



EXECUTIVE
DEPARTMENT

CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

P. O. Box 9422
25 Cottage Road
South Portland, ME 04116-9422

James H. Gailey
City Manager

MINUTES

Economic Development Committee

Thursday, November 3, 2015

7:00 PM

City Hall – City Manager's Office

Attendees:

David Schneider – District 1
Stephen Bushey – District 3
William Collins – District 5
Joshua Reny – Asst. City Manager

Ross Little – District 2
Peter Stocks – District 4
Bob O'Brien - Business

Absent:

Martha Riehle – District 1
Ed Palmer – Business
Justin Leblanc – Business

Greg Perry – District 3
Craig Gorris – Business
Fawn Dunphy – Business

Committee Chair Ross Little called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Ross announced that Martha Riehle had been appointed to the committee, but could not attend the meeting due to a delayed flight. Three other committee members had also communicated in advance their inability to attend tonight's meeting. By consensus the committee moved agenda item 2 to the end of the meeting in order to begin discussion with Karl Siedman and Rebecca Karp via teleconference call.

1. Discuss Draft Goals and Strategies for Economic Development Plan

Karl outlined five broad categories with possible strategies and goals:

Business Attraction and Retention

Business retention could be aided through establishment of a business visitation program, which would allow regular contact with South Portland Businesses. We could commit to visiting a handful of businesses each month. This would allow regular open communication with business community, and help keep pulse on what is happening in local economy, i.e. hiring needs, workforce issues, land use/zoning issues, site location, etc.

Business attraction might involve a city branding process, new motto and logo, developing a website devoted solely to economic and business development. It

is important to take active role with “brand management”, improve PR and perceptions, activities like ribbon cuttings, etc.

The city could also identify/establish a “next stage” business center, similar to an incubator. This would be multiple business spaces, available to established start-up businesses that are experiencing growth, would receive regular visits from SBDC, other assistance. Rent may be at discount, certain qualification may apply.

Entrepreneurial Development

Economic development office to act as central resource for prospective entrepreneurs, facilitate/connect with resources, shepherd through start up process, i.e. site location, resources to develop business plan, permitting and licensing, etc.

Expand business awards program to recognize entrepreneur and start-up of the year, directly relates back to branding/image of community.

Hold an entrepreneurship event, perhaps in collaboration with Maine Start Up Week www.mainestartupandcreateweek.com/.

Community kitchen in SoPo would need a feasibility study, this is being done in other locations in the region; could SoPo sustain its own community kitchen? Perhaps a cooperative approach could work. FORQ in Portland is developing a similar type of business for food industry to share space.

The committee discussed the concept of a business incubator and its feasibility. Karl noted that if it is staffed the operational costs could be significant, may need to consider economies of scale. The other challenge is finding suitable space for such an enterprise. David spoke about co-working space as a different model, enables lower rent for professions that require similar type space, i.e. professional office space. Karl also suggested a blend of co-working space with an incubator, with rents used to offset cost of incubator.

Workforce Development

Karl suggested we might consider collaborating with Portland Jobs Alliance www.portlandjobsalliance.org/, CEI www.ceimaine.org/, and others to expand a program into South Portland. These programs not only provide job training, but support necessary to enable success, including childcare, etc.

South Portland Schools have done particularly well with ESL and skills training, but additional work may need to be done with job placement in local business community. Schools are doing well with STEM curriculum and also finding internships. Some businesses remain a challenge for placement, particular when students are under age 18. The committee discussed the need to break down some of those barriers.

More could be done to target college students who are from South Portland and may return during the summer for internship programs. College internship program with local business could act as feeder for students to return to full-time jobs after graduation.

More work could be done on industry-specific workforce initiatives, fill gaps in workforce demand. Institutions like SMCC play key role in this regard. Josh recently met with SMCC staff and will continue conversation on potential for collaborative BVP, this would create synergy in effort.

Underutilized Industrial/Commercial Sites

One strategy may be to meet with property owners and jointly develop a future re-use plan for their property. Owner would have to be amenable to this. Plan may include a package of incentives for future re-use/redevelopment.

Another strategy may be an amendment to land use ordinances that would disallow residential, retail, restaurant, or consumer services in traditional industrial zones. The concern being that over time encroachment could result in a shrinking industrial zones and erosion of tax base.

Organizational Capacity

In order to implement the economic development strategic plan, the city should consider ways to increase its capacity to lead an effective ED program. Karl described what a potential ED corporation might look like. It would be non-profit, independent, funded by both city and business community. This type of organization would likely need two employees, including a director and administrative assistant.

Josh asked how this conversation would be approached at the community workshop. Would public be asked to comment on how best to increase organizational capacity to spearhead economic development? Would there be discussion on pros and cons of the various approaches? Peter explained that the committee had been discussing the concept of an ED corporation for some time and members of the City Council have asked the committee to consider this as an option to improve the city's capacity to manage a robust ED program. Ross asked that the minutes reflect that previous discussions related to cost to operate an ED corporation were "ballpark" estimates. The work has not yet been done to determine precisely what this effort might cost.

Ross spoke to the committee about the possibility of holding a focus group with millennials. That demographic was under-represented in the community survey and at the first community workshop, and it is important to capture their feedback in this process. The committee agreed that is a good idea, and Ross and Josh volunteered to put this group together. Karl and Rebecca will provide a draft set of questions. Josh will write a summary from the focus group and provide it to Karl for inclusion in the final report.

2. Preparation for Community Workshop on November 17th

Karl provided an overview of the November 17 Community Workshop agenda. The venue has been reserved. We will need at least five committee members to act as facilitators. Karl will send those people material to review in advance.

The committee discussed methods to advertise the meeting, including email distributions to members of the various municipal committees, political committees, and neighborhood groups. It will also be announced in the next city newsletter.

3. Approval of September 16 and October 8 Committee Meeting Minutes

Motion by Collins second by Schneider to approve the minutes of the October 8th meeting. All in favor.

Motion by Stocks second by Schneider to approve the minutes of the September 16th meeting. All in favor.

4. Other Business / Roundtable

None.

5. Adjournment

Next meeting will be the second Community Workshop – November 17th from 6-8pm at Community Center.

Motion by Bushey second by Schneider to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 p.m. All in favor.

Cordially,

Joshua Reny, Assistant City Manager