

Minutes

Remote Housing and Economic Development Committee

May 6, 2025, 2025

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, May 6, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the HEDC were Chair Pious Ali, and members, Sarah Michniewicz, Regina Phillips and Kate Sykes. Also present was City Councilor Wesley Pelletier. 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, Assistant City Manager Dena Libner, City Health and Human Services Director Margaret McLoughlin, Principal Administrative Officer Lori Paulette, and Housing Program Manager Victoria Volent who arrived during the executive session.

Item #1: Review and accept Minutes of previous meeting held on April 15, 2025.

The Committee did not take up this item.

Item #2: (Public Comment) Consideration of Responses to the RFP for the Lease/Development of up to Two (2) Sites at 1125 Brighton Avenue and vote on a recommendation to the City Council that an option to lease is pursued with the successful respondent.

Mr. Watson noted that a number of City Departments worked to develop and advertise the subject RFP, which was advertised 2/20/2025 with proposals due 4/9/2025. During that timeframe, there were two tours of the property for interested parties. A staff Committee reviewed the five proposals received and scored them – as noted in the Agenda packet. Mr. Watson then gave a brief summary of each proposal received.

Chair Councilor Ali then opened the meeting for public comment.

Steven Scharf first questioned why the proposals are considered confidential until the City Council votes on an award. He then noted that the summary of the proposals did not include a lease price being offered, which he considered a significant factor, and that several suggested a TIF but with the lease there is no private ownership. The diagrams are old in the RFP and fail to site existing utilities. He suggested rethinking the RFP/process.

Derryen Plante noted opposition to the 30% to housing first, which is the same wraparound services as a homeless center, offering free permanent housing. She noted that this area of Portland is seeing crime, panhandlers, littering, stealing, using public space as restrooms – people are afraid to go out of the doors in the morning. The development would be for non-productive members of society.

Bree LaCasse of CHOM thanked the staff Committee for the vote of confidence, noting that CHOM welcomes the opportunity to create affordable housing and, therefore, less demand on the homeless services center. They have 55 collaborative partners and are committed to respond to neighborhood concerns.

Eamonn Dundon, of the Portland Chamber and Portland resident, noted that he had the opportunity to tour four of CHOM's projects and was struck by the seamless integration into neighborhoods. Their approach is one that should be emulated.

Nate Howes with Avesta Housing questioned how capital was taken into account in the scoring of the proposals and neighborhood responsiveness.

Claude Rwaganje, founder and Executive Director of Prosperity Maine (PM), noted that PM provides a wide range of services to diverse communities, including housing and financial advice. PM is happy to partner with Developers Collaborative and this proposal can assist with housing. The rear of property is very difficult so the proposal focuses on the front, which could serve about 150 diverse individuals – a lot more than senior housing and will meet a workforce need.

George Rheault of Bayside noted that he also submitted written comment, which basically is that the RFP is a thin document and needs re-issuing, adding that the Loring House was created after three different RFPs were issued, resulting in the great development that exists there today and hoped their privacy would not be impeded on. He also noted there is no strategic plan for the Barron Center; nothing about the memory facility at the back of the lot – basically not being used and perhaps surplus. The City and community deserve a great housing project and this should be restarted with a better RFP.

Robby Perkins High, Director of Housing Initiatives with ProsperityME supported the family housing proposal submitted by DC/PM. Family affordable housing is a very high need, noting this does not exist within a mile of that area.

Kevin Bunker of DC, noted that CHOM and Avesta do a great job but with the DC/PM proposal, it would house 100 more people a year sooner. Regarding the building that George Rheault referred to, it is a difficult site to develop. He thanked the staff and Committee for their consideration of their proposal.

Seeing no further public comment, Chair Councilor Ali closed the public comment session.

There were then clarifying questions and answers between Committee and staff including information of how many units of senior housing versus family housing are there in Portland; site 2 issues; 30% of housing first and what that make-up might look like; City services needed for proposals; community concerns.

This followed with a motion to go into executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. 405(6)(C) and 5 M.R.S.A. 13119-A to review and discuss proposals received for possible lease and development of City property; motion made by Councilor Phillips and seconded by Councilor Sykes.

Chair Councilor Ali asked if there was public comment on the motion.

Steven Scharf questioned whether the Committee would come back to public session for a vote, and Chair Councilor Ali noted that the Committee would come back to public session after the executive session.

Darryen Plante questioned if developers could amend their proposals from seniors to accommodate families.

Mr. Goldman noted the public comment is only for the purpose of going into executive session.

The Chair then asked for a vote on the motion and it passed 4-0 at approximately 6:44 p.m.

(Victoria Volent joined the executive session at approximately 6:50.)

At approximately 8:30 p.m., the Committee came out of executive session.

Chair Councilor Ali thanked all for their patience, with the Committee providing direction to staff to invite CHOM and DC/PM to a special meeting on Monday, 5/12/2025 at 5:30 via zoom to discuss the proposals, with the Committee most likely to then go back into executive session, and then back out and vote on a final proposal to the City Council.

Item #3: (Public Comment) Executive Session – Vote to go into executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. 405(6)(C) and 5 M.R.S.A. 13119-A to review and discuss negotiations and provide direction to staff regarding City property disposition for Lambert Woods South (165 Lambert Street) Project

On motion made by Councilor Phillips, seconded by Councilor Michniewicz, the Committee voted 4-0 to postpone this item.

On motion made by Council Michniewicz, seconded by Councilor Phillips, the Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn at approximately 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully, Lori Paulette