

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

Minutes April 10, 2024

Members Present: Councilor Phillips, Councilor Bullett

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Katie Tims, Kayley Weeks, Ben Pearson, Mark Reiland, Tatyana Vashchenko, Alex Marshall, Chris Maher

Meeting was called to order.

March 13 Minutes

The March 13, 2024 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon, Katie Tims, and Kayley Weeks

Since launching DIY Electrify! The Sustainability Office has helped Portland residents buy a variety of items including: weatherization materials, cellular shades, an energy-star refrigerator, and smart thermostat. They are working on broader outreach efforts to keep spreading the word by connecting with Eldredge Lumber and Maine Hardware, who have agreed to advertise the program in their stores and on social media to raise awareness to customers. The Sustainability Office is working on forming interdepartmental relationships with Public Health and the Office of Economic Opportunity to expand our outreach within the community. Electric lawn tools, reel lawn mowers, and rechargeable power stations have been added to the list of eligible products.

Office staff are working with building owners to report energy and water usage to the City with reports due May 1 each year under the Energy and Water Use Benchmarking Ordinance. Staff will host a commercial building efficiency workshop with guests from Efficiency Maine to help building owners and property managers understand their benchmarking reports and identify actions that can be taken to improve their metrics. The workshop will be April 18th at City Hall.

On March 27, the Sustainability Office hosted their first “Landcare Lunch Break” webinar with Jason Lilley of UMaine Cooperative Extension to hear about sustainable soil management and how to conduct a soil test. This is the first in our free webinar series.

Efficiency Maine awarded a NEVI grant to Gridwealth LLC to install a DC Fast Charging facility on Marginal Way next to Miss Portland Diner. This is a location the Sustainability Office had previously explored and gotten approval from the HEDC Committee to advance. They will work with Corporation Counsel and Gridwealth to develop a site license.

On Saturday, March 16, the Sustainability Office hosted our Home Energy Expo, inviting homeowners to learn how they can save energy, reduce their carbon footprint, and save money on their energy bills. Local vendors such as Evergreen Home Performance, Horizon Homes, Green Maine Healthy Homes, Maine Solar, Efficiency Maine, green realtors, and other home efficiency experts offered the 70 people in attendance interactive workshops and demonstrations. Thank you to Friends of Woodfords Corner for their help in organizing and promoting the event!

Portland residents in the West End neighborhood are leading a “ReForest the City” native tree-planting project along with an educational campaign to spread awareness about the importance of caring for urban trees. The Sustainability Office is excited to support this effort, as it is synergistic with our climate action plan and neighborhood resilience program. On April 9, the group hosted a "Tuesday Tree Talk" with Mark Reiland, Portland's City Arborist speaking on the State of the Portland Urban Forest. If you are interested in learning more about the ReForest the City project reach out to trees@wenamaine.org to get connected.

On March 19th, the Sustainability Office had an Internal Sustainability Lunch inviting fellow colleagues to chat about some of the steps the City is taking to become more resilient and how it relates to their work.

On March 22, April 5, and April 9 our team attended the Portland Public Schools STEM Expo and got the chance to chat with high school and elementary school students about climate science and ideas for future careers.

On March 27, Troy gave a presentation as part of the Portland Public Library's Sustainability Series. The in-person presentation focused on resiliency in the face of rising waters, more extreme weather events, and new challenges on the waterfront and throughout the city.

On March 28th, Kayley attended the Maine Sustainability & Water Conference. She attended two sessions including: Balancing Forest and Farmland Protection with Renewable Energy Development, and Protecting and Accessing the Coast for Commercial Harvesters and the Public. The Keynote speaker, Susanne Moser, presented on Navigating the Psychological Challenges of a Planet Crisis.

Councilor Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilors Phillips and Bullett both shared appreciation for this presentation.

Update on Amendments to Chapter 24 and 34 of City Code Addressing Stormwater Management

Presented by Benjamin Pearson, PE, Water Resources Compliance Section Coordinator

Water Resources has created a city website called “Erosion and Sediment Control” containing information about the amendments made to Chapter 24 and 34 of the city code. Additionally, there is a form available on the website to submit any feedback in regards to the changes made.

Public Comment on Amendments to Chapter 24 and 34 of City Code Addressing Stormwater Management

Aymen Dundon, from the Portland Regional Chamber shared his appreciation to Ben and his cooperation. He also shared that he is working with the AGC to update the language in the ordinance, so that it is more clear.

Councilor Comment on Update on Amendments to Chapter 24 and 34 of City Code Addressing Stormwater Management

Councilors Phillips and Bullett both shared appreciation for Ben's presentation last month, and thanked him for the time and effort he spent connecting with the public on this issue.

Amendments to Chapter 24 and 34 of City Code Addressing Stormwater Management

The amendments were approved unanimously.

LMAC Annual Report and Recommendations

Presented by Troy Moon, Sustainability Director

Troy gave a brief overview of what is required in the landcare ordinance.

Then, updated the counselors on who currently sits on the LMAC Committee. These individuals include: Jesse O'Brien, Chair, Avery Kamila, Waiver Committee, Pricilla Skerry, Noah Tucker, Melissa Runstrom, Carol Laboissoniere, and Troy Moon, Waiver Committee.

Troy went over the responsibilities of LMAC, and he shared some outreach materials created by the committee and staff. Followed by the proposed amendments to the Landcare Ordinance. These amendments include:

1. Changing the required soil test to a "standard soil test" offered by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.
2. Required soil tests may be done every three years rather than annually.
3. Application of organic fertilizer to gardens is permitted with a soil test highly recommended.
4. Fertilization of woody plants and shrubs is permitted so long as fertilizer is injected to the root or applied within the drip edge of the plant and incorporated into the soil.
5. Removal of the term "penetrometer" because it is not referenced in the ordinance language.

Troy also shared the amendments that are under consideration for 2024, which include:

1. Quantity of organic fertilizer allowed in one growing season.
2. Reporting requirements and information required on annual reports.
3. Credentials required for LMAC membership.
4. Other issues that arise as staff evaluate the ordinance.

These considerations will help ensure that the ordinance is most effectively promoting sustainable landcare.

Public Comment on LMAC Annual Report and Recommendations

Avery Kamilla shares her appreciation of the presentation. She expressed her concerns regarding the purpose of the committee. She shared her thoughts on opening up the committee to the public.

Councilor Comment on LMAC Annual Report and Recommendations

Councilor Phillips asked if the changes to the credentials would need to be brought to the legislative committee. Troy answered by stating that changes to committee credentials are not being changed at this time. Councillor Bullett shares her support for outreach regarding the ordinance.

LMAC Annual Report and Recommendations

The annual report and recommendations were approved unanimously

Update on Bayside Tree Planting Project

Presented by Alex Marshall, Parks Director, Tatyana Vashchenko, Project Manager, Mark Reiland, City Arborist

Tatyana and Mark shared the city's tree planting plans for 2024. Which are comprised of:

- Coop + Memorial Planting ~35
- Forestry Internal Planting ~150
- Grant + Collaborative ~35
- Bayside Tree Planting Project ~152

Parks and Rec worked with Sebago Technics to optimize the tree planting in the public sphere in the Bayside community.

There are poor site conditions including insufficient soil volume, poor soil conditions, improper planting or subsequent mounding of organic matter against trunk. Part of the plan is to enhance these site conditions, and ensure the contractor is applying proper planting practices. They are expanding existing wells, creating new wells, and filling gaps. They included an overview of planting standards. At the end of the project, someone will be approving all of the planting sites.

Councilor Comment on Update on Bayside Tree Planting Project

Councilors Phillips and Bullett both shared appreciation for all of the information and all of the work involved in planting the trees in the Bayside neighborhood. Councillor Bullett expressed her concerns for the lack of trees in the community and shared her excitement about the project. She is hopeful that the contractors are held accountable for their work. Councillor Bullett asked if there is currently any engagement going on with the community, and if anyone can be involved in the CoOp program. Mark answered clarifying that they are currently working with the Bayside Neighborhood Association, and that anyone can be involved in the CoOp program.

Bird Safe Ordinance Review

Presented by Nick Lund, Maine Audubon, Chris Maher, University of Southern Maine

Nick shared the hazards migratory birds face, and the migration patterns in Portland. Birds often collide into buildings and die, which is a massive problem. Almost one billion birds die a year from colliding with glass, which equates to a million birds per day in the US.

Bird Safe Maine was started by researchers and architects. Volunteers walk the streets of Portland everyday during migration seasons to collect data on which buildings birds are striking.

Nick shared the timeline for the Bird Safe Ordinance. The Ordinance was approved by S&T, but was unable to make it to the council in time. They would like to try again. Nick continued to go over the details of the ordinance.

Residential buildings, designated landmarks, first floor visibility, and smaller windows are exempt from the ordinance.

Councilor Comment on Bird Safe Ordinance Review

Councilors Phillips and Bullett both shared their appreciation for sharing the bird safe ordinance with the new committee. Councillor Bullett asked if there is any funding opportunity available to incentivize retrofits.

Climate Action Fund Update

Presented by Troy Moon, Sustainability Director

Troy apologized for the delay. The Sustainability Department has been working closely with the finance department, assistant city manager. The final ordinance had not been drafted. Troy hopes it will be ready by next month's meeting. The purpose of the trust fund is to promote sustainability and clean energy within the city. The fund would accept charitable donations, and benchmarking penalties would go directly into the fund.

Councilor Comment on Climate Action Fund Update

Councillor Phillips was understanding and shared her appreciation.

Work Plan

Councillor Phillips urged people to reach out to Troy to suggest additions to the work plan. Councilor Phillips suggested adding the coal pile to the work plan.

Motion to Adjournment

The motion was accepted unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned