

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Committee on Sustainability and Transportation
Councilor Regina Phillips (D3), Chair
Councilor Victoria Pelletier (D2)
Councilor Anna Bullett (D4)

Minutes January 10, 2024

Members Present: Councilor Phillips, Councilor Pelletier, Councilor Bullett

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Erin Ferrell, Katie Tims

Guests: Chris Chop, Andrew Clark

Meeting was called to order.

October 19 Minutes

The October 19, 2023 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon, Erin Ferrell, and Katie Tims

In lieu of a monthly update, the Sustainability Office team provided an overview of their work and responsibilities. The team covered key achievements made in the past few years and their progress toward the goals established in One Climate Future.

Councilor Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilor Pelletier shares her enthusiasm for how much the team has accomplished in the past few years noting the Neighborhoods Program, Composting Program, and expansion of accessibility and multilingual services around programs. Councilor Pelletier asks what the electric trash truck will be like for residents to experience. *It will be a truck on our streets, it will look just like the other trash trucks except much quieter.*

Councilor Philips thanks the Sustainability team for their outstanding work.

Presentation and Discussion regarding PACTS Rapid Transit Study - Locally Preferred Alternative

Presented by Chris Chop and Andrew Clark, Greater Portland Council of Governments Transportation Planners

The region's long-range transit plan includes four goals: make transit easier, create frequent connections, invest in rapid transit, and create transit-friendly places.

Gorham-Westbrook-Portland is the first of several corridors for further study. After evaluating the four alignment alternatives against project goals and objectives, developing infrastructure assumptions, cost estimates, ridership forecasts, and travel-time estimates, and conducting robust community engagement, this locally preferred alternative was selected. The Committee will be considering whether to affirm support for the locally preferred alternative with bus rapid transit as the preferred mode and Alternative 1 as the preferred alignment.

Councilor Comment on Presentation and Discussion regarding PACTS Rapid Transit Study - Locally Preferred Alternative

Councilor Phillips confirms with Troy Moon that a letter of support can come from the Sustainability and Transportation Committee, however the Chair can also recommend this to go to the full Council.

Councilor Pelletier asks for a reminder on what steps the Committee took last session on this project. *The Committee affirmed support for the study to happen and met with GPCOG Transportation planners for a project update/progress report. This is the first review of the LPA.* Councilor Pelletier agrees that a letter of support from Mayor Dion would be helpful.

Councilor Pelletier asks how late the rapid transit line would run, mentioning constituent concerns with late shift workers)? *The target is to have operations running from 6am-midnight.* Would a joint resolution or letter of support from multiple stakeholders or municipalities (Portland, Westbrook, Gorham) be helpful? *Not sure yet, but staff of each City or town have been supportive and next moves are going to each Council, Portland was first.*

Councilor Bullett appreciates how this community engagement had a strong equity focus, shares support for this alternative line and many of the transit improvements that this line would feature. Will the next phase, preliminary design, include consideration for pedestrian infrastructural improvements? *Yes, a comprehensive approach to the entire roadway like this is an opportunity to build funding for improvements for all modes of transportation.* Is there a place for a conversation in the next phase around offsite parking? *Yes, this was a key priority item for Gorham, with parking in Gorham for riders to leave their car and take the line west. Parking in Portland may more more difficult, but certainly something we are thinking about in the next phase of the study.*

Councilor Phillips asks if this service may expand service operations for holidays. *Cannot speak on behalf of METRO, but it is a strategy they are looking to expand.* Also asks how much a bus ticket costs? Would ticket prices increase for this line, given the new infrastructure and service? This will depend on cost and ridership projections. *In other Cities, rapid networks do tend to be slightly higher than City networks.* Can you speak to why this line does not connect to the transportation center or the Jetport? *One of the other alternative lines did consider this route, but ridership did not meet goals of the project and the route did not hit other key hubs such as USM. We also recently completed a study called "Transit Together" which resulted in some changes including better access to the Jetport and better access to the transportation center, but this occurs outside of this rapid line.* Funding sources? *Federal transit administration or federal highway administration, not requesting local/municipal funds for the preliminary design phase.*

Councilor Bullett asks if Phase 2 conversations with METRO will focus on transfers (especially for connecting to the transportation center or the Jetport)? *METRO is leading the next phase of design and we will certainly consider this feedback in the next phase.*

Public Comment on Presentation and Discussion regarding PACTS Rapid Transit Study - Locally Preferred Alternative

Ken Capron shares frustration that his alternative line was not considered as a viable option.

Abigail shares her experience riding METRO lines and bikeped in Greater Portland. Abigail provided feedback that bus drivers often don't see certain waiting riders in the dark. More bike stations and/or bike lockers would be a great feature along the lines. Predictability and consistency in the bus schedule is key.

Eamonn Dundon, Portland Regional Chamber, speaking in support of this project. Encourage to take advantage of this opportunity while there is federal discretionary funding.

Bill Weber, Portland Climate Action Team, shares appreciation for a well-developed project and how it addresses more non-car-focused transit solutions. Given the imperative to reduce carbon emissions in the city, how much equivalent CO2 will be reduced with the recommended project? *GPCOG Planners will follow up with Bill.*

Winston Lumpkins, Chair of PBPAC, asks if there is any competition for ridership between the Gorham to 295 project? Also, is it possible for this study to be implemented incrementally, i.e. convert the Husky line to this level of service as soon as possible? *Yes, had conversations with Maine Turnpike Authority early on, to discuss Gorham Connector and include it in the study design, decided that that project was not a certainty. We do not know the impacts of that connector with this project. Secondly, it is a possibility to implement this incrementally and we will decide that in the next phase of the project.*

Kevin Parker mentions its alignment with denser housing proposals and its sustainability goals.

John Clark shares appreciation for this project and feedback on the many pedestrian issues, i.e. improving sidewalks on Brighton corridor and would like to see the City commit to supporting that along with this project.

Dedication of Thomas Park

Presented by Ethan Hipple, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities

The Lowell St parcel is a 0.4-acre parcel of City-owned land bounded by Lowell St, Congress St and Burnham St. The property was donated to the City in 1913 by the Thomas family and is currently city-owned, but un-designated. It is not currently listed as a Park in Chapter 18 of City Code, however, the City continues to care for the space as public green space, to comply with the deed restrictions. In February of 2023, descendants of the Thomas family reached out to the City to ask that the parcel be restored as an officially dedicated park and that it be named Thomas Park, in honor of the family that gave it to the City. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities spent multiple months considering the request and vetting the documentation, consulting with Corporation Counsel, GIS, and Archives Division, and our Transportation and Engineering Division at Public Works. We have held numerous meetings with the family and District Councilor Phillips. Dedicating this parcel as a park would further the Council goal of preserving green space in a historically low-income, CDBG-eligible neighborhood, and would further the City's goals of providing green spaces within a 10-minute walk of all residences.

As the City is already maintaining this space, the cost of maintenance will be negligible. There are no plans for major capital improvements at this time. Park improvements in the future would consist of picnic tables, signage, and park seating, which would be covered in the existing Parks Operating Budget. The neighborhood association is currently funding the installation of tree lighting. After this 9-month review process, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities supports this proposal to dedicate this land as a park, and to name it Thomas Park in recognition of the family that gifted this public space to the people of Portland.

No public comment was presented.

Councilor Comment on the Dedication of Thomas Park

Councilor Bullett is in support of this dedication, but asks if there may be a plan with DPW and other departments to put in crosswalks and maybe pedestrian-level lighting. *Director Hipple notes that safety concerns have been discussed. This park is not an ideal location for playscapes and play equipment - busy road, close to 295, very close to Doherty Field and Western Prom. Wooden side rails and other safety features have been considered and the space will be changing quite a bit soon (Denny's lot).*

Councilor Phillips is familiar with this project and surrounding projects in the District. Councilor makes a motion to bring this to the attention of the full Council. Councilor Bullett moves the motion. This item will go to full Council.

Committee Work Plan

In alignment with Council goals, some of the items proposed for this committee include:

- Establishing a Sustainability Fund, needs Finance Committee action as well
- Commercial Street Sea-Level Rise
- Review ongoing work with Climate Resilience Overlay Zoning
- Reestablishing two-way traffic on State Street and High Street
- More non-car focused transportation opportunities
- Franklin Street Redesign

Motion to Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Bullett. Second by Councilor Phillips. All adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned