

A proposal to utilize the top level of the Foundry Parking Garage as a multi-purpose, open air, community space for people to safely gather was brought to the Citizens Response Task Force by an independent working group made up of Portsmouth arts leaders, business owners, and citizens. It's dubbed a "Pop Up Rooftop" and would be a shared space for arts & cultural events, restaurant vendors, and potentially other organizations including businesses and nonprofits. This project would provide much needed, revenue-driving opportunities for arts organizations and local businesses that face potential closure due to the economic stresses of the pandemic. It addresses the need for a safe space for community cultural events where social distancing would be possible. It also takes into consideration the general public's desire to be active outdoors during the summer.

Following a site visit on Thursday, city staff gave an optimistic view of the potential use of this space for this purpose during summer 2020. The performance space would be shared by local arts organizations on a rotating calendar. Vendor space would be utilized by local restaurants and other artisans and businesses.

Members of the independent work group cited other successful examples of this type of use of parking garage space in other communities throughout the country.

Currently, city staff is taking a closer look at what is possible from the perspective of power, water, sewer, and other infrastructure needs. They are also looking at what is realistic regarding safety and staffing needs.

We need to move quickly on this project because lead time will be needed to organize the schedule including performances/vendors. This project is one way to stop the hemorrhaging that Councilor Trace referred to earlier in this meeting. It will give our arts organizations and many other businesses a fighting chance to stay open.

On behalf of the Citizen's Response Task Force, I ask you to support the assistant mayor's motion this evening and allow the task force and the leaders of our city's arts and business community to work out the details and make this project happen before it is too late and we begin to lose arts organizations and businesses that are an integral part of our community.