

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Committee on Sustainability and Transportation
Councilor Regina Phillips (D3), Chair
Councilor Pious Ali (At-Large)
Councilor Anna Bullett (D4)

Approved Minutes June 16, 2025

Members Present: Councilor Phillips, Councilor Bullett, Councilor Ali,

Other Councilors Present: Mayor Dion, Councilor Pelletier, Councilor Michniewicz, Councilor Grant, Councilor Sykes

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Katie Tims, Karly Meyer, Kevin Kraft, Nell Donaldson, Greg Jordan, Tony Wirkus, Michael Goldman, Jeremiah Bartlett, Mike Murray, Bruce Hyman, Keith Gray

Meeting was called to order.

May 14, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The May 14, 2025 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Transportation Updates

Jeremiah Bartlett notes that the City is working on a number of efforts speaking to Vision Zero and is also partnering with GPCOG on a major demonstration project on Washington Ave.

City Staff will be holding a 2-day design workshop on Wednesday, June 25th and Thursday, June 26th, to be held at the Rines Auditorium, in the Main Portland Library, 5 Monument Square. These public engagement events will offer opportunities for design feedback and visioning related to Franklin Street.

We have been working with MEDOT on analysis related to Brighton Avenue (particularly Rosemont Corner section) and contemplating intersection options available to us. This dovetails with the next round of the Bus Rapid Transit project; this work should begin soon.

On the Redesign of Forest Avenue, just south of Exit 6 through to Park Avenue, after recent discussion with Maine DOT, this work is going to be managed jointly with the State St and High St work, so that the design and the outcomes, and ideally the construction of all of those can be coordinated in a meaningful and strategic way.

The final design bid documents for the Union Branch Path were completed in April and are currently being reviewed by the City's Purchasing Department with the project aiming to go out to bid in June for construction to begin in Summer 2025.

Kevin Kraft shares that staff are finalizing the RFP and scope of work on the Comprehensive Transportation Plan and should that that out in a few weeks.

Sustainability Updates

City staff have been meeting with CMP to review their Area Grid Project involving upgrades to transmission and infrastructure in the region. City staff hope there are areas to collaborate, especially during major construction projects such as the Franklin Street Redesign. CMP is planning to submit their final plan to the PUC in July and has offered to brief the committee on their updates.

Now that it's summer, we are also working on engagement efforts around sustainable landcare, and on June 11, we hosted our first Landcare Lunch Break webinar of the season discussing invasive species in Maine and how to effectively remove them. We have two more webinars this summer, all published online in our library of webinars.

Complete Streets Policy Update

Presented by Nell Donaldson, Director of Special Projects

In March 2025, the S&T Committee reviewed the existing Complete Streets policy, originally written in 2012, and determined that the Planning Department should undertake the process of updating that policy again. Over the last 3 months, Planning staff started with an assessment of the existing policy, looking at national best practice, and made some initial edits to the policy with peers at DPW. The draft policy was then shared in feedback and review sessions with an interdepartmental working group, including Public Health and Fire, a stakeholder group, consisting of representatives from Bicycle Coalition of Maine, the Portland Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Portland Trails, and others, and then finally with the public. With plenty of substantive feedback, Planning staff made additional revisions and produced a final red line document that simplified and reorganized the policy.

Public Comment on Complete Streets Policy Update

Winston Lumpkins is happy to see the final draft of the Complete Streets policy and thinks it is a significant improvement from the 2012 version. Lumpkins also notes that the policy does exempt temporary detour routes, which can be dangerous for vulnerable users.

Councilor Comments on Complete Streets Policy Update

Mayor Dion notes that some of the written testimony influenced his thinking in regards to defining a 'street'. Perhaps in the future we will determine the fundamental definition of what we consider a street to be and what our responsibility is once it is constructed. *Nell Donaldson responds in saying that we [Planning staff] spent some time on this during Recode, working with Corporation Council on our definitions of right-of-way, street, and other things within the land use code, so there is some frame of reference for these terms. We use in this policy, interchangeably, the concepts of street and right-of-way and so there is some room for confusion about that and we can think about that a little bit more.*

Councilor Bullett shares interest in a process where the S&T Committee is notified about exemptions to the Complete Streets Policy. Councilor Bullett also shares a technical comment about hyperlinking sections in the redlined document. Councilor Bullett's last note is about

naming what it means to have a specific category of pedestrian (e.g. child) for certain mobility requirements in the policy.

Councilor Phillips asks who is responsible for educating the public about pedestrian safety related to traffic and street operations. *Nell Donaldson acknowledges that the way that streets have been designed for a long time doesn't lead to great safety outcomes when people are making the best decisions, but what this policy is trying to do is control the things we can control, the design of streets. We're never going to be able to control lots of individuals' behavior, but we can try to channel people into good decisions and control the physical space as well as we can.*

Motion to approve revisions to Complete Streets Policy

Note that this motion to approve includes small edits requested by Councilor Bullett.

The motion was moved by Councilor Bullett and seconded by Councilor Ali.

The motion was accepted unanimously and will move forward to full City Council.

Vision Zero Quick Action Plan

Presented by Greg Jordan

After the Council passed a resolution back in April adopting the GPCOG Vision Zero Plan, the City launched an internal task force on the Vision Zero plan and created a series of strategies to make progress on this. The 'Quick Action Plan', or strategies that we believe we can reasonably implement in the near term with existing capacity. These strategies are outlined in the agenda packet.

Public Comment on Vision Zero Quick Action Plan

Winston Lumpkins shares appreciation that the City is springing into action on this plan, and suggests that similar towns (Falmouth) use speed feedback signs to help slow drives down, but they force cyclists out of the shoulder and into the travel lane and advocates that when putting those out to ensure they are not exacerbating the existing problem.

Noah Grenier also shares appreciation for this quick action and progress being made for bicycle-pedestrian safety.

Councilor Comments on Vision Zero Quick Action Plan

Councilor Pelletier and Councilor Ali share appreciation for this action.

Councilor Bullett raises the idea of making the walk signal time based on senior citizen's average walk signal time given that nature of our aging population.

Motion to approve Vision Zero Quick Action Plan

The motion was moved by Councilor Bullett and seconded by Councilor Ali.

The motion was accepted unanimously and will move forward to full City Council.

Proposed Moratorium on Theater and Performance Halls

Presented by Kevin Kraft, Director of Planning and Urban Development

In April 2025, there was a proposed moratorium to consider establishing a retroactive 180-day prohibition on theaters and performance hall projects with a capacity of more than 2,000 people. This was ultimately prompted due to the application from Live Nation for a new 3,300-seat music venue in downtown on a privately owned site that is currently under review by the Planning Board. The City Council referred that proposed moratorium to the S&T Committee to evaluate the underlying conditions and determine whether there was justification to support a moratorium, and if that exists.

Maine law requires that any moratorium adopted by a municipality must be necessary and it must be needed to either prevent a shortage or overburdening of public facilities, or because the existing policies and regulations are found to be inadequate to prevent serious public harm.

In terms of Portland's public policies, data, and regulations, it is staff's recommendation that the conditions do not warrant the justification to support a moratorium focused on theaters and performance halls related to transportation-related impacts.

Public Comment on Proposed Moratorium on Theater and Performance Halls

A majority of the public comment weighed on the traffic the project would result in, lack of parking available, cost of parking, implications for the local music and arts scene, and surge prices on transportation.

Public comment in favor noted the benefits that incomers would bring to the restaurant and hotel economy (particularly in the winter), the developers' history of experience in the area, jobs this project will bring to the area (construction and operations), and the use of an unused surface level parking site.

Councilor Comments on Proposed Moratorium on Theater and Performance Halls

Before Councilor Comment, Director Kraft summarizes that the key points to touch on is the major focus on parking pressure and unsafe road conditions. And the purpose of the presentation and the memo was to reflect that there are adequate regulations in place, standards in place to fully vet those aspects through a reviewed project. That's what our staff does on a daily basis with applications before the planning board. He goes on to note that the project is outside of that 100-foot radius, which is measured from main entrance to main entrance.

Councilor Pelletier notes that the traffic this project will cause, especially when a redesign of Franklin Street is imminent, is problematic and does not want to not lose sight of what a moratorium is, as it is a pause so that we can discuss solutions.

Councilor Bullett points out that it was a missed opportunity to build community goodwill with this particular project. She goes on to share concerns for pedestrian safety, the loss of ADA accessibility on Myrtle Street. *Merrill Auditorium and the Parks, Rec, Facilities Department have*

been involved in conversations and coordination about how to handle operating two shows at the same time and organizing ADA accessibility. Many of these concerns are to be covered in the site plan review process (parking agreements, event management plan) and the traffic movement process and will be finalized if this application continues forward.

Councillor Ali also shares concern for the impact on traffic and parking in the Bayside Neighborhood Association.

Councilor Michniewicz also shares concern for the on-street parking nearby, but raises the question about how impact fees can be used to improve the area and the neighborhood. *In terms of site plan review, projects are responsible for upgrading all of their directly abutting sidewalks, ensuring that they're meeting our minimum space requirements and also bringing all sidewalks up to ADA accessibility. They also have to upgrade the directly adjacent intersection improvements, so a project like this is going to be looking at improvements to the intersections at Cumberland and Pearl, Cumberland and Myrtle, as well as potential improvements of Cumberland and Congress Street. In terms of impact fees (note: assessed to all projects), those go for signal enhancements across the city, they can also go towards a set of ten identified, larger transportation projects identified by the City Council back in 2018 (e.g. Franklin Street). Site plan review process and the traffic movement process are going to require mitigation improvements within the neighborhood. The impact fee transportation money goes into the city's general impact fee bucket, and then it's allocated by the City Council each year at the CIP.*

Mayor Dion notes that the evidence is pretty clear that there is an available pool of parking spots to meet the demand of this new venue. He reminds the council that our job has long been to design a city that would reduce the demand for individual cars, and invest in public transportation. We also have to adhere to rules. The applicant has followed process and it should be expected that they can satisfy their expectation if they've answered all the conditions that are placed before them during the planning process. But here we come with a moratorium. I think the moratorium predicated on parking alone fails.

Councilor Sykes shares concern that we have shut down a tremendous swell of public opinion on this item and feels that it should be sent back to the full council so that they can hear from the public on this.

Questions from several Councilors were answered related to construction material lay-down areas, operational questions for the music hall related to employee parking, estimated number of employees, cost of parking in the garage, and bus schedule adjustments.

Councilor Phillips walks through her understanding of the committee's decision tonight and shares agreement that this could go back to the Council to have more of a conversation, but ultimately feels that it is only appropriate to vote based on whether or not this project prompts a moratorium or not.

Motion to approve Proposed Moratorium on Theater and Performance Halls

The motion was moved by Councilor Bullett and seconded by Councilor Ali.
The motion was accepted 2-1 and will move forward to full City Council.

Motion to Adjourn

The motion was moved by Councilor Ali and seconded by Councilor Bullett.
The motion was approved 2-1.

Meeting Adjourned