

Minutes

Remote Housing and Economic Development Committee

September 17, 2024

NOTE: This meeting was held via Zoom and can be viewed at this link:

<http://www.portlandmaine.gov/1695/Economic-Development-Committee> These

Minutes provide a record of those in attendance, general discussion taking place, and motions made.

A remote meeting of the Housing and Economic Development Committee (HEDC) of the Portland City Council was held on Tuesday, September 17, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the HEDC were Chair Pious Ali, and members, Regina Phillips, Roberto Rodriguez, and Kate Sykes. Present from the City staff were Housing and Economic Development Department Director Greg Watson, Housing and Community Development Division Director Mary Davis, Corporation Counsel Michael Goldman, Associate Corporation Counsel Avery Dandreta, Assistant City Manager Dena Libner, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Melissa Hue, and Housing Program Manager Victoria Volent.

Item #1: Review and approval of August 8, 2024 and September 3, 2024 minutes

On motion made by Councilor Sykes, seconded by Councilor Phillips, the Committee voted 3-0 to accept the August 8, 2024 and September 3, 2024 Minutes.

Councilor Rodriguez joined the meeting at 5:37

Item #2: Office of Economic Opportunity: Natural Helpers Presentation

Greg Watson introduced this item noting the tremendous impact of the Natural Helpers Leadership Program. Melissa Hue, Director of the Economic Opportunity Office, provided an in-depth review of the program that ran from February through May, commenting on the positive opportunity for the ten fellows who contributed more than one hundred volunteer hours. “Natural Helpers” is a nationwide program designed to bridge the gap between residents and the resources available by identifying, training and empowering local community members. Local community members, known as fellows, participated in eight full day sessions, eight volunteer hours within workforce and community development, attended at least one networking activity, engaged in an immersive activity, spent a minimum of 57 hours in the program, and networked with over twenty-five community partners, twelve Chief Business Officers’s, two government agencies and five private businesses.

Some of the leadership development activities included a four part course on effective leadership skills and application techniques, and a four part “Spirit Series” workshop to introduce self-awareness towards becoming community leaders. Fellows attended thematic seminars aimed at learning how to support members of their community. Collectively, over a four month period, they served over 150 people, often presenting community resources to large groups. In May, the Natural Helpers held public workshops, and Question and Answer panels focused on U.S. immigration policy and rights. Other program topics included housing, healthcare, and community safety. Domestic violence training and 6 hour police ride along were offered by the Police Department. Five fellows spoke at various conferences addressing DEI and racial equity based on training received to increase racial equity within the Greater Portland area and statewide. Over 200 people were reached through these conferences.

Fellows became familiar with community resources available in Portland, they made connections with other community and organizational leaders, received education and career advancement opportunities, and at the end of their training, received a Mayoral certificate.

Committee members thanked Melissa for her presentation, and asked clarifying questions regarding the program source of funding (answer- from the Albert B Glickman Family Foundation), expanding outreach to other community members (answer -looking to expand 2025 fellows to include different cohorts), how fellows are chosen (answer- application process), and what is on her wish list (answer- hire another person, expand the program to collaborate with more people, and expand the program to include other communities). The Committee expressed their support and willingness to research funding opportunities.

Item #3: Social Housing Presentation

Councilor Sykes presented “Social Housing- the Missing Piece in Portland’s Housing Production Puzzle?”. Factors in Portland’s housing crisis include demand side (example: sudden in-migration during the pandemic; increasing housing costs) and supply side issues (example- historically low housing production; high cost of financing). The State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study from 2023 indicated a future need of up to 84,300 housing units within in the state by 2030. Portland has approved over 2,800 units of market, mixed-income and low-income housing since 2020 from applications submitted from private and non-profit developers. Inclusionary Zoning requirements cut into private developer profit margins, funding through Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) is limited, competitive and does not produce enough workforce and middle-income housing. And federal funding for HUD public housing programs has been decimated over decades.

Social housing offers housing as a public good similar to street plowing and schools. Social Housing fills a niche that private development and nonprofit development can't meet, specifically production of middle-income housing. Social Housing creates mixed income development, is not reliant on competitive funding sources, can be implemented quickly, and is revenue neutral, self-sustaining, and publicly owned. Financing would be through revenue bonds paid back with rents paid by the mixed income tenants. As construction loans are paid down, public equity in the project grows and can be leverage to build more housing. The Jill C. Dusen Housing Trust Fund should function as a revolving loan fund. Example of Social Housing include public housing authorities, Montgomery County, Maryland, and Seattle's Social Housing Developer. Subsidy public land resources already exists. The City already provides a diverse array of public services, is a lender of start-up funds, has public land, and has housing development expertise. The next step is to assemble a task force.

Councilor Sykes will draft a summary plan for the next HEDC meeting.

On motion made by Councilor Phillips, seconded by Councilor Sykes, the Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at approximately 6:56 p.m.

Next meeting is October 15, 2004.

Respectively submitted, Victoria Volent