

Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 5:30pm, Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance:

Anna Bullett, Chair (District 4), April Fournier (At-large), Sarah Michniewicz (District 1), Wesley Pelletier (District 2).

Councilor Attendance:

Mayor Mark Dion

City Staff:

Adam Harr, Executive Assistant for Health and Human Services; Jason King, Police Major; Dena Libner, Assistant City Manager; Greg Jordan, Assistant City Manager; Caity Hager, Emergency Management Coordinator; Maggie McLaughlin, Director of Health and Human Services; Ethan Hipple, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities.

Guest Speakers:

Executive Director of Youth & Family Outreach, Camelia Babson-Haley; Director of Starting Strong, Katie Soucy; Early Care and Education Associate Director in the DHHS Office of Child and Family Services, Tara Williams.

Announcements

Review and Approval of Minutes from January 14, 2025

- Councilor Fournier moved to approve the minutes and Councilor Bullett seconded. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Youth and Family Outreach

- YFO started in 1846 to always assess what is needed in the community and to provide any services they can to serve those needs
- 1986 became a primarily childcare in response to a rise in teen pregnancy.
- Today homeless and immigrant populations are focused on with wrap around services.
 - How are wrap around services funded (social workers are expensive)
 - Partnering with USM for 22 years to have a social work intern on site for the spring and fall semester with a volunteer supervisor.
- What lies ahead given the precarity of federal funding.
 - People are already on the edge and a disruption in funding and related drop in services could heavily impact families.
- Housing Project Update
 - Preparing to break ground in late July.

- It will double from 58 to about 110 slots, primarily focused on infants and toddlers
 - Primary demographic of the 300 child waitlist.
- 60 unites the majority of which will be affordable housing.
- Temporarily moving YFO during construction to a location where an existing childcare program is closing.
 - Attempting to absorb the families in the program closing.
 - In South Portland so transportation is an issue
 - Speaking with Metro board for increased frequency.

Office of Child and Family Services: Early Care & Education Childcare Licensing

- Maine DHHS Data page: [Maine DHHS By the Numbers](#)
 - Icon for each office in DHSS with tableau data.
- Number of slots is the licenses capacity of childcare programs but does not tell the exact numbers of enrollees.
 - Not every program will enroll to licenses capacity.
 - Family childcare is enrolling at 88% of licensed capacity.
 - Childcare centers are enrolling at 70% of licensed capacity.
- Providers enrollment data:
 - 8% of children enrolled in licensed programs are infants
 - Usually, a program will have a single infant class.
 - 24% are toddlers
 - 39% preschooler
 - 29% school age
- 258 Childcare infrastructure grants awarded from July, 2022 to September, 2024.
 - \$15 million
 - Closing out and is not granting new awards.
- Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) enrollment:
 - 4% infants
 - 22% are toddlers
 - 32% preschooler
 - 42% school age
- Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement Program
 - 3 tiers based on education.
 - Tier 1 has the most enrolled, receiving \$240 per month.
 - Credentials and degrees lead to the higher tiers.
 - Year over year increase in workers despite workforce turnover.
 - The governor's budget includes reductions.
- Other helpful programs:
 - Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (Maine ECCP®)

- Help Me Grow
- Is there tuition support for this workforce or paid training?
 - Two contracts
 - Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development at USM
 - Groups of trainings that build into a credential
 - Infant toddler credential in development.
 - Maine AEYC scholarship for Bachelor's degrees.
 - Need to see how many wants to access version how many can.
- Many more teachers were at tier 3 than first planned.
 - Documenting education was never a priority before there was a financial incentive.
 - Now seeing movement on people attaining more education to move up tiers.
- Are any centers doing exit interviews to identify problems with retention
 - YFO does exit interviews and anecdotally have seen the trauma of the pandemic.
 - It is a high stress job with inadequate pay.

Starting Strong

- Partnering with the Chamber of commerce since 2020 on their perspectives on childcare
 - 2023 survey
 - 82% reported finding difficulty childcare.
 - 94%
 - Last state
- Without childcare, workers cannot get to work.
- There are long waitlists at all childcare programs.
- Providers are still struggling to recruit and retain teachers.
- There is growing need.
- Many licensed slots are for after school or before school and do not meet the need for infants and toddlers.
- Childcare is a market failure
 - Families cannot afford to pay the true cost of quality care
 - Infant slots in Cumberland County costs \$330 per week or 17,000 per year for one child and is 22% of the median income in Portland.
 - High quality infant care costs providers \$544 per week
 - The low number of infant slots is how providers make up for this.
 - Teachers make \$37,000 per year (17.75 per hour).
- Recommendations
 - Creating a local childcare scholarship program
 - Childcare voucher collaborative program used CDBG to fund scholarship opportunities for kids
 - Create a local stipend for early childhood educators.
 - Do a targeted needs assessment with city specific data.

- Other cities have done these programs
 - Burlington, VT pursued an early learning initiative in 2017.
- What sort of funding models exist?
 - Can't rely on federal dollars or state dollars.
 - CDBG
 - Vacancy fee tax or housing trust fund type development money?
 - What else is out there?
 - Starting Strong offered to help the City research.
 - Potential workshop later in the year.

ARPA funds: Bathroom Access Increase

- \$600,000
- Built 18 public bathrooms
- Options
 - Make repairs to spring street garage bathroom
 - Serious plumbing issues: \$118,000 to make operable again.
 - Would have \$50,000 leftover to make an outdoor ADA bathroom for East End Beach as the bathhouse is only open while staffed by park rangers: until 6:00 PM.
 - Not currently ADA accessible: \$400,000 to make accessible.
 - Add four outdoor restrooms on peninsula
 - All ADA accessible but are not heated.
 - Each has hand sanitizer, needle collection boxes, notice on how to access help.
 - Cleaned twice a day.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Fournier
 - Making the city more ADA accessible is a goal.
 - Is spring street something that can be considered a CIP project rather than ARPA?
 - It can be but would compete with other City priority projects approved by Council.
 - It is not considered as part of the staff CIP process right now and would need an amendment at the committee or council level.
 - Parking is not involved and were spring street fixed, a downtown public works crew would clean it.
- Councilor Michniewicz
 - How much were the spring street bathrooms used when they were functional.
 - They were used but get shutdown during Winter and would be open 8 to 9 months of the year.
 - Where would the 4 vault toilets go?

- On Peninsula where there currently is no bathroom access, including but not limited to parks such as East End Beach.
- What happened to OSS outdoor bathrooms?
 - Could be incorporated to other projects and may be on hold for them; if not earmarked, can be used.
- Councilor Pelletier
 - Option 2 seems to make more sense.
 - What is the case for spring street?
 - The business community and Portland Downtown want additional bathrooms.
 - New brick and mortar bathrooms are cost prohibitive but restoring function to this bathroom was seen as a middle ground.
- Chair Bullett is not interested in funding non-ADA compliant bathrooms
- ARPA funds need to be spent by December of 2026; project would need to be in this CIP.
- Consensus on option 2, 4 vault toilets.
 - Interested in bathroom locations.
 - Interested in changing tables.
 - Interested in exploring CIP for Spring street bathroom ADA retrofit.

Public Safety Update

- 10% increase in violent crime, 30% increase since 2020 largely due to gun violence.
- 12 homicides sin the last three years.
- 42% increase in property crime, back to pre-covid levels.
- Some increase attributed to better crime tracking through online reporting.
- Calls for Service logged for response
 - Reactive: initiated by member of the public through 911
 - Proactive initiated by officer.
- Beats 1-6 are on the peninsula.
- Reduced staffing has led to a decrease in proactive calls for service.
- Strategic Priorities & Department Initiatives
 - Pursuing a grant for Crime Analyst in Residence for real time data tracking.
 - Monthly Lieutenant Reports
 - Calls for Service Analysis
 - Special Deployments
 - Additional Data Sets/Analytics under development.
 - 911 call volumes
 - Case clearance rate
- 29 sworn officer vacancies.
- Allowing volunteer overtime traffic enforcement.

- Integrating a cadre and board membership with the academy to guarantee a seat for every officer we need to send.
- Also working on data sets with the Fire Department.
- Schedule brought by unions.
 - Before had 6 teams with 11 beats per shift
 - Now 5 teams with 10 officers per shift which evens out staffing.
 - Add overtime for uncovered beats.
- People are volunteering to take necessary shift and only using forced overtime to enforce parking bans.
- Pursuing the CAR grant to make reports proPhoenix cannot do

Warming Shelter

- Ask staff to research three options to manage weather emergencies (cooling and warming) shelter, excluding city-run options.
 - No fiscal impact option with coordination from emergency management.
 - Fiscal impact options
 - Day space?
- First parish is not always available.
- Physical space is the greatest barrier.
 - What options for next year are for warming and cooling centers?
- Where to place in the workplan?
 - Keep in line with the budget process.
 - Late Spring/ Early Summer
 - Have it for April.
- Explore regional collaboration.
 - Connect with Mayor over GPCOG.
- Late Spring to early summer timeline.

Committee Work Plan

- Confirmed prioritization

Councilor Michniewicz moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Pelletier seconded. The committee passed the motion 3 - 0 with Councilor Fournier absent.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 PM.