

Minutes

Remote Housing and Economic Development Committee

January 5, 2021

NOTE: This meeting was held via Zoom and can be viewed at this link:

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, January 5, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the Committee was its Chair Councilor Spencer Thibodeau and members Councilors Tae Chong, and Andrew Zarro; Committee member Councilor Pious Ali could not be present. Present from the City staff were Housing and Community Development Division Director Mary Davis, Housing Program Manager Victoria Volent, Housing and Economic Development Director Greg Mitchell, Senior Executive Assistant Lori Paulette, City Manager Jon Jennings, and Associate Corporation Counsel Michael Goldman.

Item #1 Communication: November 17, 2020, Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes

On motion made by Councilor Chong, seconded by Councilor Zarro, the Committee voted unanimously (3-0) to accept the Minutes as published.

Item #2 Communication: November 12, 2020, Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

On motion made by Councilor Chong, seconded by Councilor Zarro, the Committee voted unanimously (3-0) to accept the Minutes as published.

Chair Thibodeau noted that he would like to take up Item #4 on the Agenda first, as Committee member Councilor Pious Ali is in another meeting and hoped to be able to participate in Item #3 on the Agenda; the Committee concurred. (Post note: Councilor Ali was not able to make this meeting.)

Item #4: For Committee Discussion and Direction: 2021 Outdoor Dining & Retail Program Proposal and Other City Business Support Pandemic Programs.

Chair Thibodeau said that this is on the Agenda to discuss next steps for permanency as to what can continue to be done to assist businesses after the current extension is done on May 10, 2021.

Mr. Jennings said that ten months ago, the City was confronted with the Pandemic and required it to be flexible with a goal of salvaging Portland's businesses and economy as much as possible. One flexibility involved responding to the closure of indoor dining, so the City pivoted and amended and expanded outdoor dining possibilities, which was extended yesterday by the City Council to May 10, 2021. Due to the Chair's leadership, prior to the Pandemic, the City had

already approved the use of parking spaces – be it up to five “parklets” as a pilot to determine future issues. The extension to May 10, 2021, also includes additional parklets where other options do not work and safety can be achieved. Mr. Jennings also commented on street closures that were done, with some successful and some not, and allowing outdoor dining on private parking lots. He complemented the City’s Inspection and Permitting staff for their efforts to assist with this successful transition and responding to constituent inquiries. City staff did not want the process to be onerous for businesses.

Chair Thibodeau thanked the City Manager for the background and where we are today. The City wants to move forward with what can be expected for Portland businesses as they transition from the Winter season back to Spring, Summer, and Fall.

Councilor Chong said this will be a good step forward, and noted street closures be vetted and worked out with Portland Downtown to connect streets for people to walk to where they want to go. When the Pandemic is done and cruise ships return, the City will need to deal with parking and moving people to be successful. Regarding the continuation of Parklets, he would like to see them continue for permanency for both restaurants and retail for shopping in and outdoors.

Councilor Zarro also noted the success of parklets, and encouraged that they continue as long as appropriate safety measures can be met. He also noted that after the Pandemic is done, he would like for Portland to have something similar to the Church Street Marketplace in Burlington, VT. This is an opportunity to leverage a healthy walkable downtown. Councilor Zarro also noted that he would like to see off-peninsula options for parklets, for example in the Woodfords area. Lastly, he would like to see updated feedback from Exchange Street businesses, and any more follow-up surveys from businesses and visitors as to what worked and what could be done better.

Chair Thibodeau noted a statistic that there were 175 outdoor dining permits in the Summer, and now there are 45 for the Winter months. This Committee will need to discuss where future street closures could work and then parklets as separate issues. Constituent feedback will assist the Committee as to what worked and what could be improved.

Mr. Jennings noted that the City’s sees a significant revenue loss for each parking space converted to a parklet and this would need to be factored into discussions. The closure of Exchange Street was not well received, hurting businesses who depend on parking, with the City also thinking there would be more parklets. City staff are currently working on Dana and Wharf Streets possible closures, noting it is a natural area for that purpose and it may be well be permanent; plans for this can be included at the next meeting when this is discussed. Mr. Jennings also noted that the City is willing work with anyone with concepts that are safe, whether on or off peninsula and on public and private space.

Chair Thibodeau noted consensus for openness to year-round options for parklets both on and off peninsula, with the need to look at revenue loss for the City and costs to businesses, as well as background information on who might take advantage of this; impacts of street closures; and numbers on who took advantage of outdoor dining and retail. He suggested that Mr. Mitchell reach out Portland Downtown to have them survey their constituents about who did and did not utilize outdoor dining and retail and to offer their feedback either way.

Councilor Chong said that in looking at partial street closures, the City would need to look at the impacts on parking and then creating innovative transportation to move people around.

Councilor Zarro also suggested to have Buy Local query their constituents about the use of outdoor dining and retail. It would be good information for the City to have as to why some did and did not take advantage.

Chair Thibodeau said that he walks Exchange Street everyday down to Middle, noting that upper Exchange Street had 2 to 3 businesses taking advantage of parklets. The foundation is there for that use, and further refinements for aesthetics can be looked at, as well as spacing and measuring. Chair Thibodeau said that his goal would be for the Committee to further review information requested today at a February meeting, noting that getting this to Council in March would provide businesses with ample time to know the City's direction. This may include Ordinance amendments and additional rules and regulations.

Councilor Chong noted that this is about people congregating and would like to see how perhaps parklets could be converted into a stage for the performing arts, planning for that one or two years out.

Chair Thibodeau agreed and looked forward to discussing the framework at a February Committee meeting and thanked all for their feedback.

Item #3 Public Hearing and vote to recommend to the City Council renaming the City Housing Trust Fund to the "Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund"

Chair Thibodeau introduced this item and Mary Davis provided an overview. During the December 7, 2020 City Council Inauguration Meeting, Mayor Kate Snyder announced that in honor and recognition of Councilor Jill Duson's contribution to housing, including "...helping to create a municipal environment conducive to the development of affordable and low income eligible housing..." she is asking the Housing and Economic Development Committee to review a request to rename the Housing Trust Fund the "Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund". Mary also noted a few of the many accomplishments under Councilor Duson's leadership.

The Housing Trust Fund Ordinance is located in Chapter 14, Article 18.3 of the Code. Any changes to Chapter 14 must be reviewed by the Planning Board who would then make a recommendation to the City Council. Tonight's packet includes a redlined version of the proposed changes. A more streamlined version will be reviewed by the Planning Board and ultimately presented to the council for approval. The streamlined version will be consistent with the new format of Chapter 14.

Councilor Chong supports renaming the Housing Trust Fund the Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund.

Councilor Zarro asked if former Councilor Duson is amenable to the proposed change.

Chair Thibodeau noted Councilor Duson is honored at the suggestion.

Chair Thibodeau opened the meeting to public comment.

Brian Eng- (33 Storer Street) indicated his support of this well-deserved honor. He also thanked Councilors and staff for their advocacy on behalf of affordable housing initiatives.

George Rheault- (28 Hanover Street) is against this recommendation; such an honor should be reserved for Councilors who have passed away, and this is not deserved.

Chair Thibodeau closed the public comment period.

Councilor Chong moved for passage of the recommendation.

Councilor Chong recognized Jill Duson's commitment to housing and her efforts towards bringing innovative housing to Portland. He supports honoring Councilor Duson for her dedication to the city and its citizens.

Councilor Zarro also supports this proposal. Councilor Duson was a dedicated leader to public service. The honor is reflective of those on the Council and City Staff to see her as the genuine, authentic person she is

Chair Thibodeau- Councilor Duson deserves this without a doubt. She was dedicated to funding the Housing Trust Fund which has contributed towards the creation of many units of affordable housing. Councilor Duson advocated for her passion and commitment to affordable housing. He also thanked Mary Davis for her long tenure and dedication to public service.

Chair Thibodeau asked for a vote on the motion and it passed unanimously (3-0).

This item will first go to the Planning Board and then to the City Council.

Item #5 Discussion of Housing and Economic Development Committee Priorities for 2021

Chair Thibodeau introduced this item and Greg Mitchell began staff's presentation by noting the memo prepared for the Committee contains five categories for consideration, the first being an overview of the "rent control referenda". The second, third, and fourth categories were introduced by Mary Davis. Ms. Davis discussed the "affordable housing policy and budget" category, the "affordable housing public-private partnership" category, and recent "real estate transactions" category. Mr. Mitchell wrapped up the presentation with a synopsis of the "annual reports and actions" category. He also welcomed the efficiency of working with one committee in policy decision and implementation and looks forward to receiving direction from the committee.

Councilor Chong- would like developers who receive City subsidies to use the Family Self Sufficiency program for Section 8 and public housing recipients.

Councilor Chong- glad to assist with providing housing for the missing middle (such as through cooperatives). He would like to combat the "amazon" or "covid" effect of shopping on-line by bringing people back downtown through the encouragement of more performing arts in the Arts TIF District. Promoting the performing arts would differentiate Portland from Amazon. He

would like to set aside money to promote the performing arts to keep Portland a vibrant shopping and service center.

Councilor Zarro- supports the comments from Councilor Chong. He would like to spend procurement dollars locally and find opportunities to lay the groundwork to highlight local business.

Chair Thibodeau- expressed the importance of continuing the work of creating affordable housing on City owned Property. He also supports unique methods to identify Portland as a vibrant commercial center. Business retention over the next year will be challenging. Portland needs to help those who wish to start up a new business and those already established. He would like to see a \$150,000 investment in Portland Adult Education's job training program.

Councilor Chong- agrees Portland Adult Education has done an amazing job. He would also like to see housing projects on major thoroughfares outside of the Peninsula.

Seeing no other comments, Chair Thibodeau closed this agenda item.

Councilor Thibodeau reported that Councilor Ali texted his support for the renaming of the Housing Trust Fund to the Jill C. Duson Housing Trust Fund.

On motion made by Councilor Zarro, seconded by Councilor Chong, the Committee voted unanimously (3-0) to adjourn at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Respectively, Victoria Volent

Lori Paulette for Item #4