

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Committee on Sustainability and Transportation
Councilor Andrew Zarro (D4), Chair
Councilor Victoria Pelletier (D2)
Councilor Roberto Rodríguez (At-Large)

Minutes January 11, 2023

Members Present: Councilor Zarro, Councilor Pelletier, Councilor Rodríguez

Staff Present: Mayor Kate Snyder, Troy Moon, Erin Ferrell, Katie Tims

Guests: Mike Murray (Acting Director of Public Works) and Jeremiah Bartlett (City Transportation Systems Engineer), Vaishali Mamgain (Committee Facilitator) and Rebecca Nisetich (Committee Facilitator)

Meeting called to order.

November 30 Minutes

Councilor Zarro makes a motion to approve the November 30th, 2022 meeting minutes.

Councilor Rodríguez moves the motion. November 30th minutes passed unanimously, 3-0.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon, Erin Ferrell, and Katie Tims

Sustainability Office staff sent reminder letters to property owners who are required to submit energy and water usage to the Sustainability Office as part of the Energy Benchmarking and Disclosure ordinance. Central Maine Power has made significant progress on its updated customer data platform. Reports from pesticide applicators are coming in. We are working on educational opportunities for both the public and landcare professionals so they are aware of changes to the ordinance that restrict the use of fertilizers. Progress has been made on charging infrastructure in Portland at East End Community School and Deering Oaks Parking Lot and the Fast Charging hub at the corner of Spring St. and High St. We are waiting for CMP to energize them but do not have an estimated time for that to happen. The Parks Department helped us install additional signs at the community compost sites that are translated into Arabic, Portuguese, French, and Spanish. We received a Waste Diversion Grant from the Maine DEP to create additional outreach materials and signage to promote the Neighborhood Compost Drop Offs and to translate them into six languages. The Sustainability Office was also awarded a \$17,000 grant to establish a Sustainable Neighborhood program that will allow us to promote sustainable actions in neighborhoods, hoping to launch in the spring as a pilot program in two neighborhoods. Our outreach has been strong: the Sustainability Office Instagram now has over 2,000 followers, the One Climate Future newsletter now has 921 subscribers, and the One Climate Future team has coordinated the full-year lineup for Coffee and Climate events in 2023.

Committee Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilor Zarro congratulates the Office on these recent achievements, noting that the Committee is excited about the Sustainable Neighborhoods Program and wants to stay updated on how the Council can be supportive. Councilor Zarro follows this by asking how can we

encourage CMP to expedite completing the EV charging hub installations. *They (CMP) may be delayed by the most recent storm and the Office are meeting with them next week and will be sure to ask them the timeline.*

Councilor Pelletier recognizes the importance of translating materials in our programs and the growth of our social media presence.

Councilor Rodríguez confirms that the EV charging stations are those contracted by EVGo. This is followed by questioning if the grants the Office was awarded are written by staff members, acknowledging how difficult and time-consuming it is. *We do develop the grant applications right in Office and are constantly searching for grant dollars to support the work of the City.*

One Climate Future Progress Update

Presented by Troy Moon

Visit oneclimatefuture.org to view the progress dashboard and updates for OCF progress made in 2022. See the presentation slides in the agenda packet for more detailed information.

Presentation on Rail Use Advisory Committee Discussion and Policy Recommendation

Presented by Mike Murray (Acting Director of Public Works) and Jeremiah Bartlett (City Transportation Systems Engineer)

The City of Portland was part of a multi-community and stakeholder study of the State-owned St. Lawrence and Atlantic Line which was convened over a nine-month period and resulted in a majority and minority recommendation for future use of the line in December of 2022. The study was initiated following the passage of a bill into law that allowed for a petition process to assess the conversion of railroad corridors (generally used for freight movements) to other transportation uses. Over the course of the study, MaineDOT, with consultant support, provided economic and cost information as it related to various reuse options.

The study began in April of 2022, and included a demographic and economic analysis for various study options. The study itself focused on the following three alternatives:

1. Restore Rail Service on Existing Corridor: Heavy Rail reuse for Freight and Passenger operations
2. Interim Rail Until Trail: Demolish existing track and replace with asphalt or gravel trail
3. Rail with Trail: Construct trail alongside tracks and generally within the state-owned right-of-way

On December 22, 2022, the Council took a vote on an advisory opinion/alternative. There was a split, with 8 votes for removing the tracks and constructing a trail, 4 votes for constructing a trail alongside the tracks, and one abstention. Several of the Council members, including Portland, noted a number of limitations with the study itself. The two largest concerns were the following: Representation and Transit Mode/Method.

Based on both the long and recent history, as well as active topics potentially impacting this important corridor, staff recommends a position of “trail with rail” to ensure the maximum utilization for City benefits. In addition, we also recommend that a transit alternatives analysis be completed by MaineDOT to determine the future direction of the transit portion of the corridor (i.e. light rail, BRT, something else), with a southern terminus at the Ocean Gateway/relocated METRO route hub). This, in turn, would lead to the engineering and design of this corridor for both active transportation and transit uses. The scope of the design work would include work with abutters, stakeholders (i.e. Roux, etc.) to evaluate on and off-corridor segments for the trail, depending upon geographic and/or environmental constraints. Ultimately, as the region continues to grow, strategic investment in and development of active transportation and transit alternatives is necessary to prevent sprawl. In the absence of that investment, congestion on I-295 is likely to result in pressure to widen that highway, as well as an increase in carbon emissions.

Comment on the Presentations

Councilor Zarro notes that this issue is going to take public comment and that the Committee is not ready to take action on this issue tonight. Councilor Zarro would like more information on Auburn’s resolution and how that may align with our recommendation. as well as senior leadership with the state in the context of the Rapid Transit Study, and also how will that project get funded, and what is the most feasible option and common ground on this issue. Councilor Pelletier notes the influx of public response that highlights the importance of this issue and adds that this Committee would provide a recommendation and not a decision, with MDOT having the final say. Councilor Rodríguez clarifies that the vote would be on a recommendation for resolution.

Public Comment

Portland residents and individuals advocated positions for the three options for rail use based on a variety of personal, practical, and financial considerations.

Committee Goal Setting for 2023

Presented by Vaishali Mamgain (Facilitator), Rebecca Nisetich (Facilitator), Committee Members, and Troy Moon

The Committee brainstorms top priorities for the upcoming year. Councilor Zarro outlines the top goals that have been identified including continuing support for the Electrify Everything! Program, completing work on bird safe design requirements, and reviewing reports from other committees such as LMAC. Troy Moon adds goals of exploring an ordinance requiring home energy performance at time of sale (similar to Montpelier, VT) to provide visibility into future energy cost and to incentivize energy efficiency, and minor tweaks in amending the Energy Benchmarking ordinance, and finding funding opportunities. Councilor Zarro adds work in exploring shore power feasibility.

Public Comment

Portland residents and individuals advocated their ideas for policy, changes, and programs that the Committee should include in their 2023 work plan. These included prioritizing the

reconstruction of Franklin Street, reinstating a Portland BikePED Coordinator and advancing bicycle/pedestrian safe policies, and use of solar RECs to further reduce the City's carbon footprint.

Councilor Rodríguez advocates for building capacity, as part of the budget, for Portland BikePED. Councilor Rodríguez asks the committee to consider their strategy for using the solar RECs, whether they are reinvested in sustainability efforts, used as part of the bottom line budget, or otherwise. Confirms revising the Franklin Street project.

Councilor Pelletier acknowledges that restoring State/High traffic would be of importance to her district, and also affirms the goals mentioned including reinstating the Portland BikePED Coordinator, revising the Franklin Street project, and infrastructure improvements for creating pedestrian safety. Continuing education and outreach on climate change, especially for those not using/in access of social media.

Councilor Zarro adds goals of creating a Sustainability Fund (similar to the Housing Fund) to support projects that advance the goals in One Climate Future, considering the feasibility of attracting a new car share program in Portland to reduce carbon emissions, and exploring alternatives to the City's purple trash bags (solid waste collection program).

Troy Moon acknowledges goals of helping renters and low-income residents access our programs for advancing energy efficiency and carbon-free home improvement. Troy Moon also added explore an ordinance requiring home energy performance at time of sale (similar to Montpelier, VT) to provide visibility into future energy cost and to incentivize energy efficiency.

Other Business

Troy Moon reminds the Committee that we can discuss having future S&T meetings in-person/hybrid or remotely. Councilor Zarro asks for any other questions or comments and thanks the guests for joining us.

Motion to Adjournment

Moved by Councilor Rodríguez, all adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned