

Minutes

Remote Housing and Economic Development Committee

September 23, 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, September 23, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the HEDC were Chair Councilor Pious Ali, and members Councilors Sarah Michniewicz and Kate Sykes. Member Councilor Regina Phillips could not be present. City staff present were Associate Corporation Counsel Avery Dandreta, Housing and Community Development Division Director Mary Davis, Public Assemblies Director Andy Downs, Corporation Counsel Michael Goldman, Parks and Public Assemblies Director Ethan Hipple, Housing Safety Division Director Zachary Lenhert, Assistant City Manager Dena Libner, Deputy Director of Parks and Public Assemblies Angela O'Connor, Principal Administrative Officer Lori Paulette, and Housing and Economic Development Department Director Greg Watson,

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

On motion made by Councilor Sykes, seconded by Chair Councilor Ali, the Committee voted 3-0 to accept the minute as published.

Item #2: (Public Comment) Review and recommendation to the City Council regarding request by the VFW to waive Poker License Fee – Zachary Lenhart

Mr. Lenhart noted that per Chapter 15 of the City Code, the City Council can waive or reduce license fees, which is what the VFW has requested, i.e., waive the Poker License Fee. The Committee is being requested to make a recommendation to the City Council. The HEDC reviewed the VFW's 2024 Beano License Fee waiver request on January 23, 2024 and recommended the 50% of the 2024 fee be waived.

Councilor Sykes noted that VFW provides a community benefit for not all citizens of Portland and questioned setting a precedent.

Councilor Michniewicz noted that this is the first time she has been presented with this issue and questioned how many non-profits were aware of potential waiver/grant requests.

Ms. Libner noted a staff oversight to not bring the HEDC vote on 1/23/2024 to the City Council and if voted favorably at this meeting, staff would bring both to the City Council for their vote.

Chair Councilor Ali opened the meeting for public comment.

Douglas Doughty, member of the VFW and prior military service, said that the VFW is passionate about their responsibility to give back personally and organizationally, sponsoring many community events at no cost. Fees charged go back directly into the community and hoped the Committee would look favorably on this request.

Dave Bianculli, Commander of VFW, highlighted the many community benefits the VFW serves and what it does for the community, noting that it makes sense to waive the fees. The VFW has all volunteers and no paid employees. Reports are done for every event which are reviewed by the State.

Jared Sawyer, Portland resident and member/CFO of the VFW, noted that the VFW does provide direct support to community in Woodfords Corner, donates to storage to the Little League in their basement, Portland Public Schools holds seminars in their hall at no charge, holding Cancer benefit events at no cost, Thanksgiving day dinners, direct donations for 4th of July PSO event, and more. If a homeless veteran calls, the VFW can put them in a place to sleep. Mr. Sawyer said that the benefits go on and urged the Committee to recommend approval to the City Council.

The Committee discussed defining direct public benefits and an accounting mechanism that would help the Council understand the benefits, with Mr. Goldman noting it is in the City Council's discretion to make the determination as the direct public benefits term is not defined in the ordinance.

After further Committee discussion, on motion made by Councilor Michniewicz, seconded by Councilor Sykes, the Committee voted 3-0 to recommend to the City Council a 50% discount for the VFW and the Maine Irish Heritage Center (who had also requested the waiver previously).

Item #3: (Public Comment) Review and recommendation to the City Council Agreement for 2026 Back Cove Festival

Mr. Hipple provided highlights of the proposed agreement with the Promoters for a similar festival that took place this past Summer. The proposed Agreement would be a 3-year agreement and a 3-year renewal and went over the terms.

Regarding this past Festival, Mr. Hipple and Mr. Downs noted that things went better than expected and staff supports the proposed agreement, reached after extended negotiations to be fair and balanced. The footprint is similar and attendance and hours are the same.

There was discussion between the Committee and staff regarding communication issues with the neighbors and a concentrated effort would need to be made to ensure that all are heard, noting a targeted email approach for better responses/timing for future events. Noise issues are handled in the moment with a direct line from Police dispatch to organizers and City staff. Decibels levels are checked on site during the event.

Committee members, after further discussions with staff, recommended that staff meet with community members/neighbors and discuss concerns/issues raised today with them so they are informed of future possible festivals coming and can offer feedback to the Committee. The Committee also requested that a tiered percentage of ticket sales to the City possibly be an option.

Item #4: Discussion: Restaurant Industry workforce and labor issues – Review Downtown Transit Oriented Development Tax Increment Financing District eligible uses for potential ways to assist the restaurant industry.

Mr. Watson noted that this item related to the Committee policy initiative regarding the restaurant industry labor shortage and thinking about creative opportunities to keep it all working. Allowable uses in the Downtown TOD TIF are intended to support infrastructure, i.e., sidewalks, streetscapes, parking but there are more general opportunities including workforce training.

Chair Councilor Ali noted that this item came about when many restaurants were closing. He is open to suggestions but not necessarily at this meeting. As has been discussed, housing for these employees is also a major component here and in many locales.

Item #5: Communication Only: Quarter 2 Rent Control Report

Chair Councilor Ali said that this is a communication item. He asked if there were any questions/comments. There being none, he thanked staff for the report.

Item #6: (Public Comment) Review and recommendation to the City Council regarding the issuance of an RFP for a Licensed Early Childhood Education Provider at City-owned property known as BC 2.

Ms. Libner noted that the Committee first took this up here early Summer. At that time, there were Committee questions and public comment, and Councilors Sykes and Bullett discussed proposed amendments thereafter. At this point in time, staff recommends postponing this until 2026 to look into it and evaluate it more so that it will be a success, particularly staffing issues as staff understands this to be a major issue for childcare providers.

On motion made by Councilor Sykes, seconded by Councilor Michniewicz, the Committee voted 3-0 to postpone this to 2026.

Item #7: Oral Communication: HEDC to discuss Performance Hall Moratorium at its October 21, 2025, meeting.

Mr. Watson noted that Councilors Grant and Michniewicz will bring a proposal to consider an ordinance to formalize community benefits associated with performance venues.

Item #8: (Public Comment) Review and recommendation to the City Council on a request for loan funding from the Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund for Lambert Woods North/622 Auburn Street

Ms. Davis, acknowledging that Virginia White from POAH was in attendance for any questions, gave a high level overview noting that the Committee is familiar with the development, which is requesting \$360,000 in loan funding as noted above. The funding will fill

the gap for the development of 72 units of affordable housing at 60% AMI across 6 residential buildings. The City's underwriter has reviewed and approved with conditions.

Councilor Ali opened the meeting for public comment; seeing none, he closed the public comment session.

On motion then made by Councilor Sykes, seconded by Councilor Michniewicz, the Committee voted 3-0 to forward this to the City Council with a recommendation of approval.

Item #9 – (Public Comment) Review and recommendation to the City Council approval of an Amendment to the Declaration of Condominium for Dougherty Commons Phase 2

Ms. Davis noted that this is another project the Committee is well familiar with and then described the amendment the HEDC is being asked to recommend approval to the City Council.

Councilor Michniewicz appreciated the amount of work to get this to the point that it can move forward for the good of the project.

On motion then made by Councilor Michniewicz, seconded by Councilor Sykes, the Committee voted 3-0 to forward this to the City Council with a recommendation of approval.

Item #10: Executive Session: Pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. 405(6)(C) and 5 M.R.S.A. 13119-A, the Committee will go into executive session to provide direction to staff regarding the disposition of City-owned property at 21 Randall Street

Mr. Goldman said that this item is appropriate for executive session so as to not jeopardize the City's negotiating position in this possible sale of City-owned real estate.

Chair Councilor Ali asked if there was any public comment; seeing none, the public comment session was closed. He then noted that the Committee would go into executive session and after the executive session the meeting would be concluded.

On motion made by Councilor Michniewicz, seconded by Councilor Sykes, the Board voted 3-0 to go into executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. 405(6)(C) and 5 M.R.S.A. 13119-A to provide direction to staff regarding negotiations for the possible disposition of City-owned property at 21 Randall Street – at approximately 7:27 p.m. At approximately 7:48 the Committee came out of executive session and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully, Lori Paulette