

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE

Standing Committee on Energy and Sustainability

Councilor Jon Hinck (A/L), Chair

Councilor Spencer Thibodeau (D2), Vice Chair

Councilor Ed Suslovic (D3)

Approved Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2016

Councilors present: Councilor Hinck, Councilor Suslovic, Mayor Strimling

Staff present: Troy Moon, Jeff Tarling, Jean Frasier

1. Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve minutes made by Councilor Suslovic. Seconded by Councilor Hinck. Both in favor.

2. Energy Disclosure and Benchmarking

Councilor Hinck introduces guest speaker, Carolyn Sarno Goldthwaite, Senior Program Manager for High Performance Buildings, and Charles Taylor, Research and Analysis Associate, of the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnership (NEEP) to discuss energy disclosure and benchmarking.

NEEP is a regional energy efficiency organization partly funded by the US Department of Energy.

The speakers note that the goal of benchmarking and disclosure is to make energy use transparent to building owners and the public. This spurs targeted investment in energy efficiency that reduces energy consumption in the built environment. Specific outcomes include:

- Public reporting of energy usage to create energy baselines and measuring the impact of energy efficiency measures
- Finding underperforming buildings and identifying opportunities for energy savings
- Allowing tenants or purchasers to make informed decisions about energy usage
- Spurring the creation of local jobs in energy efficiency

The speakers offer several examples of cities with benchmarking and reporting ordinances that have seen large decreases in energy use and significant cost savings in the private sector. These include Seattle, Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Cambridge, MA.

Results of benchmarking include:

- Better understanding of energy usage throughout the city
- Energy savings
- Increased jobs from energy efficiency
- More transparency in real estate transactions
- Higher sale price or rent for energy efficient buildings
- More efficient operation of buildings
- Ability to craft targeted assistance programs where they will be most effective

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Councilor Suslovic noted that local businesses and GPCOG were working to start a Portland 2030 District. He would like to see regional collaboration if possible as property owners have buildings in surrounding towns as well. He supports the creation of a working group to include a variety of stakeholders who would be impacted by an energy benchmarking and disclosure ordinance to include the 2030 District, MEREDA, Realtors, and GPCOG. He indicates the City should work to benchmark its own buildings as soon as possible in order to offer leadership. We can't expect the business community to do so if we have not.

Councilor Hinck is also interested in creation of a working group. He asks Mayor Strimling about the process for moving this forward.

Mayor Strimling indicates that energy efficiency is a Council goal. He suggests that the Energy and Sustainability Committee could form a task force or develop ordinance language itself but there should be communication with the Council as a whole about how things will proceed.

Councilor Suslovic prefers a working group in order to get feedback from the groups who would be affected by an ordinance. He believes the process goes much more smoothly when all parties are at the table.

Mayor Strimling indicates that he would like to see a process that would not take up an inordinate amount of time.

3. Discussion of Street Lighting

Troy Moon introduces opportunities from recent changes in state legislature that allow the City to own and meter street lights on utility poles. He explains that officials in Falmouth, South Portland, and Rockland have been leaders in this area and are have advanced an RFQ to begin the conversion process in their towns. Portland staff are beginning to look closely at the savings opportunities presented by LED conversion.

Carolyn Sarno Goldthwaite presents information about potential savings to municipalities that convert to LED. She indicates that:

- Street lighting is often 20 - 40% of a city's utility costs
- LED have better quality of light than other technologies
- LEDs offer the potential for more control over lights such as varied light levels and the ability to turn individual lights on/off.

She adds that switching to LED now is even more beneficial now because the unit costs per light have fallen dramatically during the past few years. Cities now benefit from this savings as well as reduced energy consumption.

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Ms. Goldthwaite suggests that energy service performance contracts can be an effective way to fund conversions but cities should look carefully at the details of the contract. This approach can be beneficial if capital resources are constrained.

Boston, Pittsburgh, NYC, Asheville, Baltimore, examples of cities that have converted or are converting to LED.

Councilor Suslovic points out that the City Council has made street light conversion to LEDs a priority and that we should put attention on this issue to move it forward.

Councilor Hinck agrees with this.

4. Forestry

Jeff Tarling, City Arborist, describes the City's forestry program and tree inventory. He reports that we have 19,465 street trees catalogued. Much of the City has good canopy but some areas are challenged, especially places like Bayside. Morrill's Corner is another example of place with few trees.

Finding adequate space for a healthy tree is difficult in an urban environment. Conditions are challenging due to small sidewalk cuts, high traffic, and damage from winter maintenance. Utility work to protect power lines can have a high impact on street trees.

Mr. Tarling recommends further study into the value trees provide the City by cleaning storm waste, improving air quality.

The City's maintenance efforts include:

- Pruning 1000 - 1200 trees per year
- Planting 230 per year, largely through the donations

Mr. Tarling indicates that we need strategic planning to maintain canopy in the future and to stay ahead of changing conditions brought on by ne.

Councilor Suslovic notes that Council goal setting showed a strong interest in trees. He would like to develop a policy for Council to adopt that sets specific targets for tree planting, especially for underserved neighborhoods. He questions whether we are allocating adequate resources to care for trees. He requests staff for a report outlining specific goals for tree planting and tree maintenance. This should include the number of trees that should be planted each year to maintain canopy and how the number of trees that must be pruned to maintain canopy. He would like a report during the April meeting.

Councilor Hinck states that, if we are to adopt a tree plan, status quo would be the minimum standard. He would like to see status quo in well served areas with increase in canopy in underserved areas of the City. He feels advancing a tree policy would be in keeping with Council goals.

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5. Work Plan

Councilor Hinck moves that the work plan be taken up during the March meeting in light of Councilor Thibodeau's absence. Councilor Suslovic agrees.

Mr. Moon indicates that Councilor Thibodeau has requested that the next meeting be March 15 as he will be away on March 16. Councilor Suslovic and Councilor Hinck agree.

6. Public Comment:

Sam Saltonstall, Peaks Island, advocates for increased energy efficiency but also wants to be sure we consider building health. He references the Peaks Island Community Center.

Anne Pringle is pleased to see trees on the agenda. She supports a tree policy for the city. She advocates that the Trust of Public Land report be taken up by the committee. She supports improving street lighting with conversion to LED, including in parks.

John Thibodeau asks the committee take up the South Portland ordinance in order to do joint work with that community.

Jesse O'Brien reports that the Maine Board of Pesticides Control is ramping up public education. He also mentions some efforts in Scarborough and Kennebunk.

Councilor Hinck states that he wants to make sure we consider all of our lights, including parks, when we consider conversion. He also indicates that the Committee will bring pesticides back when South Portland releases a draft.

Councilor Suslovic makes a motion to adjourn. Both in favor.