

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE

Standing Committee on Transportation, Sustainability and Energy

Councilor Jon Hinck (A/L), Chair

Councilor Spencer Thibodeau (D2), Vice Chair

Councilor Ed Suslovic (D3)

Councilors Present: Councilor Hinck, Councilor Thibodeau, Councilor Suslovic

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Jeff Tarling, Paul Bradbury, Ethan Hipple

Councilor Hinck called the meeting to order and moved to take the energy benchmarking update out of order. Councilor Suslovic joined the meeting shortly thereafter.

Progress Report on Energy Benchmarking

Mr. Moon reported that the project to benchmark energy use by all City buildings is going fairly well. Gathering the data from the utilities has been a little challenging but some key contacts have been helpful. Interns from the Greater Portland Sustainability Council have been assisting the effort by entering the utility data into EPA Portfolio Manager software. Mr. Moon demonstrated the software to the committee and showed reports from several buildings with good data sets. He indicated the goal of the effort is to track energy consumption on an ongoing basis which will allow staff to identify buildings that may need efficiency upgrades and that regular tracking will allow staff to investigate spikes in usage and troubleshoot the causes.

Review and Approve Minutes from March 15, 2016

Motion made to approve the minutes by Councilor Suslovic, seconded by Councilor Thibodeau. All vote in favor.

Jetport Master Plan

Mr. Bradbury briefly summarized the report on the Jetport Master Plan that he offered during March meeting. Councilor Suslovic made a motion to recommend the master plan for adoption by the City Council. Councilor Thibodeau seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Presentation by City Arborist Jeff Tarling on Maintenance Efforts to Maintain the Tree Canopy

Mr. Tarling indicated that staffing for the Forestry program consists of a supervisor and four arborists to take care of more than 19,000 street trees. Their goal is to create a rotation where all trees can be trimmed within 5 – 7 years. With staffing and funding levels this

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hasn't been feasible and the group mostly focuses on complaints and hazards. Parkside, Libbytown, and East Deering are in need of additional trees. He also explained that funds contributed by developers for tree planting are often for neighborhoods where there is not a lot of room for additional trees – such as Munjoy Hill. He is working with Planning to make amendments to address how the funds can be used.

Councilor Thibodeau asked about loss and replacement of mature trees.

Mr. Tarling indicated this is a problem. When a large street tree is lost or removed it is difficult to return a large tree because of space limitations. The tree wells typically allow for the planting of 2" caliper trees.

Councilor Thibodeau followed up with a question about how the Forestry team works with Public Works to incorporate trees into street plans.

Mr. Tarling reported that he works with the engineers during the design phase to think about tree placement. It is challenging to fit the tree wells into the sidewalks given other considerations including ADA requirements. A 4' x 4' tree well is as large as they can normally get.

Councilor Suslovic asked whether there could be a way to plant trees on private property (with the agreement of the homeowner) if the esplanade on a street was too narrow for planting.

Mr. Tarling said this is called "set back planting" and is a good way to address the problem. He added that the current tree replacement budget only allows for the planting of about 20 trees per year. It would be important to develop a more proactive approach.

Councilor Suslovic stated that he feels that it will be important to have integrated planning for City and private developments to insure that we plant healthy trees that will survive. He also stated that Portland residents value trees and want more. He feels the City has not adequately invested in maintaining this part of the City infrastructure. He asked what resources would be required to do this adequately.

Councilor Hinck added that the current approach to maintaining trees is based on a triage approach. He would like a report in advance of next year's budget cycle to assess what funding would be needed to have a more proactive approach. The Council has a strong

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consensus that trees are very important. He requests that the Committee receive this information during the October meeting.

Councilor Suslovic requests that this report include staffing and resource comparisons with comparable cities.

Work Plan

Councilor Thibodeau asked about transportation issues. He is interested in working on creating the first protected bike lane from the East End to the West End. He then excused himself in order to attend the Housing Committee meeting.

Councilor Suslovic expressed concern about the maintenance of existing bike lanes in regards to striping. The striping gets faded and the lines are not redone adequately. He feels we need to make sure we are prepared to take care of infrastructure if we create it. Otherwise, we are not meeting the expectations of our residents.

Mr. Moon indicated that there would be some studies and master plans coming before the committee very soon.

Councilor Hinck asked for an update on the 2030 District initiative.

Mr. Moon reported that he has been in touch with the organizers and they are working with their partners in the business community but are not quite ready to go live. They appreciate the City's enthusiasm for the project and look forward to a formal endorsement when the time comes.

Councilor Suslovic thanked Councilor Hinck for securing the National League of Cities Resiliency Grant. He further requested that staff report back to the committee on efforts related to sea level rise to date. He would like to explore how to use the grant to support ongoing efforts.

Councilor Hinck asked for an update on the solar landfill project. Mr. Moon responded that that the solar bill failed when the legislature could not override the governor's veto. Staff are evaluating the options for moving forward.

Councilor Suslovic requested information about converting street lights to LED.

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Mr. Moon told the committee that staff is currently inventorying the lights in preparation for a project. We are also waiting for the PUC to finalize their rules.

Councilor Suslovic then requested that staff bring back the LED Lighting issue at a future meeting in order to inform budget discussions next year. He also requested a discussion of solid waste improvements in the near future.

Pesticides

Director of Parks, Ethan Hipple, presented a proposal by City staff to greatly reduce the use of synthetic pesticide in City parks and open spaces. The goal is to preserve our important assets but to do so in the most environmentally sound manner. The staff team responsible for drafting the plan divided spaces into four categories with a management approach for all of them. In categories 3 and 4, staff would not use synthetic pesticides at all.

Field use in Portland is very high. Best practices call for turf fields to get 200 hours of use per year. In Portland, some fields get over 1000 hours of use. This requires extra measures to keep the fields in good and safe playing condition, including the use of chemical pesticides as necessary. Staff proposes to test completely organic methods on two high use fields and get a sense of how they perform. Field users, staff, and the public would then weigh on how it is working.

At the golf course, staff is recommending an innovative approach to drastically reduce pesticide use. Playing surfaces, other than putting greens, would be treated with organic products two out of every three years. On the third year, chemical pesticides would be used as necessary. Putting greens would be exempt because there is not successful way to maintain the greens without use of chemical pesticides.

Mr. Hipple indicated that staff is looking for the committee to endorse this approach while the Council works on a larger policy.

Councilor Suslovic requestsd that the City put a deadline on achieving Audubon certification by July 1, 2018.

Councilor Hinck mentioned that the plan indicates says that neonicotinoid pesticides will be discontinued at the golf course and asked whether this applies to other spaces as well.

Mr. Hipple indicated that it could and should have been mentioned in the other section of the plan as well.

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Councilor Hinck asked Mr. Hipple about use of Round Up. Mr. Hipple noted that staff uses as little as possible but there are circumstances when it is used. This is particularly around invasive plants and noxious weeds. Mr. Moon added that staff has been using an organic product called Avenger instead of Round Up on curb lines, traffic islands, and horticultural displays.

Councilor Hinck requested that we try to put together a base line of pesticide use in previous years so we can document reductions of use and increases in use of organics. Mr. Hipple agrees to put this together.

Councilor Suslovic asked Mr. Hipple about the costs noted in the report. Mr. Hipple indicated that the approach called out in the plan is an integrated pest management plan that incorporates the use of organic pesticides but does not only use organics. The fully organic approach would be more costly.

Councilor Hinck and Councilor Suslovic requested that staff incorporate the suggestions of the committee and bring it back at the next meeting.

Discussion then turned to the establishment of a Pesticide Task Force. Councilors reviewed the draft ordinance prepared by Corporation Counsel.

Councilor Suslovic suggested adding Fertilizer to the scope of the task force. He suggested add a Portland commercial property owner, two Portland residential property owners, and a golf course person to the task force roster. He suggested that the South Portland representative should be a resource but not a member.

Councilor Hinck invited public comment.

James Cohen, on behalf of Mainers for Greener Communities, endorsed having a task force. He recommended a good balance and suggested some trade associations would be good resources. He feels that the task force should take adequate time to have effective dialogue would be helpful.

Jesse O'Brien suggested that staff should do a measure soil health and turf depth in the athletic fields before implementing the experiment with organic pesticides in the high use fields. He added that cooperative extension agents would be good resources for the task force.

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Avery Kamila supported the formation of a task force. She is happy the City is trying to use less pesticide. She asked for clarification that the City will not be using Round Up on curb lines and infrastructure this year. Mr. Moon confirmed that is the case. Ms. Kamila expressed concern about pesticide drift.

Councilors Hinck and Suslovic discussed the language of the draft amendment and agreed to incorporate the additional members suggested by Councilor Suslovic but to include the South Portland person as a member. They also agreed that the task force will report back by July 11 but could request an extension if they feel it is necessary. Councilor Suslovic moved the item and seconded by Councilor Hinck seconded. Both agreed.

Adjourn.