

**PORTLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING May 14, 2009**

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chairman Fred Knous called the EDC meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Fred Knous, Cathy Probolus, Peter LaMalfa, Michael Elliott

Others Present: Mary Dickerson, Consultant, Susan Bransfield, First Selectwoman

A brief update was provided on the Elmcrest Project, which was presented to Planning and Zoning on May 7th. Most of the testimony centered around the three historic buildings located on the property. Some questions were also raised about traffic. The hearing was continued until June 4th. A site walk has been scheduled on May 26th to see the buildings. It was noted that the latest version of the Elmcrest plan called for keeping one of the buildings and reconstructing the other two to resemble the current façade.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Cathy Probolus to approve the minutes of the February 12, 2009 EDC meeting. Peter LaMalfa seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

No new correspondence was shared.

5. DISCUSSION

Roundtable:

No roundtable guests were present at the meeting.

Consultant Update:

Signage:

- Business of the Month for April is the Wedding Dress, 222 Main Street. Ms. Dickerson suggested some possible nominations for the EDC members to consider for May.
- The Village District Public Parking signs are ready to be installed. Ms. Dickerson noted that signage for the Farmers Market needs to be discussed.

Real Estate:

- Two businesses within the Village District wish to relocate. There are currently three vacant Village District properties whose owners are not interested in renting. There are town properties comprising three units that are actively seeking tenants, however none of these spaces fits the needs of the businesses noted.

- The owner of Deb's Café of Haddam has contacted the Town looking to find a new location for a diner. She met with some town officials along with Ms. Dickerson to discuss specific locations and health requirements. She is reviewing the three locations offered and will be back in touch if interested.
- The EDC Quarterly breakfast is on June 8th at 10:00 in the Mary Flood Room. Rebecca Myer of Northeast Utilities is the scheduled speaker.
- A Portland Community Marketplace meeting was held on May 5th. Twelve vendors have expressed interest in participating. The Marketplace opens on June 20th and will run for approximately 12 weeks. Rivereast will continue advertising throughout the summer months.
- A resume seminar was held on May 12th, facilitated by Jeffery Theirfeld of Middletown Adult Education. Eight people attended, and interest was expressed in implementing an ongoing job support program. EDC members expressed support for this initiative.
- The index of active Portland Businesses is complete and available to the public on the town website. The new EDC mission was also posted, and Ms. Dickerson has requested that the link to SiteFinder be eliminated as the EDC no longer participates in the program.
- Dr. John Mormile, 234 Main Street, has applied to the Village District Review Commission for façade improvements to his building. This is the first comprehensive façade renovation of an existing business since the introduction of the Village District Regulations. He was approved for new awnings and a change in paint color. The Village District Consultant made several recommendations to the extensive landscaping that was proposed. Dr. Mormile will be incorporating several of the suggested changes, which will result in savings of over \$1,000 from the original plan.

Support/Marketing:

- Tritown is moving forward with a home delivery program. Test marketing will be done with the Portland Senior Center to determine the program's viability, staffing levels, schedules, etc.
- Gildersleeve Spirit Shop is looking to obtain a lease from the State for land in front of their building so that they can install a new step, ramp and railing. A permit and lease agreement from the State's Property Management Division are necessary to complete the upgrades. Ms. Dickerson will continue to work with them through this process.
- Senior Center Accreditation Commission meeting was held on April 29th. Ms. Dickerson will be assisting this group with marketing and fundraising. They want to produce a brochure to market their programs to residents.
- Brownstone Festival is scheduled in September. The EDC will be sponsoring a "Past and Present" exhibit showing the changes in local businesses, particularly the Village District, over the past 100 years. The exhibit boards will be used again in the community tent at Portland Fair this year.
- Ms. Dickerson, Deanna Rhodes and Susan Bransfield met with Donna Wertenbach of CDEF to discuss a grant application to provide professional landscape and design assistance as well as a refund of Village District architect fees upon completion of a renovation project within the Village District. The proposal was ultimately turned down, as CDEF thought it best to wait until after the Elmcrest project takes shape to determine the financial impact on area businesses.

After discussion by EDC members, Portland Automotive was selected as Business of the Month for May.

Budget:

Mr. Knous questioned the status of EDC's budget for the coming year. Ms. Bransfield indicated that the EDC budget was approved as presented. She added that the Board of Selectmen recognize the work of Ms. Dickerson and members of the EDC, and thanked them for their efforts in this regard.

Reduce Business and Residential Electric Bills:

Mr. Knous briefly highlighted this savings opportunity for businesses and residential customers. Customers now have the option of choosing a supplier who charges less than the standard offer. This affects the generation part of the bill only. CL&P continues to provide billing, transmission and repair services. Customers can opt out later on if the supplier's rates go up.

Local Business Marketing – Press:

Various marketing strategies were discussed. One idea generated was to host a "Flood Fest." The goal is to tie town groups together to sponsor an event and create opportunities for more advertising and press in the paper.

Partnerships:

One suggested partnership was to tie a Renaissance Festival at St. Clements in with Shakespeare on the Green. Any and all ideas for additional partnerships are welcome.

Home Occupations:

This will be discussed again at Planning and Zoning. The proposed amendment would require any business in town operated out of a house to register regardless of the number of employees to ensure there are no safety issues. Upon receipt of the registration, the business would receive a welcome packet from the EDC. There would be no fee to register. Advertising on the town website would be available to those interested. If during the course of the registration it is determined that there are home visits, the use of the property is being changed, or chemicals and other materials are being used, the Planning Department would then be in touch to ensure compliance with Planning and Zoning regulations. This process will protect business owners as well.

Non-Voting EDC Members:

EDC members discussed recruiting non-voting members to serve in order to ensure continuity in the event a current member leaves. Ms. Dickerson suggested asking representatives from the business community.

6. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Knous asked for clarification from Ms. Bransfield regarding whether money generated from a tag sale of donated items can be spent by the EDC to promote town businesses. Ms. Bransfield confirmed this, and indicated that she believes a fund for this purpose may already exist.

Signage to clarify the location and parking for the Farmers Market was discussed. Ms. Dickerson noted that other people will need to be identified to assist as she will not be able to attend every week.

7. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Knous indicated that he feels the Elmcrest project has many desirable elements both from a business and economic development perspective. He feels the project is crucial to the town, and plans to write a letter of support from that perspective. Mr. LaMalfa asked if any discussions have occurred in terms of tax abatements. Ms. Bransfield responded that no formal discussions have occurred. Mr. LaMalfa indicated that he believes this should occur soon.

EDC members agreed that it would be beneficial for the project developers to meet with Historical Society members and the building owners to discuss possible ways in which to keep certain elements of the historic buildings in the reconstruction, and how they plan to incorporate history into the design.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

9. ADJOURN

MOTION by Michael Elliott to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 a.m. Cathy Probolus seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Matterazzo

TC, FS, BOS, EDC, Planning, Book