

Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee

April 10, 2025, 5:30 PM Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance:

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

Councilor Attendance:

City Staff:

Adam Harr, Executive Assistant; Mark Dubois, Police Chief; Dena Libner, Assistant City Manager; Greg Jordan, Assistant City Manager; Maggie Mcloughlin, Director of Health and Human Services; Bridget Rauscher, Public Health Director. Kaela Gonzalez, American Rescue Plan Coordinator; Jessica Hanscombe, Director of Permitting and Inspections; Chris Beaumont, Marijuana Compliance Coordinator, Mary Davis, HCD Division Director; Caity Hager, Emergency Management Coordinator; Nicole Albert; Associate Corporation Counsel; Chad Johnston, Fire Chief.

1. Announcements

- None.

2. Review and Approval of Minutes from March 11, 2025

- Moved to approve by Councilor Fournier and seconded by Councilor Michniewicz. The minutes were approved unanimously 4-0.

3. Chapter 35 (Councilor April Fournier)

- Higher Grounds of Maine is a cannabis store that also operates as a coffee shop; there was an issue with their license as there was not an ability to also make espresso and coffee drinks the way the ordinance is currently written.
 - Requested staff to look at current licensing and what changes could be proposed to allow this use.
 - Chapter 35 and chapter 15 needed changes.
- Public Comment
 - Mark Barnett, owner of Higher Grounds of Maine at 45 Wharf Street. He thanked the committee and staff before giving background: Received initial food service license in 2017 as a coffee shop with a food safety license held since 2027. They prepared coffees and blended drinks. The state license is an FSE food service with prep which allows them to blend milk. This was so for 7 years until their food service with no prep license with the city expired. Food service establishment that also has cannabis on hand and dairy cross contamination was the concern; for 3.5 of their 7 years in operation they operated the cannabis part of their business. When they switched to adult use, the question of if they can operate a beverage prep business onsite with the cannabis

business came up. Now we are looking at how to get to a license that allows to prepare the beverages; they are currently not serving the beverages which has cost money in legal fees and loss of customers.

- Public comment closed at 5:44 PM.
- Committee discussion
 - Page 27 has the major changes with the red lines: Section D
 - Adding change to FSA with preparation, striking out hot beverages and limiting to non-alcoholic beverages.
 - Change in fee from \$142 to \$230.
 - There was a cap on businesses in 2020 and then the cap was removed and the workload increased.
 - Was there any consideration on additional budget requests because of that increase?
 - Not this year but we will put in for an additional employee when social clubs come up.
 - We thought we would have 20 stores and there are 38; we are right on the line of needing more staff.
 - Adult retail stores are 21+ (medical is 18+) and people under 21 can go into stores accompanied by a parent or =guardian and could purchase a coffee, but not cannabis.
 - Would other stores likely follow?
 - Likely yes.
- Committee Vote
 - Councilor Fournier Moved to approve the changes in Chapter 35, Councilor Michniewicz seconded and the motion was approved 4-0.

4. Childcare Proposal (Councilor Anna Bullett, Chair)

- The proposal comes from a committee request form the March meeting.
- The CDBG program has been supporting childcare in Portland since 2002, totaling \$2.3 million to date. In 2024, American Rescue Plan money covered gaps from CDBG.
 - Covering costs of childcare for families looking for employment or school; the state assistance is only for people currently employed in school and there is a long waitlist.
 - The childcare voucher program helps people obtain and keep childcare using a 4 group collaboration: YFO, Catherine Morel, Saint Elizabeth's and Portland Headstart.
 - Served 845 families since 2010.
 - Since July, the collaborative has averaged \$6,500 per month in program expenses with YFO leading administration of the program.
- Starting Strong informed recommendation.
 - School aged childcare averages \$317/week.
 - If the City funded \$200,000 per year, it would provide 630 weeks of childcare.
 - If the City funded \$100,000 per year, it would provide 315 weeks of childcare.
 - If the City funded \$80,000 per year (current level), it would provide 252 weeks of childcare.
- Committee questions
 - Councilor Bullett clarified the committee is choosing which level the committee would like to recommend.
 - The tax rate stays the same regardless of choice.

- It is a gap program that is a bridge, not supporting families long term.
 - The weeks of programming would support hundreds of kids.
- No vote needed: one of the councilors needs to put forth an amendment as part of the finance committee budget process or to the full body; the entire committee agreed to move forwards and the committee thanked HCD Division Director, Mary Davis and American Rescue Plan Coordinator, Kaela Gonzalez for their work.

5. Warming and Cooling Shelter Planning (Caity Hager, Emergency Management Coordinator)

- Emergency Management Coordinator Hager presented options for managing cooling and warming shelters at the request of the committee.
- Some staff time is dedicated to cooling and warming center planning, with warming pressing.
- Some communities operate nightly in the winter, whereas Portland opens when certain temperature and weather thresholds are met.
- Portland is limited to a lack of appropriate space.
- Warming shelters: we facilitate private community partners operate overnight warming shelter funded by MaineHousing.
- Nonprofit partner opens their space during the day for warming centers.
- The EMC monitors weather and notifies partners when thresholds are met.
- 2023- 2024 was based on a daily high apparent temperature of 20 degrees or snow accumulation of more than 10 inches.
 - Opened 17 times.
- 2024-2025 was based on the overnight low of 15 degrees to be more often.
 - Open for 34 nights.
- Cooling centers use the national weather advisory excessive heat warning as a trigger and the library is used as a cooling center.
 - If the library is not available other facilities can be used such as the ice arena.
 - 2023: activated twice
 - 2024: activated 5 times.
- We have more extreme cold weather than warm weather; most need and gaps are with overnight warming shelter.
- No one in Cumberland County applied to the warming shelter funding opportunity; after this Commonsplace and First parish secured other Maine Housing funds to open an overnight warming shelter.
 - Commonsplace explained successes and challenges in a memo.
 - Need professional and trained staff to operate a warming shelter in Portland.
- Looked at cities identified by the league of women voters that were similar in population and size in relation to the rest of the state and looked at similar cities in New England as well as Lewiston and Bangor.
 - Half cities outside of New England do not have warming shelters.
 - Those that do operate nightly mostly in churches or in existing shelters.
 - Some found vacant buildings such as old schools when new ones are built or when a federal building was unused and able to use for very little.
 - Most are privately funding, with some grant funded and some municipal.
 - New England cities were more likely to coordinate.
 - Nashua, NH was the only municipality to operate overnight; it was a warming station but that operates overnight but does not have beds.

- Portland stands out as the only one to operate its own emergency shelter.
- Possible options
 - Dedicated staff would not expand what the EMC and Social Services Director already do as the lack of an appropriate facility is the primary barrier.
 - A single site opened nightly during winter would have a fiscal impact and might be limited by zoning.
 - Facilitate multiple smaller sites open by threshold.
 - There are not many options without a large fiscal impact and there is not an appropriate space.
- Committee questions and discussion
 - Councilor Pelletier asked if we have tried to coordinate with other communities
 - Councilor Michniewicz asked if the allowable costs were described by MaineHousing.
 - This was outside of the normal warming shelter funding but everything was funded by MaineHousing
 - Could the day space being pursued also allow for overnight shelter?
 - The zoning of the day space location does not allow for it; the property owner would need to seek a zoning amendment approved by the council.
 - Councilor Fournier asked if the state will fund a Commonsense and First parish partnership to operate a warming shelter next year as they did this year?
 - That is still unknown.
 - Does MSHA money cover low barrier or are there restrictions to how the population can access?
 - Since the organizations apply directly, we cannot confirm.
 - Councilor Pelletier asked about the Salvation Army offering space.
 - They may have had a change in leadership and since the change, we have not been able to utilize their space.
 - He would like to look at some sort of rotation between facilities.
 - For staffing, there were many people who wanted to help: is there a way for us to coordinate trained staff?
 - Prior to MSHA funding, there was a community volunteer effort with a threshold of 5 degrees; it was very difficult to mobilize volunteers during a blizzard. It would be too challenging to do a fully volunteer effort.
 - Zoning: is there a way to queue this up ahead of time or do we need to know the exact property ahead of time?
 - A temporary shelter in an emergency context can operate for 180 days but the challenge is planning for a permanent or yearly shelter is not temporary.
 - Councilor Michniewicz flagged the extreme challenges of the population using the Warming Shelter. Could there be a separate shelter serving people with less challenges that would be easier for staff to serve?
 - Warming shelter is supplemental to the shelters we do have. The HSC and Milestone are open and available.
 - Assistant City Manager Libner clarified the councilor is asking about different warming shelters serving different populations in the context of a multi-site warming shelter plan.

- The lack of space, staffing, and funding would still exist and it would depend of the operators of the shelters.
 - We would support if there was interest by nonprofit partners.
 - It would be difficult to bar people with behavioral health needs form any publicly funded shelter.
- Councilor Bullett reiterated that the City has a large low barrier shelter and that the warming shelter serves a vary specific high needs populations and thanked Commonsplace and First Parish. She will follow up with the Mayor, GPCOG and the County public health department.

6. Public Safety Update (Chad Johnston, Fire Chief)

Other business

- Department Make Up
 - 229 FTEs at 10 Fire Stations with 4 Engines, 4 Ladders, and 5 Medcu:
 - 17 Administrative Staff
 - 53 Field Ops per shift (4 shifts)
 - 1 at City Wide Deputy Chief
 - 5 at Munjoy, Ladder/Medcu
 - 5 at Central, Engine/Medcu
 - 8 at Bramhall, Engine/Ladder/Medcu
 - 5 at Rosemont, Ladder/Medcu
 - 3 at Riverton, Engine
 - 5 at Northgate, Ladder/Medcu
 - 3 at East Deering, Engine
 - 3 at Fireboat
 - 3 at Citywide Heavy Rescue Co.
 - 1 at Citywide Paramedic Fly Car
 - 1 at Peaks Island
 - 3 at Jetport Crash Trucks
 - 7 – Vacation/Sick Coverage
- Operations:
 - Fire Chief, Chad Johnston
 - Asst. Chief, Chris Goodall
 - Deputy Chief, John Cenate
 - Captain ARFF, William VanDeinse
 - Division Chief, Sean Donaghue
 - Captain EMS, Sheldon Gregoire
 - Deputy Chief, Kevin McGuire
 - Captain L3, Ryan Walsh
 - Captain L6, Chris Tillotson
 - Deputy Chief, Shawn Neat
 - Captain L1, John Hardy
 - Captain L4, Mark Stewart
 - Captain R1, Dale Dyer
 - Deputy Chief, Jonathan Hendricks
 - Captain E6, David Nichols

- Captain E9, Justin Bragdon
 - Captain Marine, Chris Alves
 - Deputy Chief, Vacant
 - Captain E5, Curtis Magnuson
 - Captain E11, Brad James
 - Captain E12, Scott Krum
- Staff
 - Gender
 - 14 Female: 6%
 - 218 Male: 94%
 - Education
 - 93 Highschool: 40%
 - 64 Associates: 28%
 - 70 Bachelors: 30%
 - 5 Masters: 2%
 - Primary Residence
 - 29 Portland: 13%
 - 118 Cumberland City: 54%
 - 37 York City: 17%
 - 11 Androscoggin County: 5%
 - 10 Other Maine City: 4%
 - 9 New Hampshire: 4%
 - 3 Massachusetts: 1%
 - EMS Level
 - 98 AEMT: 47%
 - 66 EMTP: 32%
 - 43 EMTB: 21%
 - Rank
 - 156 Firefighter: 70%
 - 44 Lieutenant: 20%
 - 16 Captain: 7%
 - 7 Chief Officer: 3%
 - Years of Service
 - 79 1-4: 33%
 - 32 5-9: 13%
 - 38 10-14: 16%
 - 12 15-19: 5%
 - 53 20-24: 22%
 - 15 25-29: 6%
 - 14 >30: 6%
 - Retention
 - Spike in hiring in 2020 with 29 (8 – 12 is typical).
 - Spike in resignations in 2022 with 10 attributed to Covid Stress and being understaffed; better staffing now with less overtime and advanced life skills moves that cover ambulances.

- The high forced overtime were high in 2021 and 2022 at 199 and 162 but dropped dramatically to 18 and 42 in 2023 and 2024 with 4 to date in 2025.
 - Similar trend in ALS moves with 137 and 303 in 2021 and 2022, dropping down to 98 and 67 in 2023 and 2024 with 9 to date in 2025.
 - There are multiple special teams that assist the 17 administrative staff with opportunities to get involved in special projects and roles that supports retention.
 - Fires
 - 2022: 379
 - Building Fires: 44
 - Cooking Fires: 100
 - Vehicle Fires: 21
 - Dumpster/Trash Fires: 75
 - Outside Fires: 107
 - Other Fires: 32
 - 2023: 399
 - Building Fires: 33
 - Cooking Fires: 119
 - Vehicle Fires: 19
 - Dumpster/Trash Fires: 84
 - Outside Fires: 73
 - Other Fires: 71
 - 2024: 328
 - Building Fires: 40
 - Cooking Fires: 75
 - Vehicle Fires: 34
 - Dumpster/Trash Fires: 64
 - Outside Fires: 67
 - Other Fires: 48
 - Numbers are consistent over time.
 - EMS Calls
 - Calls for service dropped in 2020.
 - Calls go up 3-6% every year and over time causes issues:
 - Run volume
 - We need to add an ambulance every decade.
 - An ambulance was last added in 2013.
 - Number of employees
 - Managing 5 ambulances when we need 6.
 - Using a grant to staff a 6th ambulance during peak hours.
 - Next year the grant money likely won't be available; need to identify funding for the 6th ambulance.
 - Responses by District
 - Munjoy: 1,548
 - Central: 3,969
 - Bramhall: 4,189
 - Rosemont: 3,504
 - Riverton: 2,693

- Riverton volume was in line with Deering before opening the HSC. We have the capacity to meet the increased need.
 - North Deering: 1,786
 - East Deering: 1,570
 - Islands & CB: 395
 - Islands and Casco Bay are calls to the water and mostly on Peaks.
 - Out of Town: 281
 - Mutual aid with our neighbors; most communities have the bandwidth for normal days but we rely on them on high volume days.
 - Attempt to distribute workload as evenly as possible with steady year over year call volume for each company.
 - Call volume at the airport increased from 2023 to 2024 and call volume for Marine and Peaks decreased from 2023 to 2024.
- 2024 Cardiac Arrests
 - 107 Cardiac Arrests
 - 66 Resuscitation Attempts
 - 24 ROSC – Return of Spontaneous Circulation
 - 20 Survived Event
 - Innovations in response has drastically increased survivals.
- Strategic Priorities & Department Initiatives
 - Enhancing community safety and engagement;
 - Improving operational efficiency and effectiveness;
 - Strengthening Firefighter health and wellness;
 - Maintaining and modernizing equipment and infrastructure;
 - Enhancing leadership and workforce development.
- The committee thanked the Chief and Jessie Lemieux’s work on this presentation and highlighted the cardiac data and improvement in response and for ride along opportunities. The committee did not have questions.

7. Next Meeting: May 13, 2025

- Noted Agenda:
 - Built for Zero
 - Public Safety Update: PD
 - Childcare Concept Proposal

Councilor Bullett entertained a motion to adjourn. Councilor moved to adjourn, Councilor seconded; the motion passed unanimously 4-0 and the meeting adjourned at 7:14 PM.