

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
JOB CREATION/JOB RETENTION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

May 14, 2012

5:00 p.m.

Chairman Arnold called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Arnold, Ludwig, Long
Alderman Corriveau arrived late

Absent: Alderman Katsiantonis

Messrs: J. Minkarah, W. Stewart, R. Comstock, N. Perriera, J. Beaulieu

Chairman Arnold stated for the committee members' reference, Alderman Corriveau did contact me earlier today and said he would be arriving late.

Chairman Arnold addressed item 3 of the agenda:

3. Update from Jay Minkarah, Economic Development Director, on economic development projects.

Chairman Arnold stated Jay, if you could come up, and while you're getting ready I see that we have representatives from the Chamber of Commerce here today to hear a brief report from the economic development director on a couple of updates

on some projects going on in the city, and then we'll remove the tabled item and ask you to come up and we'll have a discussion about it.

Mr. Jay Minkarah, Economic Development Director, stated thank you; I will be brief. First of all I just wanted to throw out another plug for Small Business Week, which is going to be next week. I have the brochures here; hopefully you saw them in the *Business New Hampshire Magazine*. You're seeing them in a lot of places, so if you haven't registered, please do so. There is a lot of good stuff going on and obviously that's a big focus for us now. Just a few of the projects I think that may be of interest: the Dunkin Donuts purchase and sale agreement was signed so that is moving forward. They are now in the due diligence phase. That is for the property on Granite Street. Also we have been approached by developers interested in the MDC parcel across the street from that, also on Granite Street. I expect we'll see something coming forward very shortly on that as well as another property also within that area. Those are a few other properties that are of interest right now and I expect you're going to see a few more development projects coming forward shortly. I am not yet able to give you too much detail on those. On the residential side, I think as you probably saw, the Legacy Park project, the apartments that were happening in the south part of town, that is a very significant project but there is a rental residential that generally has been very, very strong in the city. We've got a few projects going on, most notably 300 Bedford Street. You've probably seen some activity down there being converted to residential and also Mill West is kicking up again, which is nice to see. And we have a fair amount of interest in some smaller properties in the area also, such as on Manchester Street for residential conversions, 550 Elm Street, which you may have seen some activity there as well, but also on condominiums. If you've noticed down on the riverfront, two of the buildings in Riverwalk Place are currently under construction. It's nice to see some activity down there. They will keep building those as they sell, as the market drives, and

that is definitely encouraging. Commercially of course, we were all at the Market Basket grand opening, which is nice to see, and we are seeing a lot of retail activity generally in the city but it's not all just retail. You may have seen the grand opening for Harvard Pilgrim at 650 Elm Street. That was also very nice to see. Although they've been there for a couple of months, they took the entire seventh floor of that building, so it is encouraging to see some of the office space fill up. We've seen a lot of vacancy in that area, so anytime we see a nice block get leased, that's very, very encouraging to see. You've probably also noticed a lot of smaller businesses popping up around downtown. Murphy's Diner opened fairly recently, kind of more in the downtown core. The food thing just keeps taking over Elm Street. We have two new bakeries that are opening; Baked, which you probably saw, as well as Finesse, a French bakery that is kittycornered right across the street. There is the fried chicken place that's opening up right on the corner. We've actually had two other bakeries that have opened pretty recently, so it's very interesting to see how the foodie thing is happening, and then we have a candy store coming into another vacant spot. It will be interesting to see how that all plays out. It's not all food oriented, but we're definitely seeing a lot of that type of activity. With that I'm happy to answer any questions.

Chairman Arnold stated I'll just say that the report you presented is certainly more encouraging than, I think, we often give the city credit for. We certainly recognize it when a business leaves town and we want to make sure that we keep that from happening as much as we can, but it sounds like there are a number of businesses choosing to either expand or relocate in Manchester, especially in the downtown area, which I think is great.

Mr. Minkarah stated that's definitely true.

Alderman Long stated thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minkarah what percentage would you say of, even these businesses that you referenced, and I know the MDC is one issue, but like the bakeries, called your office for a preliminary look at what to expect? Do you know a percentage of new openings that called your office?

Mr. Minkarah replied it's hard for me to give you a percentage off the top of my head especially in the downtown area. I would definitely say most.

Alderman Long stated okay, thank you. I have a follow-up on that, if I may. What advice or direction do you give them? Is there a form that if you're looking to put a bakery into this location, here's a rough idea of what you need to follow? Do we have that at your office?

Mr. Minkarah replied there really isn't a form because the reasons why people call and when they call, at what stage they're at varies significantly. Some call when they're thinking about opening up a business downtown and they're interested in available space and are very often interested in assistance, what kind of assistance can you give us, can you help us with funding, etc. It really depends on what or why. Sometimes they call once they've already committed to a particular space and so maybe they're looking for a different type of assistance. There isn't kind of a one standard way of approaching somebody. It really does have to be case by case.

Alderman Long asked and then that direction you give them... Let's say I'm opening up this bakery and I had called you originally, I talked to the landlord, this is a good location, I'm going to get it, so I've just touched base with the economic development office to see what direction I need to go in, and then you send me to maybe Planning, Mr. LaFreniere or whomever, and I'm on that. Is there any follow-up on how that process is going like a month later or two weeks later? Do

you have a policy of following up as to how things are going if you know that they are moving into downtown?

Mr. Minkarah replied if we've been working with somebody and they're going through the process, then yes, we touch base with them again. Again, it's not a formal process, but kind of how are things going, if we don't hear or know.

Usually you hear, of course, more when they're having an issue or a problem or a delay than you do if everything is going smoothly, naturally. But absolutely we follow through, and usually we also like to work with them on doing some sort of a grand opening and almost always we're touching base with the Chamber and Intown and kind of trying to put something together. A while ago we did a whole bunch of them at once, so sometimes we'll do that, and sometimes, of course, it is one-on-one. When there are a lot of smaller ones, it's kind of nice if we can do something, make a bit of an event out of it.

Alderman Long stated okay. Thank you.

Chairman Arnold asked any other comments or questions from the committee.
Thank you very much, Jay.

TABLED ITEM

4. Communication from the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce Infrastructure Committee regarding Manchester business permit process conversations.

(Note: Tabled 4/16/12)

On motion of Alderman Long, duly seconded by Alderman Ludwig, it was voted to remove this item from the table.

Chairman Arnold stated I'd like to invite whoever is speaking for the Chamber to certainly come up. If you could begin by identifying who is representing the Chamber today. First I will say thank you for coming in; thank you very much for the correspondence. I know that historically perhaps there's been a criticism, sometimes justified and sometimes not, about communication not being as effective as it could be between the policymakers at city hall and members of the business community. I hope this is the beginning of one of many conversations and many opportunities for dialogue that we can continue moving forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Will Stewart, Vice President of Economic Development, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, stated I hope so as well, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee for inviting us here today.

Mr. Neville Perriera stated I have a couple of small businesses in downtown Manchester.

Mr. Stewart stated to give you a little bit of background on the memo that we submitted to this special committee back in April, back in the fall the Chamber, a number of us, the staff and at the volunteer level, began hearing anecdotes from people regarding the business permitting process with the city. These people represented an array of people in the development process, your developers and also those who are involved in a professional capacity on their end. Be they engineers, architects, contractors, real estate attorneys, real estate agents, as well as small business owners, restaurateurs, and others, regarding just some hiccups they've had. Obviously we hear a lot but we began hearing the same thing over and over and over again, which made us think there was some fire behind the smoke, as it were. So we decided to see if we could find what the issues are. I began by conducting a number of one-on-one interviews with these same types of

people, usually anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes, and gauging what issues they had experienced themselves. Then we took this to our infrastructure committee at the Chamber, which then was able to bring it up and held a roundtable discussion, the results of which are part of the memo that was presented to you last month and again this month. I will note that most of the people we spoke with spoke on the commission of anonymity, afraid of reprisals, that may be a strong word, afraid of some kind of retribution, that's probably a strong word, of speaking out. So they did speak anonymously, and I ask that you keep that in mind. What we found was that the City it seems, in granting these things, may be better than most cities, however, there are a number of issues, again, that were mentioned by more than a few people that we believe need their attention both to enhance the City's reputation as a business friendly city and to ultimately increase the commercial tax base and lower the tax burden on residents. I'm not going to read the entire memo, you have that, but I will kind of give you the overview of the issues we found in about five categories. The first one mentioned is communication. I think ultimately a lot of it seems to come down to both communication between the various City departments, and again, we're not here to pick on any particular department in the process itself, but communication between departments and permit applicants, as well as communication between City departments. Multiple jurisdictions seem to have to deal with business permit applications, kind of leading into a kind of a lack of departmental coordination. No one it seems fully oversees the start to finish process. We see when somebody comes in and wants to start a business; Jay is great to work with them, but as you know, he is a staff of two there, and there's really no one to see holding hands, which I think a lot of new business owners need. Those who have been through the process like Neville here a number of times didn't know it but it is the start-up business owners who really need our help and those who we need encouragement but really need that hand-holding. Also, touching on lack of customer service. Again, not with any one department, not with any one individual, but some feel that applicants are not

always treated as customers to be served. There are also issues of code interpretation, clarity, and enforcement. Everything from the International Existing Building Code, which has been adopted by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, not being enforced or implemented, to codes being enforced arbitrarily; some codes apparently that aren't even in the code being enforced or reports of those, and code interpretation from staff member to staff member. Kind of a lack of consistency there. Finally, some of the issues are with the lack of an appeals process. It is reported that the fire code has no appeals process and that the building code, while there is an appeals process, it's only for challenging inspectors' incorrect interpretation of the code. It is very much limited there. As you can see, in the report there were a number of proposed solutions the people suggested, and again, I'm not going to go through them one by one and really I think ultimately what's needed is a comprehensive look at the business permitting process in the city, to look at it as a whole. We think, again, due to the importance of the City to the commercial tax base it is warranted, and if we might make a suggestion, the Chamber, I think, would like to see some independent committee made up of, again, people who go through the process, development professionals. Again, not just developers, but attorneys, real estate agents, engineers, small business owners, to really take a look at the process as a whole, again, to examine it. The process itself, not place blame, not to throw anybody under the bus or place fault on any individual or department, but to examine the process to make recommendations for improvements there. If this is the direction the special committee would like to pursue, the Chamber would be happy to make some recommendations for that committee. With that I will open it up to for any questions. That is pretty much the gist of the memo.

Ms. Robin Comstock, President and CEO of Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, stated I would just add that we find the departments of the City so supportive and so sophisticated and terrific at what they do. I just want to be very

clear that in no way is this accusing anyone of any fault that is incomprehensible. It's just in interest of getting even better. Again, I think it is a great group of people and the Chamber has a great relationship with every one of them. This isn't a particular department or a particular person; it's really not about that. It's about perhaps looking at the process, hearing some business people and developers, and taking that information and improving upon it.

Chairman Arnold stated I appreciate that sentiment and until we have no vacancies in properties throughout the city, then I suppose there is always room for improvement. Is there any discussion from the committee?

Alderman Long stated thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been working on this letter to try to pinpoint where the problems are. I know that within the Building Department they get periodic thank you letters for the easy process that they went through. So that's where the confusion is with me, hearing that the process worked well for me, and then hearing these, which I haven't heard before. Actually I did hear of one but they didn't want me to do anything because they were afraid of retribution. Now to me that's where the problem lies. I understand somebody being afraid of speaking out because there may be issues, but I think the opposite. I think if somebody speaks out they're going to get special attention because we're not going to let that slide. If I know this restaurant owner is getting beaten on ridiculousness and I find out, then I'm going directly to the source and I'm able to rectify that. It would be nice if we didn't have the anonymity, if we had something like hey, I've been doing business here for 20 years and here's what happened to me. Why? I know most of the process that has been successful, they have hired all the professionals they need to hire. I'm not going to know every code change, I will sitting on this board, but as a contractor I won't know all the code changes, so I need to hire somebody who is an expert in that; I'll never know that. Now I understand in these times that if I want to expand my restaurant

10,000 square feet, I don't want to have to hire five different people to make sure I get everything right. But then I also have to be aware that I may miss something because I'm not the expert in this. So that's what I'm trying to figure out as to if some of these untimely incidents are lack of knowledge or expectations that just weren't there. As far as a hand-holding process, I don't know if the City is responsible for that. I don't know if the City wants to be responsible for that because if I tell you to put in hood A and you find out after it should have been hood C, the City is liable. And I don't know if there's anybody in the City or one department that would cover that whole entity, you know codes with fires, there are other divisions that are involved. So trying to get that is going to be costly, I would think, because we would have one representative on every entity that wants to build. I don't know how many applicants we have in a month, but let's say there are ten. Now there is somebody holding ten hands making sure that there are no issues, and that's difficult and time consuming and a costly attempt to get that right. Is there a possibility of doing that under a small business opening, something that's going to be under \$200,000 or \$300,000; maybe that would be it, but in my opinion it's the owner's responsibility to know what the rules are and what the laws are, not they themselves, but maybe through whomever is the expert in that field that you would pay for those services and you would get those expected results. For example, the International Building Code, I know it is being implemented because I sat in on Planning Board meetings and watched Zoning Board meetings and see that, but I don't know if people realize that with respect to fire, that hasn't been adopted, so we're following state life safety and I don't know what the acronym is, but the NFPA, we're following those so those aren't only the City but it's also the State. There's another entity you have to know what their regulations are. Could we smooth that out somehow? I think we probably could, but not to the point where the owner would be absolved from the responsibility that the City would take that on because I don't think we can. With respect to appeals, once again, if I know what the issue is, if somebody is able to come to me

and not be afraid of retribution, I understand that and hear that a lot with other issues also, landlord-tenant issues, so I understand that. But in this environment and the business environment, I believe that it would be special attention that they wouldn't have to worry about retribution. If they came forward and they showed cause that this really shouldn't have happened, then I'm expecting that department to make up for that. So that they are getting special attention not how am I going to stick it to these guys, that type of attention. Then finally, I don't think we could get to that resolve without knowing exactly what are apples to apples. What is the issue? Let's follow that process, where could we have change because if it stays anonymous, if I'm the inspector, it is he said she said stuff, and we're never going to get anywhere. But I'll tell you that as far as I'm concerned and as far as the perception I see of this board, they are absolutely in favor of making sure businesses are transitioning with no difficulties. That is what we're here for, so I was a little taken back by the political rhetoric of 'we're business friendly'. The businesses that I speak to, I've had a couple of complaints, one of them was parking, there were minor issues, one of them was parking for construction vehicles, so they were minor issues. But other than that, I've heard positive. So why wouldn't I think everything is going okay.

Ms. Comstock stated Alderman Long, all great points, and I really want you all to hear me say, and anyone else who may overhear my perspectives on this, is that in no way was any of the language of this letter or any of the comments made here tonight meant to be political rhetoric or divisive in any way. And I think you hit a couple of nails on the head in that, and we all know how pro-business Manchester is, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, our Planning Department, our Economic Development Department, in fact there is no question anyone can debate. And at the same time to be really honest, since we're all here to have this conversation, we've had so many complaints about this from the very unsophisticated and probably the business owner building out their own closets or whatever they're

doing, very small owner-operated buildout, to the most sophisticated of whom I am not at liberty to share names, and enough so I would say with enough momentum and enough concern even give the particular economic pressures at this point in history, if you will, not specific to the City of Manchester but the nature of the economy, I think that you hit the nail on the head about the whole point of we need to know more. And I think when all is said and done, what we come here tonight for is to share with you our interest and belief that we need to know more and experts in this, of which maybe Neville, but certainly Will and I are not, that those individuals who are experts and who are the caretakers of the City of Manchester, and you have the best and highest interest at their hands, need to know more. And we're here just saying that we've had so many complaints in such a broad array that perhaps it's time to have a conversation, perhaps it would be manifested in some kind of a focus group like we did with the pedestrian walkway conversations on Hanover Street or something of a nature that business owners would feel comfortable to come and talk to you perhaps with several of them that we could hand pick from a variety of segments of construction and development industries so that they weren't charged with any one particular message but were part of a group showing their experiences so that you can hear them and we trust and know that you'll do the right and the best things. I know without any wavering doubt whatsoever Planning and MEDO are just as interested as you. I just think that you, as leaders of City, need to hear and need to know that there is concern whether it is perception or legitimate real issues that there is a problem, and the perception of the process has lots to do not with any one particular department or any one particular issue, I would say very broadly, and Will correct me if I'm wrong, more about dovetailing of departments and their particular areas of expertise so that they are working more compatibly with greater consensus and unity. Leon and I were talking a little earlier, and I know the city is on the cusp of installing a new computer system which may lend itself to vast improvements and connectivity and communication.

Chairman Arnold stated you're right that it's worth having the discussion.

Ms. Comstock stated I would say to you that I am here tonight saying we have heard enough that we want to share it with you, and we are suggesting that there's more information that's been shared with us that we think you would want to hear it in some way.

Chairman Arnold stated thank you.

Alderman Corriveau stated thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have a couple of questions and a couple of them I assume will go toward Leon or Jay, but while I have you up here, one of the questions I had was under proposed solutions under the communication list. There should be a 'how to open a business in Manchester' guide that is industry specific. Why doesn't the Chamber do that? Why does government have to do that? It's our business to make sure everything goes smoothly, it's not our job to go and be involved in commerce. I'm curious why you wouldn't put that guide out and share it with the city.

Ms. Comstock replied it may well be a member that would be willing to do that. We don't know the specifics because we're not City employees.

Alderman Corriveau stated that's fine. I guess I'm saying that would be something to work with us on, and I get that that should be a proposed solution but I don't necessarily think that that's necessarily the City's duty to do, nor do I necessarily think we have the manpower to be creating specific guides for specific industries because we're not in commerce. Now if these are permitting-specific guides you're talking about, I would imagine Leon or Jay wouldn't object to that. I'm wondering why the business community isn't taking that challenge on.

Ms. Comstock responded the City, from our perspective, and I appreciate your involvement, only one narrow aspect of your total responsibility, but we do see the City in the business of developing business. Jay's office is highly, highly active and we often make referrals to Jay's office not having the expertise of Jay or his staff. So I do think that you bring a good point in that there perhaps could be a collaborative and perhaps we could elicit members who could help develop something, but we just don't know the specifics and we don't know regulations or the ordinances that you would want to see...

Alderman Corriveau interjected I should say my comments shouldn't necessarily be taken as criticism. It's as you said, it's important we have this dialogue. The fact that this dialogue has never occurred is the whole point, I think, of having this committee. The other question I had for you, another proposed solution under lack of coordination, there should be a point person for everyone who wants to open a business in the city to guide them through the process. I think that's a good idea. Obviously that's something that costs money to have a person who would have that job requirement and working day in and day out, would be enough work for such a position to do this job and is this the type of position where it could be a revenue generating or a revenue neutral position. If there is a demand from the business community for creating a small business point person, I kind of would like to know more details other than just a bullet point.

Ms. Comstock responded that's a direct result of feedback that we heard as business people suggesting that this would be a solution, and I think to answer that question, we'd have to obviously have conversations with Jay and all three parties talk about the possibility. What does Jay really need, what is his experience, what does Leon feel would be the most helpful to the businesses he's working with and

have that conversation, but I think that that particular bullet was a result of direct feedback from members who were expressing their frustrations.

Alderman Corriveau stated I think it's a great idea, don't get me wrong, and if there's a real demand from the business community, I think that's something we should be responsive to. It's very easy to say that, but to get a new position in City government in this day and age is next to impossible.

Ms. Comstock stated we had many businesspeople ask why there wasn't an ombudsman, and again, I haven't had this specific conversation with Jay or Leon who do have experience in other committees as well, and also to better assess the demand, but we've heard over and over again just the broad question, could there be a neutral ombudsman to escort me through this process. It's complicated, the departments aren't talking to one another, there are different expectations, they're told one thing, they do it, then they're told it's not enough, would a neutral ombudsman perhaps out of MEDO be possible?

Alderman Corriveau replied I think that's worth exploring without question. Leon, if I could just ask you one or two quick questions. I don't know...

Chairman Arnold interjected Alderman, I wonder if we could maybe wrap up with the Chamber. We're just sort of introducing ourselves to some of these issues the Chamber is bringing forward. I imagine we'll be continuing our conversation in subsequent meetings, but if any other members of the committee or aldermen have questions for the Chamber before we wrap them up and then there are some general questions for Leon, if we have time, we could do that.

Alderman Levasseur stated it is said by a million people, and probably six billion times, you get more with honey than you do with vinegar. But let me remind everybody that 95% of all salad dressings have as the base vinegar, and I know that probably 95% of us when we eat our salads, have a salad dressing on our salad, so vinegar is not a bad thing. I just want to say, Mr. Stewart, you drafted this memorandum and it is an absolutely great document, it is very well done, very well written, I was very happy when I received it in my email. I corresponded with Mr. Stewart; I said I would come here specifically to back him up on every single thing he stated in this memorandum. I find that the City of Manchester is a terrible place to do business, I find it to be extremely vexing, I find it extremely hard to get through the process, I find that every time you try to do something in this city there seems to be a separate and different rule each time you go through the process. To be honest with you I don't know why people go to the economic development director if you're already in Manchester, maybe there is a reason for it. I haven't found that reason for it. I do know that whenever you want to get anything done in this city, you have to go through the Building Department. I guess you try to start a business you get a building permit or a business operation license, you have to go through the City Clerk's Office. I found the City Clerk's Office to be excellent at what they do. I haven't had to deal with the Economic Development Office, so I don't particularly have any comments for or against. My main concern happens to be with the Planning Department. Myself and Mr. LaFreniere have had many go rounds over many years. I find him to be an extremely approachable person who will listen, and I find that to be at least a good basis for the start of whatever process we have to fight through. Unlike Mr. Long, I seem to be the guy who gets most of the complaints because I'm probably the most approachable alderman in the city because I have a restaurant, so they know where to find me, they can come in the door, and they do many times. And I hear many of the complaints that you have put out into this paper. I think you should get a raise for doing this job. I know that it may come off as being a little bit

blunt, I know it may come off as being a little bit critical, but I think that in order to change things and make things better, we cannot just continue to put sugar and honey on everything. We need to be more direct. There are a lot of very upset people in this city or a lot of people who are upset about the practices that go on here, there are a lot of business owners that I agree would never come out and publicly say what you have said. I don't think there's a problem with the fact that people would be anonymous when they say these things. That's the reason why we have a curtain when we go in to vote. People don't need to know everything that you think and they don't want to make enemies out of some of the most powerful people. Government is not a place where there's competition. You have to go to the government to get everything done. If you're not happy with your telephone service, you have places to go. So I am extremely critical of the situations that we have in the city; it's one of the main reasons why I ran for office. Personally as a business owner, not only as a restaurant owner, but as a lawyer and as a landlord, I understand a lot more of what people have to deal with in this city when they have to deal with certain issues. I disagree with the alderman, who I have a great deal of respect for and I think does a great job for the businesses down here, the alderman from 3, I do agree if anybody ever brought a complaint to him, he'll be the first guy to bring it forward, and I wish more businesses would bring their complaints to Mr. Long. He will take care of you and will go forward and he will get through the process with you and for you. I hope I'm not being overly critical of the Planning and Building Departments. I think they are so overwhelmed with work that it is not their job, like Mr. Long says, to have to come in and say this is the size hood you need or this is the size fan you need and this is the size RPM's for ductwork you need or this is what you need to do when you have to build out a bathroom as far as what a 2x4 is. But I think that we are going to work together and we're going to develop a process where before you even go into the building department and you need to do business with the City of Manchester, they will lay out the guidelines for you. If

you're in the historic district, you'll know that before you bring a sign forward, you have to go to the historic department, so we'll try to make these matters a little bit easier, try to cut through the hurdles a little bit more. I would like to see the Planning Department, the building department have more leeway with making decisions so you won't have to go to the Zoning Board to get a variance on stuff that they already know is going to pass or within certain parameters. Whether they can do that or not is something we're discussing right now, we'll fight through those things and see if we can make the process easier. But I think that the Chamber by bringing this forward has done the city a service. I don't think you should try to sugarcoat what you did, I think what you did is the right thing, I think you've opened some eyes, and I think that going forward I promise, if I'm only here for two years, it will be two years they'll know that I'm here. Hopefully I'll be here for a lot longer and be able to fight through some of these processes and to help some of these business owners not be so afraid of the problems and issues that we have to deal with and feel a little more confident in some of the decision making that's made and why they are made. I think you'll find this board to be very open to a lot of these suggestions. What I would ask you to do as the Chamber is if you do have any problems, if any business owner comes to you, have them call either myself or Mr. Long and we will handle it for them. Thank you.

Chairman Arnold stated thank you, Alderman Levasseur, for the feedback, culinary references or otherwise. Any other questions for representatives of the Chamber right now?

Alderman Long stated I like cream dressing. I don't do the vinegar dressing. I do want you to know that if your members have an issue, then I believe there's an issue, so I intend to work on a resolution for this, and the fact that your members are coming to you with these complaints tells me that there's either a

miscommunication somewhere or there is an issue that needs to be addressed. The issue will be addressed.

Ms. Comstock stated we're anxious to support you and assist you in any way that we can.

Chairman Arnold stated I appreciate those comments as well. I see that another business owner has joined us. I didn't know if she had any comments she wanted to make before we adjourned.

Ms. Jane Beaulieu stated thank you, Alderman Arnold. I live in Ward 10 and I'm a business owner downtown. I did attend meetings with the Chamber, I'm not a member of the Chamber but I did speak with them, they reached out to me, they wanted to learn about my experience in opening up a market downtown. It's just a small space, I didn't have to put in a hood system, and I have opened businesses in the past 20 years in the city. I did have a difficult time with the building department. I love all of them up there but there are so many little issues that came up at different times that if I could have met with one person in particular when I was opening up my market, this is where it is, this is what I want to do, what do I need to do. I did get that information from one person, but then it changed, then I had to go to see another person and then it changed, and then the day that I wanted to open up... I am no dummy, I've done this before very successfully, and I found it was very challenging. The day that I thought I was going to open up I didn't realize that I needed to have all of my signs in place to get a COC and there was nowhere in any document that was presented to me this is what you do first, second, third, fourth. So the day that I wanted to open they told me that I couldn't, that I needed to put up my signs, I couldn't, it was raining, I had already scheduled the opening. Every day is dollars when you're a small business owner, and if you don't open up when the general public thinks you're

going to open up, then they think that you're having trouble with something or other. So it was back and forth and back and forth and back forth. I just wanted to open up a market. I went to the Health Department, the Fire Department came in, all of the departments, but I do believe if there was one person at the building department who could say okay, you're opening up a market, this is first, second, third and come to see me when you get to this point. So I will wait to see that person, there's enough people that work up there that can do the job. I find that there are many people who work in City government who have never owned a business, never opened a business, so they don't know how challenging it is and every single day is important and you need to be able to communicate with one person not four or five different people when you go up to get this sign-off and that sign-off. I wasn't able to get here earlier because I was at a Friends of Valley Cemetery meeting, which is a City-owned landmark. I didn't hear what they were saying, but I don't believe that you do have to hire one other person. I think that Leon could certainly eventually work with all the people that work there, many of them have been there for many years, they know what they're doing, and they would be more than willing to help put systems in place so that it would be easier for someone, not to answer questions about... I didn't go there asking them how do I open up a market; I know this and that, but how do I go through the process in opening up a business, not necessarily a market. I think it is good that we're having the conversation because there are a lot of people like myself who are small business owners who aren't big corporations or who don't have a lot of money to hire an attorney to represent them. I think you'd have a lot more small business owners opening up a business. If there was one point person in the building department to help them through the process, and I think everybody up there would be more than willing to assist the business owners. But keep in mind, I don't know how many of you have owned a business or how many people who work in City government, it's not easy but I love being downtown, and I appreciate you taking the time to listen to what I have to say.

Chairman Arnold stated appreciate the feedback as well. Any comments from the committee?

Alderman Long stated if we could get details of your frustration, exactly what the process was... I know you had a sign issue and you weren't told until the last minute.

Ms. Beaulieu stated it wasn't just that.

Alderman Long stated in order to take corrective action we need to know in detail where the issue is and would appreciate if through the Clerk's Office, or you could email me, what the steps were that you took and where is the frustration that you ran into.

Ms. Beaulieu stated and there was one other small issue with the Health Department. I have a fudge counter, and of course I do have six sinks in my 650 square foot establishment to do what I'm doing, but the health inspector came in because they sign off and she wanted to know why I didn't have a sink near my fudge counter. And of course I presented everything to her, she reviewed it, but for some reason she thought that I needed another sink there to wash the knife every time I cut the fudge right there. I just said to her I don't need another sink, I don't need any more expense, I can wash my knife in my 3-bay sink and she said yes, I guess you can. It's just those little things that by that time I was ready to... I will definitely email you with simple step by step examples of what I went through. I didn't have any fire issues, and everybody up there in the building department was more than happy to assist me, but the last person who I met with I had never heard of her, I had never seen her and she was the one that was going to

give me my COC. That would have helped if I immediately would have maybe been introduced to her.

Chairman Arnold stated Robin, I do want to give Neville an opportunity to speak as well before we bring up City staff.

Ms. Comstock stated just a few words. I would just say I don't want this to go down the path of fixing one particular business, whether it is Jane or anyone's particular specific issues, although I so appreciate your willingness for a quick response. This has to be policy, practices, protocols, and strategy and I think that that's what we're here saying in a much larger way. Jane, thank you.

Chairman Arnold stated I agree with that position and that perspective. I guess to mirror Alderman Long's comments, its helpful certainly for me, and I have to imagine for the rest of the members of the full board, to have the perspective by a business owner who is willing to put their name on it with a firsthand account, which I think just gives it more credence. It is somebody else that we can call, not that the correspondence from the Chamber is lacking in anything because the comments were made in anonymity, but having somebody that an alderman can call specifically to ask follow-up questions I think goes a long way. I appreciate your point, though about us taking a 30,000 foot view that moves the community forward as a whole. Neville, do you want to say anything?

Mr. Perriera replied yes. I don't want to beat this thing up; we know there's a problem. Just to be a little bit specific; it is great to hear J talking, I feel I have an ally on the other side now. There is no fluff, he says it the way it is and that's what I'd like to do: say it the way it is. There is a problem. I have opened four businesses in the last two years in this city and I'm in the process of opening a fifth one. Fortunately for me I've gotten to know a lot of people in the

departments, and I know the process pretty well but that's not the problem. I can get things done now because I understand it enough. It is the new person who has never done it that's having the problem. That's what we need solved right now. I'm looking at it as a business opportunity now, maybe I should open my own business on how to open a business in Manchester, so if anybody's interested, we'll think about it. It is a very real solution that might actually work. My biggest problem is the inspectors. It is their attitude and demeanor and we are at their mercy, which is wrong. I got into business, I put all my dollars into it, I spend a lot of money, I'm tired of the bleeding, I want to open up, but I have to wait until that last minute to decide is this inspector going to be in a good mood or in a bad mood, what is going to happen, and they will show up when they want to show up. That is not good business on the City side. If you tell me you're going to show up between 1:00 p.m. and 1:30 p.m., okay, I'll be there because I have to pay electrical engineers to be there, mechanical, plumbing, they cost us money while we're waiting for an inspector. That I think should be an easy solution. We'll be there within this hour, it's reasonable; sometimes we'll wait two or three hours for the inspector to show up. We don't know what he's going to come with. One particular incidence I had put up a very nice restaurant and I was told I needed a hood on top of the dishwasher. I asked if this is something new, nobody told me about it. Of course you could say I should know all of these rules, but I don't. I said why do I need a hood above my dishwasher? He told me it was a new code and you need to put the hood over your dishwasher. I said it is a low temp dishwasher. His response was, look, I said put a hood on that dishwasher. Do it. When you're done, call me. My response was do not speak to me in that tone, I don't care who you are. I've just spent a lot of money in this place and now you're talking to me in that tone, how dare you. He said just get it done. I went to his superiors and asked what's the problem, what's the deal here. Now every dishwasher has to have a hood? You know the funny thing about that, it's true, it is a code, but if you're familiar with bars and restaurants, in most bars they have a

dishwasher under the counter, they don't require a hood. Double standards here. So when we make a rule, we should stand by it, whichever it was. Fortunately I think it was Leon and Max who asked how much time do you need to do it. I said give me a week and I'll get it done, and it cost me another \$12,000 more, but they allowed me to open under the condition that I get it done within the week, which is very cooperative, and I appreciated that. But coming back again, the problem is the inspectors. I don't know what it is with them; you don't know what you're going to get with them. That is a problem. If somebody was coming to invest in this city, I think we should be a little more receptive and show a little more respect on how you deal with customers. We are the customers at the end of the day. If I spoke to one of my customers that way, guess what? They're going somewhere else. I have opened quite a few businesses in Manchester, I feel good and I think Manchester is a great city to invest in, it is developing very fast, everybody is working together. Just like if I sell a bad steak, my customer is going to the next restaurant. I might have to consider going to another city. It is something you need to consider.

Ms. Comstock stated thank you, Neville. I just always remember the piece of this particular story we've heard on numerous occasions by many restaurant owners in the City of Manchester, but I'll always remember when a business owner like Jane or Neville talks about the costs and the delays, remember they have people employed, Manchester residents, who are waiting to earn their salary. We heard one restaurant around November that waited almost three weeks with his entire staff with no payroll even though they had been pledged to a particular opening date and had understood their salaries would begin on that date. So always remember the full component of the workforce and paying the salaries, the employees' abilities to go to work because that is part of the cost and they are generally about costs, but it often translates to human beings who are staff who can't go to work or work is delayed or altered in some way.

Chairman Arnold stated thank you very much. I appreciate the Chamber coming today.

Alderman Long stated where we're obviously under time constraints, we have a 6:00 p.m. meeting. A couple of choices; one would be to have a meeting next week. This is an issue that needs to be addressed, and it can't be sitting on the table.

Chairman Arnold stated I agree and I don't want to wait a couple of months before continuing our discussion.

Alderman Long stated or we set up some representatives here that want to meet with the Chamber and also with... I know I have sat on committees and other entities, organizations with the Planning and Health Departments and to see... If you'd like to do that and come back to this committee and report.

Alderman Corriveau stated I also think City staff should maybe give a report based on their reaction to this report. It's one thing to get a little testimony but it's another to see their, I don't want to say rebuttal, but what they would say.

Chairman Arnold stated how about this. I certainly want to give City staff an opportunity to discuss some of the issues that were raised in the correspondence. I'd like to do that at the next meeting. In the interim, if the Chamber is open to it, what I'd like to do is make it more routine that the Chamber communicate, not just with members of this committee, but the aldermen as a whole. But if there are any individual questions you have, Alderman Long, feel free to reach out to the Chamber in the interim. I'm okay with that. I want to give City staff an opportunity to respond before we make a decision to ask them to form an ad hoc

group or something, which may very well be justified. We'll make sure we get a meeting called sooner than a month. Thank you very much.

There being no further business, on motion of Alderman Long, duly seconded by Alderman Corriveau, it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Clerk of Committee