

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE

Standing Committee on Sustainability and Transportation

Councilor Belinda Ray (D1), Chair

Councilor Spencer Thibodeau (D2)

Councilor Andrew Zarro (D4)

Minutes April 21, 2021

Members Present: Councilor Ray, Councilor Thibodeau, Councilor Zarro

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Alex Marshall, Jeff Tarling, Bill Needelman, Casey Zorn

Guests: Rick Harbison, Councilor Fournier

Meeting called to order at 5:34 PM.

March Minutes

Councilor Thibodeau motions to approve the March meeting minutes. Councilor Zarro seconds the motion. March minutes passed unanimously, 3-0.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon

Will be able to introduce new Sustainability Associate soon. PMAC has been discussing invasive species. Benchmarking has been going well. Casey, the Sustainability Fellow, has led benchmarking workshops for building owners and the Portland Climate Action Team (PCAT), who is helping with benchmarking support. Working on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Central Maine Power (CMP) to get the streetlights fixed on the Western Prom. There will be a press conference tomorrow to launch food composting drop-off pilot project. Drop-off locations at North Street Community Garden, Boyd Street Community Garden, Clark Street Community Garden, Libbytown Community Garden, and Riverside Recycling Center. Working with the University of Maine Mitchell Center and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to promote food waste reduction and food hierarchy. Working with Mitchell Center to prove effectiveness of composting program. Current electric vehicle (EV) network is getting good use. Working to expand EV network, and will be putting out Request for Proposals (RFP) to get more chargers, especially in neighborhoods without access to driveways. Had Community Solar-themed Coffee and Climate, the One Climate Future (OCF) office hours. Intern working on Spanish translated OCF material which will get posted on the website.

Committee Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilor Zarro wonders where community members can learn more about compost pilot. *Go to the Sustainability Office website and click on the Waste Reduction tab and then the Compost tab.*

Councilor Ray wonders if the composting program is bring-your-own-bucket. *Yes. Use any container with a sealable lid.*

Quick METRO Update

Presented by Councilor Ray

METRO peninsula loop reboot has been put on pause. A new working group, Transit Together, will be looking regionally at transit, and it makes sense to consider this project in that context before proceeding. METRO still anticipates route improvements in the near future, but wishes to pursue them collaboratively.

Proposed Public Landing at Ocean Gateway

Presented by Bill Needelman

The proposed public landing is at the current Ocean Gateway. For supply of boats in harbor, currently have a low number of public landings. The State Pier is the only location for public tie-ups, with a maximum of 2 hours. This gets very busy during summer months and the location is very constrained especially during ferry hours. Will not remove any facilities with this proposal. Propose floating public landing dock between Ocean Gateway and Sail Maine. Currently focusing on dogleg design but will also explore other designs. Using existing concrete floats that the City already owns and 6-8 steel pilings, which will allow berthing on both sides. Will more than double public landings for transient use for Portland Harbor. Leaves adequate water space to navigate other boats and remnant wooden pilings. Does not see privately proposed Portland Harbor Commons as incompatible with the City's plan. Holding 3 public meetings, (1) Portland Harbor Commission, Portland Parks Commission, S&T Committee. Received full support from the first two meetings. This is a 360K project, and half of the funding would come from the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program, which considers existing City floats as part of the City's matching contribution. This leaves City with remaining 80K responsibility, which will involve 40K from each fiscal year of operating funds from Public Buildings and Ports Division. Will not touch capital improvement funds.

Councilor Comment on the Proposed Public Landing at Ocean Gateway

Councilor Thibodeau voices original worry about location with large scale improvements to the area in coming years. However, he does not see this as too much of an issue based on further drawings. Wonders if this will be a permanent fixture for many years. *Could move and deploy in a new location, though expects this to be long term and not proposing as temporary*
Is a great location to connect to other transportation, especially for Islanders to access the city.

Councilor Zarro wonders if there will be issue with cruise ships in the summer. *Harbor Commission's job is to figure out issues with cruise ships. Part of being on water is knowing rules of the road and giving cruise ships way when maneuvering and docking. There will be a learning period to how to use this public landing.* Wonders if there has been any outreach to lobsterman/fishermen. *Not reached out to this fishing/lobster community. Not proposed as a commercial lobster boat dock but would allow for them to dock. Don't see this to be an issue with this community and expect support especially from those on the islands.*

Councilor Ray wonders the capacity of the proposed public landing. *It is 240 feet and will be able to dock 8 to 10 boats at a time but room for potentially bigger boat as well since water is*

quite deep. Have not figured out how to manage use of the public landing (kiosk or time limit signs, etc.). Open to discussion. Timing of program has to do with SHIP program. Will likely have one berth pickup and drop off only without extended docking.

Councilor Fournier wonders if this becomes very popular, if there is possibility for expansion at this space or other locations? *Did look at other option and ideas. This is the best opportunity right now and can be expanded at this location given funding and opportunity.*

Transit Tomorrow

Presented by Rick Harbison

Transit Tomorrow is a long-range public transportation plan to map out a vision of the system for the next 30 years. The draft was posted in January, incorporated public comment, with final draft published in February. The plan aims to make public transportation faster and more affordable through sustainable funding. This vision is realized by making transit easier, creating frequent connections, improving rapid transit, and overall creating transit-friendly places.

Make Transit Easier: Recommendations

- Adopt innovative customer service technology
 - Adopt a unified mobility platform
 - Integrate new technology into paratransit communications
- Advance partnerships with businesses and anchor institutions
 - Establish a transportation management association (TMA)
 - Partner to provide free and low-cost fare programs
- Enhance first and last mile connections
 - Develop welcoming stops
 - Prioritize walking, biking, and rolling to transit
 - Pursue pilots of feeder services (e.g., microtransit)
- Strengthen coordination among providers
 - Establish a mobility management program
 - Convene a local coordination working group
- Improve door-to-door options
 - Expand community-based volunteer driver programs
 - Advance user-focused improvements to paratransit
 - Pilot new service models for door-to-door rides

Will perform feasibility study of microtransit to see if appropriate for Portland.

Create Frequent Connections: Recommendations

- Improve frequency / service of existing routes
 - 10 min peak / 20 min off-peak
 - 6 A.M. to midnight, 7 days per week
- Add new high frequency downtown circular routes
- Expand transit service to new locations
 - Expand to Grey and connecting Gorham and Standish

New study Transit Together will do network redesign before adjusting transit frequencies to fit current development and needs, then will ramp up frequencies.

Improve Rapid Transit: Recommendations

Rapid transit operates in its own right of way and has fewer stops. Options for rapid transit include bus rapid transit, light rail, and commuter rail. Plan does not recommend a specific route or mode.

- Perform alternatives analysis of the considered corridors to receive federal funding
 - Biddeford-Saco-Portland
 - Brunswick-Portland
 - Gorham-Westbrook-Portland
 - North Windham-Portland-South Portland

Have funding for one alternatives analysis for a single corridor. Will be prioritizing analysis of Gorham-Westbrook-Portland corridor. Options to also improve rail lines and/or move location of Portland Transit Center (PTC) to improve frequency of Amtrak Downeaster.

Recommendations for improving rapid transit are very conceptual right now.

Create Transit-Friendly Places: Recommendations

- Expand housing choices and jobs near transit and encourage infill development
 - Zone for public transportation
 - Target investments to places that support public transportation
 - Create Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plans
 - Ensure complete streets
 - Protect open spaces

Used priority centers and corridors from Plan 2040 to encourage more growth, infill development in these areas and really work with zoning and enhance transit in these areas.

Public Comment on Transit Tomorrow

Kenneth Capron believes this fails to consider the alternative transportation system he is proposing.

Committee Comment on Transit Tomorrow

Councilor Thibodeau wonders when the 7 different transportation systems will get consolidated. *This is not in the cards right now. The goal is to make this transition between systems as seamless as possible so that the rider does not need to know the different systems. COG staff did a lot of research and workshops and consolidation is not as important as collaboration and coordination. Example of coordination between South Portland bus, METRO, Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach now uses same funding of Dirigo Card.* Councilor Thibodeau is pro-consolidation but understands and appreciates the goals of this plan.

Councilor Zarro wonders about microtransit feasibility with Portland's population density. *Goal of feasibility study would be to figure this out. By looking at other cities and studies, believes there are pockets of density and need in which microtransit could work. There are also other*

challenges with marketing shared rides, etc. Councilor Zarro wonders what the next step with the plan will be. There is a series of next steps including the Transit Together study and alternatives analysis Westbrook-Gorham-Portland corridor, both of which are happening this year. Currently working on TOD plan in Biddeford-Saco. Also need to figure out best use of Cares Act funding.

Councilor Fournier wonders about ferry proposal between Portland and South Portland and how these plans work together. *This is the Cushing Point Transportation Study. This study is looking into options to connect Broadway and South Portland and is in the early stages and considers a seasonal ferry. The findings of this study will be incorporated into the full network redesign.*

This Sustainability and Transportation Committee would like to send Transit Tomorrow to the full City Council. Troy will make sure to include in a full council agenda.

Tree Canopy Update

Presented by Jeff Tarling and Parks Staff

Portland has been known as the Forest City since the early 1800s. Previous satellite assessment showed that Portland has approximately 25% canopy cover. In the current canopy review, Portland has 23-25% canopy cover depending on the neighborhood. Started project with US forest services called the Forest Inventory Assessment (FIA) to investigate value trees and urban spaces. This project will conclude next year, and results will allow for better understanding of Portland's tree canopy. Did assessment of Portland peninsula and off-peninsula. Center of peninsula has lowest canopy cover and needs the greatest amount of canopy improvement. Parkside neighborhood has good canopy cover, especially near Deering Oaks. Neighboring suburban areas also have good canopy cover but should continue to encourage homeowners and developers to plant trees. Canopy cover great in Baxter Woods.

Parks Department is considering many options to protect and improve the tree canopy. Canopy is at risk from declining trees due to pests and other harms. 3,000 of 20,000 trees are Norway Maples, and many have hit climax in growth period and are in decline. Trees are also dying from salt that goes into the tree wells built into sidewalks. Parks Department is looking at designs of raised tree planters to prevent salt harm to trees. This design more than doubles life expectancy of the trees. Also trying to plant more native and self-supporting species. Pick 150-180 trees to plant per year through Planning Tree Fund, Tree Trust, and City funding. The key is watering and supporting next few years of establishment of these trees. Also want to incorporate more green infrastructure for stormwater mitigation and aesthetics. Should consider infrastructure and plant the easy places first where there are large soil resources with the cut-out soil squares as the last resort, allowing for more root space.

Committee Comment on Tree Canopy Update

Councilor Thibodeau wonders if most of the trees that were shown in the presentation were Norway Maples. *Norway Maple is the predominant tree along with Silver Maple. Originally most of trees were elm trees that were wiped out from disease. A lot of development used Norway*

Maples. The City purchased hundreds of cheap and available maples that were available and did not think about long term needs. Did not have concept of importance of native trees at the time. Wonders if the increase in deaths of street trees is caused by new process of putting asphalt below sidewalk. *This could be part of the problem in addition to simply trying to help a tree grow in restrictive conditions.* Voices desire to help with storm drain concepts. Improving canopy is a joint effort between Parks, Planning, and Water Resources—while there may be a need for more parking, these parking spaces used to be a place where trees were planted, and the prioritization of cars makes it harder to improve the tree canopy. The Sustainability and Transportation Committee can help by putting trees higher on the priority list.

Councilor Zarro wonders about the approach to replacing downed heritage trees that are not invasive such as the Linden trees in Back Cove. *Have switched to Native Basswood to replace European Lindens, which are the same tree but native. The native tree has not had the same issues with sooty mold, but they are in a harsh location near the ocean.* Wonders how we prioritize upholding stormwater through design and whether this is through ReCode. Councilor Zarro would like to support in any way. *Complete Streets design helped a lot to bring more trees in. Applaud effort to implement more stormwater catchments.*

Councilor Ray says that the Committee will look at ways to prioritize tree growth. Wonders about meaning of numbers for percent canopy. *Numbers vary between 23-25%, with lower numbers on peninsula and in areas that are transitioning through development. Applied for Project Canopy grant. Confirms that 40% canopy cover is the goal, although report shows we could get to 50%.* We are currently holding firm from 1952 numbers of 25% canopy cover. Councilor Ray would like to see this canopy grow. Should get back into practice of setting canopy growth goals.

Councilor Fournier voices gratitude to Jeff and Parks Department, especially for bringing back native species to this region. *Have started planting bare root trees that can establish much quicker than larger trees and are cheaper to acquire and plant. This could be an opportunity to increase the canopy faster.*

Meeting Conclusion

Will postpone rest of agenda for next month's meeting. Parks and Rec will be coming in with West End Masterplan. Will also discuss OCF short term actions and councilor priorities, potential Straw Ordinance changes, Green New Deal and what can be changed for green building code, possible amendment to parking schedule and fees for EV charging.

Councilor Zarro wonders if the Sustainability and Transportation Committee should have supplemental meeting. Councilor Thibodeau would be okay with longer meetings or supplemental on occasion. Councilor Ray voices it can be a lot for councilors and staff but will see how May meeting goes. Supplemental meetings may be necessary once priorities are set.

Councilor Ray motions to adjourn. Councilor Thiibodeau seconds the motion. Passed unanimously, (3-0). Meeting adjourned at 7:26 PM.