Minutes
Portland Development Corporation
Remote Zoom Meeting
Held on May 15, 2025

A remote meeting, via Zoom, of the Portland Development Corporation (PDC) Board of Directors was held at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 15, 2025. Present from the Board of Directors were Board President Kierston Van Soest and Directors Jonathan Berg, Matthew Buonopane, Sam Dargan, Eamonn Dundon, Councilor Ben Grant, Beverly Werber, and Nikki Yanok. Board Directors Nathan Henry, Scott Kleiman, and Assistant City Manager Dena Libner could not be present. Present from City staff were Associate Corporation Counsel Avery Dandreta, ARPA Project Coordinator Kaela Gonzalez, Business Programs Manager Nancy Martin, Principal Administrative Officer Lori Paulette, and Housing and Economic Development Director Greg Watson.

Item #1: President's comments.

President Ms. Van Soest opened the meeting and informed the Board that after 5:15 pm the meeting will no longer have a quorum.

Item #2: Review and vote to accept Minutes of March 20, 2025 meeting.

On a motion made by Mr. Berg and seconded by Mr. Dargan, the Board voted 4-0-4 (Mr. Dundon, Ms. Van Soest, Ms. Werber, and Ms. Yanok abstained) to approve the March 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes.

Item #3: Review and vote on recommendation to the City Council regarding TIF-funded Downtown Improvement Loan Guidelines.

Ms. Martin provided a recap of the proposed program and discussion from the February 20, 2025 and March 20, 2025 meetings, which resulted in a few changes to the proposed guidelines. These changes included an increase in the loan amount to $20,000 from $10,000, and eligible activities were expanded to include security cameras, interior lighting, exterior lighting, and outdoor furniture.

Discussions highlighted concerns about the challenges facing downtown, including security issues, cleanup costs, and a lack of foot traffic. Ms. Martin reports that businesses have expressed support for the loan program as a way to improve storefronts.

Mr. Dundon, Councilor Grant, and Mr. Watson discussed how the loan program is considered one part of a larger, multi-faceted strategy to revitalize the downtown area. Other initiatives include a forthcoming vacancy ordinance, increasing police presence, relocating food distribution, and activating public spaces. Long-term projects aimed at increasing foot traffic were also mentioned. Board members discussed the need for multiple strategies, the importance of addressing both short-term and long-term issues, and the flexibility to revisit and reprogram the loan funds as needed.

On a motion made by Mr. Dundon and seconded by Mr. Buonopane the Board voted 8-0 to recommend to the City Council the proposed TIF-funded Downtown Improvement Loan Guidelines.

Item #4: Review and recommendation to the City Council approval of proposed Bylaws amendment.

Ms. Martin reviewed the proposed change to Section 5.6 of the Bylaws to clarify voting procedures. Currently, the wording states "at least 4 votes carry the motion," and the proposed change is to replace "at least 4" with "a majority."

On a motion made by Mr. Dargan and seconded by Mr. Berg, the Board voted 7-0 (Councilor Grant left the meeting at approximately 4:12 pm) to approve the proposed Bylaws amendment.

Item #5: Discussion and possible vote regarding Brownfields program flexibility in light of fully expended EPA grants.

City staff requests the Board's approval for two actions related to Brownfields remediation and assessment programs: 1) authorization to issue commitment letters for remediation funding to approved applicants before receiving supplemental EPA funds expected in late summer 2025, and 2) requests permission for staff to administratively manage up to $5,000 of program income per site per year for activities like Phase I Environmental Site Assessments or soil sampling, without requiring prior Board approval.

Concerns were raised about the risk of pre-committing more funds than received and the potential for funding disruptions from the federal government. Ms. Martin clarified that if the EPA funds are not received, the City will not be held to the commitment.

On a motion made by Mr. Dundon and seconded by Mr. Dargan, the Board voted 7-0 to approve the issuance of commitment letters to approved Brownfields remediation funding applicants, at their own risk, before funding is received by the EPA later in 2025, as well as Board support allowing staff the administrative authority to use program income of up to $5,000 per site per year without requesting Board approval.

Item #6: Review and vote on the Microenterprise Grant Applications presented on the meeting materials.

Ms. Martin reports that $15,000 remains in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and that there are currently three applications under consideration. She recommends funding Felina, LLC, an art business owned and operated by Laura Bramley, as a new applicant. Martin suggests not funding Maine Surfers Union and Al Badoo Community Association of Maine, since they received grants from the same fund last year.

Ms. Martin invited Ms. Bramley to join the meeting, who then proceeded to introduce her business, Felina Design Company. She described her work, which included providing graphic design services and painting murals for local businesses in Portland, including work for Bom Dia Cafe and Dok Mali Noodle Bar. She mentioned her studio in the State Theater building and how economic uncertainty has affected her client requests. She said the grant would help her maintain her business and continue bringing art to Portland.

On a motion made by Ms. Werber and seconded by Mr. Dargan, the Board voted 6-0-1 (Mr. Berg abstained) to approve a $5,000 ARPA Microenterprise Grant to Felina Design Company (recently renamed to Four West Studio LLC), and not to approve the applications by Maine Surfers Union and Al Badoo Community Association of Maine.

Item #7: Treasurer's Report - April 2025

Ms. Paulette provided an overview of the administrative budget, cash management report, and the schedule of loans receivable. Ms. Werber requested more information regarding the advertising budget and the staff’s strategy to market the new zero-interest loan program and suggested that funds may be used for that purpose.

Item #8: Staff verbal update.

Ms. Martin invited the Board to attend the Build Maine conference being held June 3 and June 4, 2025 in Skowhegan and shared the news of the successful Job Creation Grant application for Community Development Block Grant funds for $205,000.

Item #9: Other Items to be discussed/brought up by Board Directors.

No other items were discussed.

Item #7: Next Regular Meeting Date: June 19, 2025 falls on the Juneteenth Holiday - either to be rescheduled or canceled.

The Board will be notified if there is a need to reschedule the June meeting, otherwise it will be canceled.

There being no further business, on a motion made by Mr. Dargan and seconded by Mr. Berg the Board voted 7-0 to adjourn at approximately 4:51 pm.

Respectfully, Kaela Gonzalez