

SOCIAL HOUSING TASK FORCE

Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 6:00 PM
City Hall Basement Room 24 Kippy
Richardson Room



MEMBERS

City Councilor Kate Sykes, Co-Chair
City Councilor Sarah Michniewicz
Paul Styslinger
Bill Stauffer
Jason Spector
Catherine Buxton
Wendy Cherubini
Cullen Ryan
Matthew Peters
Kristin Leffler
Jon Fetherston, Co-Chair
Jonathan Culley
Tim Wells

The Social Housing Task Force will conduct this meeting in person. The members will break into working groups in order to focus on specific topic areas. As a result of the meeting format, there will be no meeting recording. Written notes from each working group will be incorporated into the minutes of the meeting, which will be posted in the [Agenda Center](#).

PUBLIC COMMENT INFORMATION:

To submit written public comment on an agenda item, email SocialHousingTaskForce@portlandmaine.gov. Submissions must be received by 12:00 pm the day before the Social Housing Task Force meeting to guarantee their inclusion in the agenda packet. All submissions must include the commenter's name and legal address. To help ensure your comment is submitted for the correct item, please include the name of the agenda item (see below).

AGENDA:

- 1. Review and Approve Minutes from the March 11, 2026 Meeting**
 - i. Draft Minutes of Meeting held March 11, 2026
- 2. Administrative Updates, Announcements, etc., as needed**
- 3. Working Groups Breakout Sessions**
- 4. Group Report and Meeting Wrap Up**

Social Housing Task Force Minutes of Business Meeting held March 11, 2026 at 6:00 pm

In attendance:

City Councilor Kate Sykes – Co-Chair

Jon Fetherston – Co-Chair

Bill Stauffer

Wendy Cherubini

Matt Peters

Jonathan Culley

Jason Spector

City Councilor Sarah Michniewicz

Kristin Leffler

Paul Styslinger

Greg Watson, Director of City's Housing and Economic Development Department
Christian Roadman, GPCOG, Senior Planner

The meeting started at approximately 6:04 PM. It opened with approval of the minutes from February 11, 2026 (moved by Councilor Michniewicz, seconded by Matt Peters, with unanimous approval).

Paul Styslinger led a discussion about formation of subgroups with particular areas of focus: bonding, Portland Housing Authority (PHA) partnership, site/project selection, and reporting. He acknowledged an email from absent committee member Catherine Buxton regarding need for community engagement, and noted that such engagement could be a whole-group responsibility.

Wendy Cherubini noted that much of the Task Force's work so far dealt with fairly basic background information required to setting a foundation for understanding; it will therefore be a challenge to successfully and adequately communicate lessons learned to the public efficiently and clearly.

A discussion followed regarding potential meetings moving forward, and if this subgroup format might be pursued again. Because groups of three members trigger public meeting laws, the group acknowledged that some work and collaboration done in pairs may be an efficient and reasonable way to make progress on subgroup work.

The group moved to discussion of the City Council order creating the Social Housing Task Force, the intent behind it, and the specific items it mandates. The group generally expressed a desire to acknowledge complicating factors noted in the order, like inclusionary zoning and rent control, without weighing deeply into them.

The task force then broke into groups for discussion and focused work.

Paul Styslinger, Matt Peters, and Greg Watson joined the **bonding** group. They focused on defining the specific financial mechanisms the City of Portland can use to fund social housing, specifically comparing costs, control, and legal constraints.

Discussion points included:

- Setting up a framework so that project facilitation and administration is easy for the City when funding becomes available.
- Bond types and ownership: the City must be the owner for certain bond types. While the Portland Housing Authority (PHA) could be hired to manage developments, their independent borrowing interest rates are generally higher than the City's.

- The “Portsmouth model,” a potential “pass-through” strategy where the City issues a General Obligation (GO) Bond but transfers the proceeds/management to the local housing authority, potentially shielding the City from direct liability.
- The “Barron Center precedent” regarding past efforts where the City explored equity opportunities in development; the group should learn why those options were previously declined.
- Preservation vs. new construction: Greg highlighted the need to focus on housing preservation (buying existing real estate to extend affordability). He noted that MaineHousing has a “right to purchase” provision for expiring restrictions that the City should utilize.

The bonding group identified a bonding options table as a deliverable to provide. It should translate complex financial jargon into a “cheapest to most expensive” hierarchy, and should include:

- general obligation (GO) bonds, which have lower interest rates but are strictly tied to City ownership and public perception and may require public referendum
- revenue bonds, which are more flexible, tied to specific projects, and may not require a public vote, but come with higher interest rates
- taxable vs. tax-exempt bonding: the “90% threshold” for tax exempt status should be clarified, and taxable options for funding the Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund and/or third-party deals should be explored
- City referendum caps and restrictions. It should clarify which bonds trigger a citizen referendum, and whether it is due to a dollar amount being exceeded, or if referendums only apply to GO bonds.

The group noted that it will need more information regarding up-to-date market assumptions for interest rates on taxable and tax-exempt bond issuances. It also identified engagement with City Finance Director Brendan O’Connell as an important step to right-size potential bond offering ideas and understand the City’s risk tolerance. Matt Peters will draft the bonding toolset table, and coordinate with Brendan O’Connell and Adam Krea to help answer questions and calibrate information.

Bill Stauffer, Wendy Cherubini, and Jason Spector joined the **PHA partnership group**.

The group discussed potential guiding principles and descriptions to form the basis of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the PHA. They noted that such a partnership should:

- Enable more units than the City acting alone, particularly enabling lower-income units through the partnership as part of mixed-income developments.
- Facilitate flexibility within macroeconomic and political realities.
- Allow tiers of partnership that range by project (e.g., ranging from manager to developer).

The group identified as a one-month goal a successful meeting with PHA on April 22, wherein the entire Task Force can hear PHA’s responses to Task Force initiatives together. Moving forward, they will work toward further developing guiding principles for an MOU (though an MOU will be the work of lawyers). Needs include continued information regarding bonding. Also, though there may not be similar social housing models to the City’s potential partners, any such relevant precedent would be helpful.

Chair Sykes and Kristin Leffler joined the **reporting group**.

The two expressed desire to pursue an Op-Ed piece in the Press Herald explaining the Task Force’s work, as well as a logo to help identify and promote it. They also discussed outreach to various relevant groups, including the tenant’s union, nurses/service workers, Homeless Voices for Justice, social workers of Portland Public Schools, the Chamber of Commerce, affordable housing organizations, etc. Members of the Task Force could attend meetings of these other

groups to listen and ensure they are aware of the Task Force's work. Kristin Leffler noted that she is already informally doing this with the teacher's union. Task force members who professionally intersect with any of these groups could volunteer to attend an appropriate meeting and report back.

The two discussed a strategy for compiling the Task Force's final report. Chair Sykes volunteered to go through the Council Order, as well as the minutes of previous meetings, to begin to fill in what has been addressed. Regarding areas of focus that need additional information or haven't been addressed, individual Task Force members will be assigned to take them on. Chair Sykes noted that the point in the order about maximizing and streamlining funding programs could be pursued further; she'd like to make the argument for how inefficient all the various efforts and funding for projects are, even though projects don't always work out – social housing is a way to maximize return. She also noted that fiscal sustainability is an area that could be further expanded – while the group has discussed bonding, there may be other routes it could advocate for, like a tax on titles transferred within the County. She also brought up the focus of the City's Land Bank, and how that could be expanded to include housing and other needs besides green space.

The two also discussed whether there is information available regarding vacancy rates in apartments; if the Task Force is making the case for additional supply, people might reasonably question if there are existing apartments available going unused, and how the City could create units in a segment where supply is needed.

Councilor Michniewicz, Chair Fetherston, and Jonathan Culley joined the **project selection** group.

The three looked through information provided by Mary Davis and others in the City to identify particularly promising City-owned land for potential projects. They determined that Jonathan would look into four further: 284 Palmer Avenue, 200 Lambert Street, and 21 Randall Street, and 1928 Congress Street.

The groups came back together to report back on and discuss their breakout groups, initiatives, and ideas.

Chair Sykes informed the group that she has committed to a Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting in April or May to provide a "mini-report".

The group discussed their next meeting, and decided to hold an extra meeting before the scheduled meeting on April 22 with PHA. The group will meet for an hour on April 8 to continue work in breakout groups and report back to each other.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:40 pm (moved by Chair Fetherston, seconded by Councilor Michniewicz, with unanimous approval).