Blue Ribbon Committee to Reopen Portsmouth 2021
City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Remote meeting via Zoom
March 17, 2021 – 2:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

Co-Chair James Petersen called the meeting to order at 2:02 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 2020-25, and Emergency Order #12, 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-Chairs James Petersen and Mark Stebbins; Alan Gold, Ann Weidman, Jim Lee, John Golumb, Karen Bouffard, Kathie Lynch, Sen. Martha Fuller Clark, Valerie Rochon, Nancy Carmer for City Manager Karen Conard.

Non-voting Member Present: Councilor Petra Huda.

Voting Members Absent: Ann Birner, Deborah Anthony, Jeff Goss, John Akar and Health Officer Kim McNamara.

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

HEALTH UPDATE: Kathie shared her screen. NH has a higher positivity rate than Maine and Massachusetts. There is a concern that vaccine hesitancy could be a cause. Twenty-five percent of NH has received at least one dose. The Manchester area seems to be the last area driving positivity. It is important to continue to follow all CDC guidelines.

RESTAURANTS/RETAIL UPDATE: Valerie discussed how to reach out to businesses and residents on Penhallow, and probably the best way is to hand out flyers door to door. She discussed timing and order of next steps.

CITY UPDATE: Nancy Carmer shared her screen and gave an update on Sidewalk Café License approvals. There were 10 currently, with Dwyer's being the new addition. There were nine pending requests from new locations and 20 pending renewals – so 39 restaurants for the season. Those present discussed Elephantine and their location outdoors. Nancy will follow up with Chair James.

STREETS:

Barrier Update: Alan presented the barriers update, saying the last weekend of the month will be best for painting, with the first full week of April being the most likely time for barriers to be placed. Right now they are in position to be painted as soon as the weather goes above 50 degrees. Those present discussed concern about the weather and that it would be better to get at least half of them painted and placed and agreed that placement is the priority over the painting – i.e., they can be placed even if not yet painted.

Virtual Tour: Anne W. discussed key considerations for color choice. The options are a blue/gray, which are a nod to the water and granite. She discussed the process the pros used, and said the color also is a nod to existing signs and trims. The chosen color is Sherwin Williams Waterloo 9141 – that is the recommendation from the design pros. Valerie asked about the second color that was to be chosen as well. Anne suggested that maybe application of stencils would address that second color.

Alan Gold made a motion to approve $1,500 for Phase 1 painting and the materials for the barriers. This was seconded by Co-Chair Mark Stebbins. On a roll call vote 11-0, the motion passed.

Anne shared a screen on Foundry Garage and discussed issues on why people don't use it more. She brainstormed some solutions, with one being a passive solution.

Problem 1: it's too far away: solution – signage.

Problem 2: I don't feel safe: solution – Anne walked around alone at 10 p.m. She walked the normal routes to get to Hanover. Most streets were well lit and had tall buildings, which made people feel safe. However it got wonky where Hanover meets Bridge Street. At that location it feels exposed and vulnerable. It feels like no a man's land. The empty parking-lot gives an aura of "this is not safe", and the stretch of Deer Street feels ominous. She ID'd it the "uncomfortable zone". She discussed needing a "gateway for pedestrians" – there needs to be a gateway which includes lighting in different ways, e.g., wrap poles with colored lights.

Mark said for very little money it is fixable. It is really only one block that needs addressing.

Se. Clark said this is exciting, and it is what needs to happen. She stressed the need for a decent foot path where people feel safe. That area feels very rough and not easy to walk on, she said. Sen. Clark mentioned clean-up of the other side of the street to make it more inviting, as it needs

to be more pedestrian friendly. There is not enough time to cross Maplewood – that must be addressed.

Nancy Carmer mentioned the site plan for the building on Maplewood. She added the City is already aware of this, and it has been looked at. She suggested this can be discussed at the next meeting and inviting Eric Eby to talk about this.

Anne displayed streets in Europe, but they are too different, so she looked at American cities. You need at least 10 things to do on a street that is closed to pedestrians: she held up Burlington Vermont's Church Street Marketplace that was closed to traffic in the past as an example.

She asked the group to think about which street in Portsmouth would be a good street to close that would have "10 things to do". She referenced www.nacto.org about sharing of public streets.

Street Closures: Sen. Clark discussed options of how people would utilize various streets; providing more tables; concern that some streets don't get the same level of activity as others; accommodating restaurants that do just takeout; closing off the street in the Penhallow/Daniel Street area and closing Bridge Street or make it narrower to support businesses.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Andrew Bagley said Portsmouth will be overrun this summer, anything to promote the use of the garage would be important. Last year people using PopUp did not know the Foundry Garage was there until we pointed it out.

Councilor Huda suggested to Anne to consider what is done on Paul Revere Trail, and Wayfinding via the use of florescent paint – what businesses could be visited by going in one direction or another.

The group expressed interest in inviting Peter and the traffic people to discuss further.

Nancy said there are findings from Share the Square that it worked for some but not other businesses.

ADJOURN:

Sen. Clark moved to adjourn, seconded by Jim Lee. On a roll call vote 11-0, the motion passed and meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
By Marian Steimke

DRAFT