

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)

Minutes

July 20, 2016

Members Present: Councilor Hinck, Councilor Suslovic, Councilor Thibodeau

Other Councilors present: Mayor Strimling

Staff Present: Jon Jennings, Mike Murray, Troy Moon

Councilor Suslovic makes a motion to approve the minutes. Seconded by Councilor Thibodeau. All in favor.

Solid waste program

Troy Moon introduces the proposed solid waste changes. He indicates the staff would like formal endorsement of moving forward with cart based recycling even if this means separating discussion of issues related to trash collection. Staff has a goal of implementing cart based recycling in July, 2017. He added that there appears to be consensus on the committee and the full Council that the City should adopt cart based recycling. Staff are pursuing grant opportunities and are cautiously optimistic that a funder will help pay for the recycling carts.

Mr. Moon indicated that he has spoken with colleagues from Worcester, MA who chose to stick with their bag based pay as you throw program as it has been successful for many years. They tried a pilot program with trash carts and were not happy with them because they were difficult to use in some parts of the city. Worcester is looking at adopting a bag based program for recyclables as well. Mr. Moon also spoke with officials from Fayetteville, Arkansas. They have a cart based pay as you throw program and are very happy with it. He noted that most cities with cart based programs do not serve residents who live in large multi-family buildings. In Portland, there are many large apartment buildings receiving City trash service because they do not have a good place to put a dumpster. A cart based pay as you throw program may require the City to discontinue service to these buildings. He noted that cities with cart subscription programs have the ability to add trash costs to an existing utility bill. This is not practical in Portland because we do not have a bill that goes to tenants, only to building owners. Requiring landlords to pay the fee would diminish the program because the individual tenants would be not paying for the trash being set out. Mr. Moon also provided information about the Grand Rapids, Michigan program that allows residents to choose between a cart for trash or a pay as you throw bag. Officials there say most people are now choosing carts.

Councilor Hinck asked committee members for comments on the staff proposal to bifurcate discussion of trash and recycling.

Councilor Suslovic would like to talk about the two together but is ok with separating them if that is where the conversation goes.

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Councilor Hinck agreed with the staff assessment that the Council wants to move forward with cart based recycling. He is supportive of separating the issues.

Councilor Thibodeau would like to consider the staff recommendation of maintaining the bag based pay as you throw program and cart based recycling. He is ok with bifurcating the discussion.

Councilor Suslovic asked whether moving forward with just cart based recycling would prevent the City from seeking competitive bids for trash and recycling collection. Mr. Moon indicated that it would not.

Councilor Suslovic asked why the City is not pursuing full automation of trash and recycling collection.

Mr. Moon responded that staff does not believe automated collection would work in all parts of the city.

Councilor Suslovic wants to make sure we consider all options before we make a final decision.

Mr. Moon clarified that staff anticipates putting out an RFP for trash and recycling collection but, if it makes more sense to do the program with City staff, we would do it with semi-automated trucks. These vehicles can often be operated by one employee.

Mr. Moon indicated that there are haulers in the area who would be able to propose service if the program used recycling carts and bagged trash.

Councilor Suslovic re-affirmed his interest in putting out an RFP for a combined approach to collecting trash and recycling before we make a final decision.

City Manager Jennings responded that staff has gotten good financial information from haulers. He sees cart based recycling as phase one of the larger program and doesn't think moving forward with that forecloses options.

Councilor Thibodeau would like to vote on recycling tonight. He thinks this moves us in the right direction. His primary concern right now is covering the recycling bins.

Councilor Hinck has concerns about the government forcing people to buy plastic just to throw it out. He thinks a program where residents could choose carts if they wished would be good. He asked if there would be additional costs if we do not move forward with changes to trash

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collection along with recycling collection. Mr. Moon responded that the budgetary pricing received from the private sector suggests adopting both together would be cost prohibitive. Mr. Jennings added constraints on the CIP would make it difficult to buy enough trucks to change both trash and recycling at the same time. He would like the committee to vote on moving forward with recycling at this time.

Councilor Thibodeau wants to vote on recycling. He thinks the current system works with the exception of the open top recycling bins. We can look at other improvements in the future.

Councilor Hinck asked for public comment. There was none.

Councilor Suslovic reiterated support for a comprehensive RFP. He won't support anything short of a full automation.

Councilor Thibodeau moves to authorize staff to move forward with implementing a cart based recycling program that includes the current bag based pay as you throw program as outlined in the staff memo.

Councilor Thibodeau and Councilor Hinck support the motion. Councilor Suslovic opposed it.

Ocean Avenue Solar

Mr. Jennings noted that he supported a solar landfill project in South Portland and was pleased the Council in Portland was also interested. Staff has had to look closely at the financials along with partners in South Portland. After further negotiations led by Mr. Moon and Julie Rosenbach the new financials are much improved and staff feels comfortable advancing the project. He asks that a motion to approve the project give staff the flexibility to exercise a buyout in year 10 if necessary.

Councilor Hinck requests clarification about the difference between buying out the project in 7 years or 10 years. Mr. Moon responded that buying in year 10 would require the City to make three additional years of PPA payments. Mr. Jennings added that his request is to allow flexibility in the future. If the future council feels they are able to buy out the array in 7 years they should, but borrowing capacity may be better in 10 years.

Mayor Strimling asks for further clarification about why we would delay purchase. Mr. Jennings responded that the issue relates to CIP constraints due to the ballooning pension obligation bond.

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Councilor Hinck calls on Stephen Hinchman from Revision Energy to add information. Mr. Hinchman noted that the buyout number represents net present value of the array, so it will decrease over time. However, under any scenario, buying out the array sooner is better financially in the long run. He added that the proposed contract provides a buyout option every year beginning in year seven.

Mayor Strimling offered public comment supporting the proposed Ocean Avenue Landfill solar project as well as the community solar project on Peaks Island. He supports having at least 25% of city residents and businesses using solar power. He would like to see Portland be a leader in solar power.

Councilor Hinck opens public comment. He invites people to make comment on solar at Ocean Avenue, Peaks Island, and energy benchmarking if they wish.

Glen Brand – supports the Ocean Avenue project.

Elizabeth Parsons – supports the Ocean Avenue project.

Allen Armstrong – supports the Ocean Avenue project.

Jeff Packard – supports the Ocean Avenue project.

Councilor Suslovic asks whether advancing this project will detract from the LED street light conversion. Mr. Jennings indicated that the street light project is of the highest priority and the solar project would not detract.

Councilor Suslovic moves to recommend the Ocean Avenue Solar project to the full Council. Councilor Thibodeau seconds the motion. He thanks the public and staff for their work on it. Councilor Hinck indicated that he would be supporting the motion and also thanked staff and the Sierra Club for their work.

All in favor.

Peaks Island Community Solar

Mr. Moon described community solar projects that allow individuals to jointly own a solar array and to benefit from the solar power generated through net metering. There are a number of these projects in Maine. Peaks Island residents expressed interest in having such a facility on Peaks Island landfill. Staff supports this as there are no future plans for other uses on the landfill cap.

Councilor Suslovic asks whether the Peaks Island Council has weighed in. Mr. Moon indicates that they have not. Councilor Suslovic requests that we get their opinion before voting.

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Councilor Hinck asks about the role of the City in this project. Mr. Moon indicated that the City would be the landlord but not have financial stake in the project itself.

Councilor Thibodeau asked about protections for the City in terms of liability. Mr. Moon indicated that the City will require insurance and will not accept any financial responsibility for the array. There would be an annual lease payment and the lease would have a specific duration.

Councilor Hinck agrees that we should get input from Peaks Island Council.

Public Comment:

Alissa Armstrong – supports the Peaks Island project. She indicated that there was a meeting on Peaks Island earlier this year with many attendees and a lot of interest.

Sam Saltonstall – supports the project. Believes there is strong support on the Island.

Glen Brand – supports the project. Will work to find investors and thanks the committee for considering a public/private partnership.

Jeff Packard – thinks there may be room for two arrays on the site and hopes that might be a possibility. Suggests the lease holder be responsible for maintaining the property.

Sue Jones – works for Revision Energy, doesn't think it is practical to have two arrays due to regulatory environment.

Councilor Suslovic moves that the project be tabled until the committee receives input from the Peaks Island Council. Seconded by Councilor Hinck. Councilors Suslovic and Hinck support the motion. Councilor Thibodeau opposes it.

Councilor Suslovic asks about who would be responsible for cost and hopes the design would allow for future expansion.

Mr. Moon indicated that there is only single phase power at the location and it would not be financially feasible to run three phase power from the front of the island to the landfill. This limits the size of the array.

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Energy Benchmarking

Councilor Hinck indicates that he has advanced an energy benchmarking ordinance based on the Cambridge, Massachusetts ordinance. He asks Mr. Moon if he has a presentation on this item. Mr. Moon responds that he does not, but that staff supports the concept of energy benchmarking and is currently working to benchmark all City facilities. He also indicates that the City has been very supportive of the creation of a 2030 District in Portland where private sector leaders would band together to reduce their energy consumption by 50% by 2030.

Councilor Suslovic indicates that he would be willing to postpone discussion of this item to September so we can learn more about what the 2030 District team has planned. Councilor Thibodeau agrees with this.

Public comment

Kimberly Brewer – supports benchmarking but has questions about the current proposal. She wants to make sure the goal is not to penalize.

Charlie Taylor from Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships -- Thinks benchmarking is a great way to promote energy efficiency. He noted that many buildings in Maine are already benchmarking. He thinks 2030 Districts and benchmarking ordinances can be complementary. He offers to help with the effort.

Sam Saltonstall – supports energy efficiency efforts.

Jeff Edelstein – wants to see outcomes, and would like to hear about how benchmarking has spurred people to make improvements.

Jeff Packard – expressed concern that energy data is not readily accessible to building owners for a variety of reasons. Benchmarking is great but first it is important to remove barriers to getting the data. We should focus on this as opposed to passing an ordinance.

Glen Brand – supports the benchmarking ordinance.

Councilor Suslovic moves postponement to the September meeting. Seconded by Councilor Thibodeau. All in favor.

Motion to adjourn made by Councilor Suslovic, seconded by Councilor Thibodeau. All in favor.
Agenda Friday before the meeting