Blue Ribbon Committee to Reopen Portsmouth 2021
City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Remote meeting via Zoom – March 10, 2021 – 2:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

Co-Chair James Petersen. Called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. and read the following declaration:

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2021-04, and Emergency Order number12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

ROLL CALL of MEMBERS:

Voting Members Present: Co-Chair James Petersen and Co-Chair Mark Stebbins; Alan Gold, Anne Weidman, Deborah Anthony, Jim Lee, John Akar, , Karen Bouffard, Kathie Lynch, Sen. Martha Fuller Clark, Ben VanCamp for Valerie Rochon, City Manager Karen Conard, Health Officer Kim McNamara. Non-voting Member Present: Councilor Petra Huda.

Voting Members Absent: Ann Birner, Jeff Goss and John Golumb

Other City Staff Present: Jessica Griffin, Marian Steimke, and Stephanie Seacord.

WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF 3/3/2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Co-Chair James said the 3/3/2021 minutes should be corrected to reflect that Barbara Massar suggested closing Market Street vs. Market Square.

Jim Lee moved to approve the minutes of the 2/24/2021 meeting and the corrected minutes of the 3/3/2021 meeting, seconded by Alan Gold. On a roll call vote of 9 in favor with 3 abstentions, the minutes were approved.

HEALTH UPDATE

Kathie shared the 3/9/21 COVID-19 screen with numbers updated as of that morning. She said the NH positivity rate was falling but fluctuating. Twenty-five percent of NH had received at least one dose of the vaccine. Most of deaths are occurring in the community versus facilities.

She expressed concern that new areas / counties have higher positivity rates – not just college communities. She said they made changes to three FAQs: Added new home test; an alert on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine; and posted a FAQ to reflect CDC recommendations released on Monday.

CITY UPDATE

Karen Conard said Kim and Kristen of the City Health Department have been meeting with the Arts committee to review outdoor seating plans and will progress to indoor venues, so there will be uniformity in spacing and capacity at these tables. Karen shared a screen reflecting sidewalk café license approvals. As of March 10th there have been 34 requests and to date 10 have been approved. She said there were 6 new pending location requests and the remaining 18 are renewals that are pending.

Those present discussed alternative barriers, requests requiring new closures of streets or sidewalks, use of parking spaces and time to get pending requests approved.

RESTAURANTS/RETAIL UPDATE

Ben VanCamp spoke for Valerie, stating there is a lot of cautious optimism. Weekends have been strong, and weekdays have been spotty. Retail is seeing fewer sales, but the value is higher. Most had a better winter than projected. There were some concerns regarding hiring. It is more challenging than ever, with people not showing up for interviews or showing up for 1 or 2 shifts and not coming back – "Ghosting". The other concern was about the statewide mask mandate being rolled back. Kathie said the Portsmouth mask mandate is in effect until June 30th.

STREETS

Street Closures: Sen. Clark is the liaison between this and the Arts & Nonprofits BRC. She discussed concerns regarding closing of streets and mentioned a sharp drop off at the end of Penhallow. Would the group consider street closures of Market Street from Bow to Market Sq. and a section of Pleasant Street that is closed for the pro Portsmouth gathering, she asked, with the idea that it would be pedestrian friendly. We'd lose maybe 6-8 parking spaces closest to North Church. She spoke about concerns and how to be more pedestrian friendly. She said there was almost no foot traffic on Penhallow Street, which was why she was considering Penhallow and how to get people to patronize businesses on that street.

John Akar said there is a residential driveway connected to his building. So the idea of how that person would get into or out of his driveway must be addressed. John said it would hurt takeout. They discussed the implications for takeout and delivery and how the McIntyre would be too far for that scenario.

Karen B. said the Pink Bamboo is a 15 minutes spot, asked if the City would have parking behind the McIntyre and asked about Hanover Garage being closed this summer. Karen C. said we will continue to use the McIntyre at least on weekends. The Hanover Garage will need to be

rehabilitated – a third of the space per year starting in July approximately. She will make sure parking options will be available. Foundry Garage is a 2 minute walk from there.

Sen. Clark asked about making the area a little more inviting and mentioned the light to cross the street is not long enough for people to cross. This was in reference to people using the Foundry Garage and changing incentive for parking preferences. Karen C. said they have gotten approval to recalibrate the timing and will check with DPW about enhanced lighting in the Maplewood vicinity.

Those present discussed sidewalks being very narrow, beautification and support for making downtown more pedestrian friendly, as there will be a lot of demand on downtown Portsmouth. Co-Chair James asked for a virtual tour of Europe communities that look like Portsmouth. He mentioned delivery and takeout access concerns.

Co-Chair Mark said the Chamber expects places like Portsmouth are going to be a travel Tsunami. It is going to be a big issue and giving people a space to walk will be important. Also, it is impossible to find help – people are making money sitting at home.

Councilor Huda said do not forget Brick Market will be under construction all summer. There will be noise and dirt, so please consider that. She asked all to please consider the parking on the side of town near State Street, as anyone coming into town will need to get over to the shows, so please take into account. She said this will be an issue if you close streets and take away additional parking.

Sen. Clark asked if bus service will transport people from Foundry to downtown and if that could be tried for a month or two to alleviate parking crush. Kim said it is crucial to be careful with public transportation until COVID was under control.

Barrier Update: Alan referred to his summary document and discussed the best approach to color and participants on this project. They spoke to 316 about people from the CTE program at the HS. Laying out phases with PW to get barriers painted. Discussed the logistics of putting in place, distance, painting, plan B if unpainted but painted in place. He gave an update. They gave credit to all the help they have gotten.

PUBLIC COMMENT: No one wished to speak from the public.

Those present discussed virtual tour and images by Principle Group; having the Chamber line up a Zoom meeting with people who occupy Penhallow, having Sen. Clark run the meeting and logistics of other street closure suggestions and how they could work. Ben will work with the Senator to make that happen.

ADJOURN

Jim Lee moved to adjourn, seconded by Karen Conard. On a roll call vote 13-0, the motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 2:57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted – by Marian Steimke