

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 October 8, 2025

Members Present: Councilor Ali, Councilor Bullet, Councilor Michniewicz, Councilor Pelletier, Councilor Phillips, Mayor Dion

Staff Present: Helen Donaldson, Greg Jordan, Kevin Kraft, Karly Meyer, Troy Moon, Mike Murray, Greg Watson, Tony Wirkus

Meeting was called to order.

September 10, 2025, Meeting Minutes

The September 10, 2025, meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Announcement

Councilor Phillips thanked Director Murray, Department of Public Works, and the Maine Department of Transportation for their work repaving streets.

Sustainability Updates

Presented by Troy Moon and Karly Meyer, Sustainability Office

Visited Little Diamond Island and viewed their living shoreline and joined Kristina Egan at the Greater Portland Council of Governments for their Regional Councils national conference.

The Neighborhood Mini Grants program launched to bring neighbors together.

The Sustainability Office is partnering with the Harvard Kennedy School of Government to better understand residents' concerns related to sea level rise and vulnerabilities.

Katie Tims, Sustainability Associate, recently gave a talk at the Senator George J. Mitchell Center at the University of Maine on One Climate Future.

The Sustainability Office hosted Park(ing) Day at the end of September.

Mayor Dion recommended that Councilor Phillips follow up with Director Moon to watch the video produced about the Little Diamond Island living shoreline project.

Resolution Supporting the Collaboration Between the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the City of Portland

Councilor Phillips brought forth the resolution supporting the collaboration between the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the City of Portland to build coastal resilience and support the marine economy.

Councilor Phillips asked Mayor Dion if this is something that should be read at a full council meeting and if it is something that could be put on the agenda.

Mayor Dion stated that it would be on the agenda.

Director Moon read the resolution.

Public Comment on Resolution Supporting the Collaboration Between the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the City of Portland

Seeing no one wishing to make public comments, the comment period was closed.

Councilor Bullet motioned to bring the resolution before the full council. Councilor Ali seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Amendment to Chapter 28

Presented by Tony Wirkus and Mike Murray

Proposing to change the ticketing for leaving a car on the street during a city parking ban for snow removal efforts from \$40 to \$175. Historically, the City has operated the Ocean Gateway parking lot as an impound lot. However, this lot is slated to become a city park, and will no longer be available for vehicles.

Currently, the fee structure is such that if you are towed, you pay \$135 and a \$40 citation. If you are not towed, but you leave your car in an area where you are not permitted to park it, you only pay a \$40 citation.

The proposed change would be such that if you are towed, you would pay \$40. If you are not towed, but you leave your car in an area where you are not allowed to park it, you would pay a \$175 citation.

Director Wirkus stated that this looks at a fee structure that ensures it is worth the time and effort to move your vehicle, so that our public works team can adequately plow the roads and emergency vehicles can access roads.

In addition to revising the fee structure, the proposal increases the amount of parking space available during snow bans to include the following areas: parking along Marginal Way until Maj. Charles J. Loring Memorial Park, Rainbow Mall Road next to the woods, Saint James and Douglas Streets next to the park, Valley Street south of C Street next to the park. None of these parking locations are in front of someone's residence.

Councilor Bullet asked if Director Wirkus could attend her district meeting on December 7 to discuss parking along Rainbow Mall Road and if communication efforts could be increased by encouraging residents to sign up for text messages.

Councilor Ali asked how we landed on this fee. Director Wirkus stated that this is below \$200, which is the current fee for parking in an ADA-designated parking spot. That fee is similar, since it is also blocking accessibility. The tow fee, impound fee, and citation were adding up to over \$200, and so the rate for leaving a car on the street during a snow ban was set to be below \$200.

Public Comment on Amendment to Chapter 28

- ❖ One resident commented that they are a property manager and higher fines don't necessarily create the reactions one is looking for, but rather consistency in enforcement. A drastic change is pretty concerning. Appreciates options for more parking. Wants to create a solution before penalizing people. Noted that other areas don't have parking ban fees above \$100. Fines are often considered a tax.
- ❖ Comments were made that this will penalize people; people don't even know that there will be a parking ban or that the city tows. The City is fining people who are not aware of what is happening.
- ❖ A comment was made that the parking ban ends at seven o'clock and you have to move your car by seven, which is hard to do. The ban should end at six and cars should be moved by seven.
- ❖ A comment was made that once in a while, parking bans get extended and called much too early. Does not approve of the increase and encourages the committee to send this back to staff.
- ❖ A commenter stated that they were very supportive of changes to the policy, both the fee structure and adding new snow ban lots. A new development came to Libbytown, and the concern was that they would not add much surface parking. The neighborhood was supportive of not adding more surface parking. By creating more snow ban lots, we are able to have fewer off-street parking lots. Raising the fines is regrettably necessary. It is comparable to a cigarette tax, and it may be regressive, but some regressive taxes are necessary.
- ❖ A commenter stated that they were inclined to support the city staff's proposal. Suggested that the impact on lower-income households is something we could mitigate. If residents can show their eligibility for food stamps or Section 8 housing, could receive a discount of 50%.
- ❖ A comment was made in support of the increase in availability of options. It is stressful to come home from working out of town and find that all of the snow ban parking is taken. Around 2,700 snow ban parking spots exist on peninsula; suggested City encourage or mandate other garage owners to allow use of garages for parking.

Mayor Dion commented that on the criminal side, increasing fines rarely changes behaviour. He would like an analysis of enforcement, including how many tow trucks are deployed and how

many officers are available to help remove vehicles. He stated that he is more concerned about capacity to remove vehicle rather than fining someone. The likelihood of getting towed is more of a deterrent than a fine.

Councilor Michniewicz commented that there have been fluctuations in the number of people available. Sees the life-safety issue of such narrow streets. Asks if there is an option to have a fee between \$40 and \$175. Asks if there is a gradual fee structure option, like with sidewalk shoveling.

Assistant City Manager Jordan stated that they could certainly provide data on the strain this places on the police department. This is a forced-overtime situation for police. The City could try to quantify the lack of coordination from tow drivers. Thirdly, the loss of the tow lot will impact things. Can do more work looking at how fines are raised and how populations respond. Recognized that communication is a big part of this.

Mayor Dion would like to know how we target our limited resources, and if we target certain areas.

Councilor Pelletier recognized the difficult position. It is expensive to use tow trucks. Would like to see data on effectiveness of fines. Would also like to see discount on fines for low-income residents. Would love to see community partners lend their parking spaces.

Councilor Michniewicz asks if impound lot needs to be enclosed or if it can be an open surface lot. *Director Wirkus responded that it needs to be able to be secured.*

Councilor Michniewicz stated that during recent conversations about music venues, they looked at night parking availability, and that there was lots of parking. Suggested that some of those lots could be pressed into service for this.

Councilor Phillips reiterated that education is key, additional spaces within garages, WEX or Roux building parking, and asked what happens when a car does get towed. Are you not just paying the tow truck company? *Director Wirkus stated that yes, you just would pay \$40 as a citation, and the \$135 would be to the tow truck company for use of their equipment.* Councilor Phillips asked if the committee was under the gun for this proposal. *Assistant City Manager Jordan confirmed that if this went to the council and then back to the committee, it would likely not be put in place until snow season, which would be too late.*

Motion to raise the fee to \$175 with some of the changes suggested by the committee.

Councilor Bullett motioned and Councilor Phillips seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Amtrak Downeaster Location

Presented by Assistant City Manager Greg Jordan

Assistant City Manager Jordan provided an overview. Proposed move of location from its current location to the Main Line, which is the track directly parallel to Saint John Street. A site

study in 2021 conducted by Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) concluded that a location parallel to Congress Street would be most advantageous. A follow-up study in 2024 by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) looked at three locations and concluded that a location on the Maine Line along Saint John Street adjacent to the Mercy Hospital, referred to as Site Three. NNEPRA adopted the recommendations in the plan. From the beginning of the discussions, City staff have communicated concerns to NNEPRA. City staff appreciate NNEPRA meeting, however, staff have not been convinced that Site Three is in the best interests of Portland. NNEPRA has been invited here to present why Site Three is the best location, as well as City staff to present their assessment and recommendation, and the Greater Portland Council of Governments, which administers the regional transportation program, to share their perspective.

Presented by Patricia Quinn, Executive Director of NNEPRA

Provided a brief overview of the history and structure of NNEPRA, NNEPRA's role as operating partners for Amtrak Downeaster partners. Provided statistics on the Downeaster trips, ridership, and passenger destinations. Goal of NNEPRA is to provide more trains with shorter travel times to connect more trains to more destinations. Have received federal funds to open a station in Falmouth. Provided overview of Wells Area Improvement Project. This will enable an additional trip to be added between Wells and Brunswick running every day. The northbound train would arrive in Portland around 7:55AM. The biggest barrier is that the Portland station is not very accessible to the downtown currently.

The other issue with the Portland station is that it is currently located down a one-way street, taking 15 minutes for the train to stop and turn around. This adds cost and makes the train less competitive.

Ms. Quinn presented a vision for a new mainline station where there are two tracks, making the stop two minutes. A map and schematic of where the new station location was presented. Increased connectivity to a variety of locations were discussed. Ms. Quinn noted past studies supporting moving train stations, as well as stakeholder and public outreach and engagement in the 2024 plan. Noted support from Maine DOT, Maine Legislature Transportation Committee, Towns of Brunswick and Wells, Amtrak, and others. Noted request from City of Portland to conduct an analysis that includes a no-build option and a cost-benefit analysis of all reasonable alternatives. Ms. Quinn noted plans and challenges for each of the three options evaluated by NNEPRA. Mr. Dale Doughty, Acting Commissioner of NNEPRA, added additional reasons which inform and motivate NNEPRA's plan to change station locations.

Amtrak Downeaster Station Relocation

Presented by Kevin Kraft, Development Director

Discussed site selection of process, role of City in the site selection process. Summarized historic and current regional transportation plans, as well as implementation process of plans. Discussed outcomes of 2021 study conducted by City, NNEPRA, Concord Coach Lines, Metro, PACTS, and other key partners, led by Maine Department of Transportation (DOT). Explained benefits and drawbacks of each station, from the perspective of the City and the 2021 study.

Presented national examples of integrating rail into downtowns, rail lines located near grade crossings. Reviewed history of statements made by city on NNEPRA proposal of station move.

Portland Station Relocation - Regional Context

Kristina Egan, Executive Director, Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG)

Discussed goals and role of GPCOG. Goal of GPCOG is cohesion of all regional transportation. Discussed 2021 study, the goal of which was to analyze whether or not to decouple Concord Coach Lines from Amtrak Downeaster site. Discussed opportunity costs and benefits of investing in rail. Reviewed regional transportation goals: make transit easier, create frequent connections, invest in rapid transit, create transit-friendly places. Preferred Site 2 over Site 3.

Kevin Kraft concluded staff recommendation for Site 2 over Site 3, emphasized investments and benefits of current station location, identified pathways forward for Council.

Public Comment on Amtrak Downeaster Station Location

- ❖ Support for Site 2 includes transit, bike/ped, and development potential; is most effective to meet accessibility goals, land use and planning goals, and holistic community needs; proximity to Congress Street and METRO stop is important; revitalizes historic location of original use and serves regional and local goals; advances TOD and multimodal access; recognition that City staff, regional planners at GPCOG, and the neighborhood organizations in/around this site all prefer Site 2.
- ❖ Opposition for Site 2 includes the concern around land ownership, safety considerations related to a 3rd rail crossing Congress St and downtime signals with multiple track crossings and vehicle delays, and platform landing on County jail property.
- ❖ Support for Site 3 includes concern that the City is ignoring the operational difficulties of Site 2 and MaineHealth's preference for Site 3; quick access to MaineHealth and Mercy shuttle.
- ❖ Opposition on Site 3 includes inconsistency with City's Comprehensive Plan; requires significant industrial restructuring.
- ❖ Concern that the study done to determine size of proposed parking lot is insufficient; concern for the impact to surrounding area; concern that carbon emissions were not a consideration in the study; concern that MaineHealth is landbanking area with no plan for improvement/development to Union Plaza; concern for the cost benefit of this potential project.

Councilor Comment on Amtrak Downeaster Station Location

Jim Cohen recognizes NNEPRA's lengthy process to analyze the feasibility of and public input surrounding this topic. The information presented by City staff has not been seen until today. Reiterates the following conclusions around reduction of carbon emissions, land ownership and control on those outcomes.

Greg Jordan recognizes the property ownership concerns, but those issues are downstream from this conversation at this time.

Dale Doughty notes that Maine DOT and City agree on reassessing Libbytown traffic patterns, after their federal grant funding was rescinded, and we don't see a funding path forward anytime in the near future. MEDOT wants to continue partnering with all parties to determine the best site, even if the alternatives are not in Portland.

Patricia Quinn reaffirms that Site 3 would support Transit Oriented Development. She goes on to review some of the regional and service-related changes since the study was conducted during COVID.

Councilor Bullett notes that Portland's train station should be urban and future planning means planning for a future without cars. Councilor Bullett asks if there was in-state ridership modeling done between Site 3 vs Site 2. *Patricia Quinn says they did not, since the sites are so close to each other.* Councilor Bullett asks Dale Doughty, MaineDOT, to expand on the federal grant clawbacks mentioned. *There are still federal grants being announced, we can get you more details on those.* We didn't get public comment from Mercy or MaineHealth, and just wanted to make sure they are aware of this public comment. *Greg Jordan mentioned that representatives of MaineHealth on the attendee side, we have corresponded with property owners, but confirming that we did not receive public comment from either organizations.* Councilor Bullett shares her support for the alternatives analysis and re-emphasizes the key to walkability to the train station.

Councilor Pelletier asks if Site 3 is up for sale? *Patricia Quinn states that we have had conversations with all property owners impacted by Site 3 and all have expressed their willingness to work with us.* Is the only feasible layover facility the one mentioned on the Mountain Branch? *The primary layover facility is in Brunswick and would still be able to be accessed by any new station, some of them just require the backup movement and multiple movements.* Is there an implication that Amtrak would no longer service Portland if there isn't a favorable outcome here? *I think we were talking about 'what's next' such that if we go back and conduct an alternatives analysis and we determine that Falmouth is the most viable alternative, because of the limited viable spaces available in Portland, then that may be the outcome.* If we moved to conduct an alternative analysis and work with MaineHealth to find a compromise.

Councilor Ali asks Mayor Dion if there was other sources of funding that could be accessed to help fund this study? Mayor Dion submit this project for analysis in the U.S. Mayor's Conference design guidance for land use issues. There is an opportunity for us to work together and hard bargain for what something could look like, but perhaps a third party can help us determine what is in the best interest of all.

Councilor Michniewicz shares her support for the Mayor's advice on collaborating with a third-party and for all members not backing away from this conversation.

Mayor Dion suggests Legal should provide clarity on land acquisitions and other relevant issues.

Councilor Phillips notes her appreciation for the public comment concerning parking lot size. Councilor Phillips goes on to remind us of all of our City planning documents that outline our goals and aspirations that direct this work. So many of these documents outline our concern for public safety. Site 3 does not have sufficient connection with METRO lines. There are five businesses co-located with Site 3, all of which would have to move if Site 3 was selected. That is certainly a concern that has not been noted tonight. Councilor Phillips shares her surprise that a facilitated conversation has not happened already.

Greg Jordan suggests that a facilitated discussion would be couched within the greater alternatives analysis and further technical and financial studies.

Councilor Phillips suggests we need to change the recommendation before us, being step 1 being a facilitated discussion with a third party and step 2 conducting an alternative study. Councilor Bullett adds that those steps could happen simultaneously. Financial cost breakdowns, land ownership, and legal analysis of the options at hand.

Motion to Recommend an Alternative Study for the Amtrak Downeaster Station Location and an Additional Directive for Staff to Engage NNEPRA in the Solicitation of a Mediator to Provide the Objective Data to Inform the Committee

Councilor Bullett motioned and Councilor Ali seconded. The motion passed unanimously, 3-0.

Motion to Adjourn

The motion was moved by Councilor Bullett and seconded by Councilor Ali.
The motion was approved 3-0.

Meeting Adjourned