



Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, October 12, 2021, 5:30pm, Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance:

Tae Chong, Chair (District 3), Mark Dion (District 5), Belinda Ray (District 1)

Councilors in Attendance: April Fournier (At-Large)

City Staff:

Kristen Dow, Director of HHS; Tina Pettingill, Deputy Director of HHS; Aaron Geyer, Director of Social Services; Adam Harr, Executive Assistant for Social Services. Keith Gautreau, Fire Chief; Bridget Rauscher, Chronic Disease Prevention Program Manager; Ethan Hipple, Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities; Heath Gorham, Interim Police Chief; Kirsten Goodrich, Tobacco Prevention Program Coordinator; Chelsea Hoskins, Resettlement Coordinator.

Meeting called to order at 5:40 PM.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Announcements

- September 12, 2021 draft workshop minutes.
 - Councilor Dion moved to accept the minutes; Councilor Ray seconded and the minutes were accepted unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – September Updates

HHS Update

- 39 Forest Avenue Update
 - Administrative staff moved on September 28th.
 - Moves for the various locations have been scheduled for the following dates:
 - Lancaster St staff & GA operations- October 18th
 - India Street staff, clinic & exchange operations- October 28th
 - As a result of recommendations from our September 21st committee meeting, an interested parties email list has been created. The link to sign up can be found on the HHS relocation page: <https://portland.civilspace.io/en/projects/the-unification-of-portland-s-health-human-services>.
- General Assistance Program
 - Total Applications: 1,267

- Number of denials: 116
 - Denial rate: 9%
- Oxford Street Shelter and contract hotel:
 - OSS average nightly census: 65
 - Contract hotel average nightly census: 129
- Overview of the Family Shelter:
 - Number of on-site at the family shelter: 28 families/ 83 individuals
 - Number of families at local hotels for shelter overflow: 95 families/ 310 individuals
- Totals for the Needle Exchange Program (NEP) are as follows:
 - Total number of exchanges: 613 (286 onsite, 327 outreach)
 - Total number of needles collected: 40,228
 - Total number of needles distributed: 38,151
 - Total number of Narcan doses distributed: 267 kits (534 doses)
 - Community needles collected: 1,350
 - Collected from community sharps containers: 848 (63% of total)
 - First month of data going back to 1:1.
- Clinic Numbers:
 - STD Clinic: Patients seen: 97, new patients: 38
 - PCFC: Patients seen: 52, new patients: 8
- Outreach to individuals who are particularly aggressive.
- HHS does not employ outreach workers in Social Services; Oxford Street has shelter attendants who used to go out when there was capacity pre-covid. Today, the Social Services Director does the outreach when encampments are reported.
 - Outreach positions were created but were not filled; 4 temporary outreach positions were reposted.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Ray asked if any exceptions are made to the 1:1.
 - Only new clients are given a pack of ten; larger exchanges were only occurred under the governor's executive order.
- Councilor Ray asked who else should be called in to respond to encampments? The alternative response team? If not, are other social service providers have capacity for outreach when encampments are reported.
 - HHS relies heavily on other providers but they are not here to enforce City ordinances; they operate for harm reduction, not enforcement or to move people along.
 - The PD started an alternative response unit as part of the behavioral health unit in 2020.
 - The alternative response position is vacant.
 - Currently have 2 full time staff in behavioral health unit.
 - Crisis workers are facing a critical shortage with one serving Southern Maine.

- Councilor Dion asked about the 40% of needles not being recovered in sharps boxes; where are they being collected?
 - Each needle/group of needles is logged into a GIS map.
 - They are picked up in porta-potties, parks, etc.
 - Parks, Public Works and staff across departments in maintenance positions pick up syringe litter.
- Councilor Dion would like more detailed location data shared on where needles are picked up.
- Councilor Chong said that we have 22 sharps boxes compared to the one in Bangor. Of the state's 11 needle exchange programs, Portland's collect the state's majority of needles. Our exchange is accessible so it we are a service center, making tracking needles difficult when people come here for services then go back to their home communities.

Councilor Chong said that Social Services staff don't have the capacity to do more outreach due to the volume of clients.

- Councilor Dion asked for Parks to provide a summary report on encampments in the city.
- Councilor Ray asked how the Point in Time numbers of people sleeping outside could be compared to what's seen in the encampments report.
 - The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is the last Wednesday in January.

Fire Update

- Month of September had 1,488 calls for services compares to 1,505 calls for service in 2020, down by 5%.
 - Down in Fire calls.
 - Added a Decon 1 unit to help disinfect ambulances after calls for service.
 - YTD Calls for services: 12,141 down 4% from 2020's YTD 12,672 calls for service.
- Facilities and Stations
 - Ocean Ave. renovations were completed in the beginning of September; Engine 11 is back in their district.
 - Completed 5 stations for air quality testing in response to some firefighters getting odd cancers.
 - Costs \$6,000-\$8,000 per station.
 - Tested: Munjoy Hill, Stevens Ave. Bram hall, and Peaks Island.
 - Munjoy Hill was the only one to come back above acceptable levels.
 - Riverton Station's renovation is under way. It is switching to natural gas and getting a new mechanical room and windows.
- Apparatus and Vehicles.
 - 5 new apparatus: first three, 2 engines and one ladder coming should arrive in April of 2022.
 - 2 new ambulances coming at the end of November. One is from an AFG grant and one from CIP funding.
 - Getting a pick-up truck with homeland security funding
- Staff
 - Graduated 13 recruits in September.

- o 8 firefighters lost due to vaccine mandate.
- o 12 vacancies.
- o Authorized to hire 18.
- o 100% vaccinated, including administrative staff.
- o 3C retirement will aid recruitment.
- o A Joint Job Fair with PD and dispatch is planned.
- o Recording a radio recruitment campaign.
- o Will start a fire academy in February to hire the 18.
- o 2 new positions posted through reallocation.
 - 1 fire marshal/fire prevention coordinator and a mental health EAP position. This position is only for first responders.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Chong asked if there are more needles being distributed, is there an observed increase in overdoses?
 - o Chief Gautreau will bring a 3, 6 and 9 month look back at overdose calls.
 - Numbers are fuzzy because the calls can change from an overdose call to a cardiac arrest call and can change if the overdose caused the cardiac arrest.
 - o Are there reports from OD Map?
 - PD can make a report.
- Chief Gautreau doesn't have staff dedicated for recruitment from outside the City and State.
- Councilor Ray said if we are looking for a trend in overdoses, to consider our limited data and the potential for compromised data; while distribution increased, covid also increased mental health and substance use issues. There may be a correlation with increased syringe distribution but can our data prove that?

Bayside & Deering Oaks Park Update

- Crime is up in those areas, including violent crime.
- Jail closures/restrictions and a lack of being able to arrest and remove people exacerbating the situations.
- Public nuisance issues that impact quality of life are responded to with a summons which doesn't change the dynamic of the situation.
- PD can only move people along.
- Trying to outreach and connect people to services.
- Cumberland County opening won't solve things but will help.
- Parks usually address the cleanup aspect.
- Portable toilets are deployed and staff were added to clean twice a day, seven days a week in this neighborhood.
 - o Urinals are full of needles and trash and are so full they can't be cleaned without being pumped.
 - o A contractor pumps the units three times per week but their workers are being accosted and the company is threatening to not continue unless the situation improves.
- Food and water are delivered and City staff picks up the trash off the ground despite there being trash cans.

- o Asking nonprofit partners that deliver food to stick around to help pick up trash from their meals and improve the dignity of people in the park.
- Picking up needles and trash is supplanting programming.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Dion asked the capacities of the jails
 - o Cumberland County is closed and not taking anyone, including violent offenders.
 - o York is taking violent offenders.
 - o Two Bridges is taking everyone but is very small.
- Councilor Ray said that the drop and go meals are not working. Covid closed meal seating's at Preble Street but dropping off meals is creating issues.
- Councilor Ray hopes the public toilets issue will lead to fixed, concrete, year-round structures for public toilets in very public areas that can be monitored.
- Councilor Ray asked about the number of single people in GA hotels: 211.
- Councilor Dion thinks it's great to do outreach and deliver services, but some people require being arrested; he is concerned that the PD is not able to remove people for public safety.
 - o Councilor Ray and Councilor Chong agreed.

Resettlement Update

- Resettlement Coordinator position is funded by Cumberland County CDBG dollars; the staff in the position is former Family Shelter Program Coordinator, Chelsea Hoskins.
- The use of hotels has spread people out making it less obvious we are experiencing Expo level numbers.
- Biggest challenge is capacity. Not all hotels are required to accept General Assistance and it is a challenge to bring new hotels on.
- Singles are returning or coming to Portland to be housed, as covid hotels in other towns close, taking local hotel rooms offline.
- We have heard as other municipalities close their shelters, they are concerned about hotel licenses being in jeopardy for being disorderly houses and going outside their temporary lodging land use.
- The chart shows we were seeing the same number of individuals now as the total number of families last fall.
- When people come across the border, they are identifying the Portland shelter address.
 - o Previously people would go to San Antonio or Dallas then request a location change with immigration.
 - o Now we are seeing people list here.
 - o Someone was detained on the 20th and then released the next day being paroled for 3 weeks to get to the South Portland immigration office.
- The GA hotel numbers in August and September cost \$1 million/month. This is paid with FEMA dollars through the end of December but after that the City will need to pay for 30% of that with the State paying the rest.
 - o Monthly meetings with the State starting this month.
- Chelsea Hoskins, Resettlement Coordinator explained the position: coordinate and streamline services with a long-term goal of coordinating housing placements.

- New Mainers may include asylum seekers flying in or crossing a border as well as newly arriving to the country presenting to the Family Shelter of other immigration statuses.
- Families placed across multiple hotels due to capacity, spreading resources even thinner.
- Labor shortages are impacting the nonprofits serving families.
- Community stakeholder meeting identified:
 - Gaps
 - Duplication of Efforts
 - Current Capacity.
- Needs
 - Warm Clothing Distribution
 - Food Access and Distribution
 - Medical Enrollment Streamlining
 - Transportation
 - Housing
- Director Dow is concerned that families will not get the service they need because staff are spread so thin. We were so successful at the Expo because of wrap around services.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Dion said that people saw the Expo as an incidental event but the numbers show a continued trend.
 - Do we have any influence in triaging arrivals?
 - Where will people be housed when they get here?
 - The Mayor should work with other mayors to get money that can be turned into tangible resources.
- Councilor Ray asked if there are newly arriving singles.
 - There are.
 - Newly arriving singles are not counted in the family shelter numbers; there are not many singles.
- Immigration status is preventing people from getting housing.
- During the Expo, we had the Portland Community Support Fund and a lot of Volunteers.
 - This happening more quietly in hotels.
 - Are we seeking volunteers, is the United Way coordinating this?
 - We have not reached out to the United Way for volunteers.
 - Councilor Ray thinks the Mayor should bring this to the United Way in addition to other mayors.
 - We need other municipalities time.
 - The situation is bigger than the Expo but we don't have the same level of help from other communities and community members.
- Councilor Chong agreed that this not a Portland issue, it is a state issue; the Mayor should meet with the Governor for support from the state.
 - Navigating asylum seekers is completely different from refugees because there is not federal money or eligibility.
 - This will be a \$3.6 million price tag if the FEMA money stops; that is a state issue.

- o GA should be reformed.
 - Portland shouldn't be penalized for helping people from around the state.
- o We need the state's assistance to create a resettlement program with state dollars to house people throughout the state.
- o Portland is only 5% of the state's population; we can't do this alone.
- Councilor Dion said that under the War on Drugs, each municipality contributed a member of their government to work on that issue; if we want to take on the resettlement challenge, there should be human resources behind it, such as staff from multiple municipalities working with the Resettlement Coordinator.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Flavored Tobacco Ban

- Kristen Goodrich, Tobacco Prevention Coordinator presented.
- Flavored tobacco products target advertising to minorities.
- Combustible tobacco product use has declined.
- 85% of young people are using e-cigarettes.
- Tobacco use is the leading cause of death in the USA.
- Flavors target youth.
 - o The flavors are what's advertised; when surveyed, youth in Maine are reporting they thought they were just vaping flavors when they were vaping nicotine.
- Mint and Menthol disproportionately target vulnerable populations.
- Recommendation
 - o The Public Health Division recommends a full flavor ban on all tobacco products, including mint and menthol flavors.
- Enforcement
 - o Bans the sale, display, marketing and advertising of flavored tobacco products.
 - o Enforced by Public Health Director.
 - o Civil violation with a fine of \$100 to \$500.
- Flavor Bans have been proven to be effective public health strategy.
- Councilor Dion asked if public health will engage in outreach to retailers before enforcement?
 - o Yes.

Public comment opened at 7:30 PM.

- Dasha of 305 Commercial Street is a volunteer with the American Cancer Society, Cancer Action Network, supports the ban on the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Maine; tobacco is responsible for 30% of cancer deaths in Maine. Maine has the 6th highest case of tobacco related cancer and 11th in tobacco related death. These statistics represent our friends, neighbors and loved ones. At work, they help people diagnosed with lung cancer apply for social security disability. Clients suffer symptoms that limit their ability to live normal lives and require aggressive treatment. More than 1 in 4 Maine children use tobacco; 4/5 youth started using tobacco with flavored tobacco products. Portland should lead in protecting kids from a lifetime of addiction.
- Richard Veillieux, resident of Portland, American Heart Association volunteer, and public health professional spoke in support of the ordinance to end the sale of flavored

tobacco products in Portland. Richard has been involved in tobacco use related public health issues for 30 years and there is good evidence that this ordinance will be effective. We made great progress combatting the tobacco industry before that was flipped upside down with youth tobacco use. This is an opportunity to make the city and the state a healthier place to live.

- Dr. Marguerite Pennoyer is the current chair of the American Lung Association's Maine leadership board. The lung association supports the end of all sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products; this ordinance is one of the most important public health measures. We have made tremendous progress in lowering smoking rates but e cigarettes increase temper that progress. Almost all tobacco uses begin their use in youth and young adulthood. Flavored products are the reason youth started and continue to use tobacco products. More than one in four high school students vape daily. The industry is using flavoring in e cigarettes and cigars are attracting youth. They support the ordinance.
- Dr. Florence Edwards is a dentist living in Portland and board member of Equality Maine. and supports the ban on flavored tobacco. She grew up reading Jet magazine, a magazine for American descendants of slavery, most black Americans, where there were full page ads of black people smoking. LGBT smoke at higher rates and as a result of the related conditions suffered higher rates of severe covid. There are over 15,000 flavored tobacco products. She wrote an editorial on the subject. Note:
<https://www.sunjournal.com/2021/05/05/dr-florence-edwards-tobacco-industry-uses-menthol-mint-candy-flavors-to-lure-hook-black-brown-lgbtq-youth/>
- Matt Moonen, a resident of Thomas street and executive director of Equality Maine. They have worked on health equity issues for LGBT people. LGBT people suffer disproportionately high rates of tobacco related disease. The tobacco industry has sponsored pride events and marketed to the community. RJ Reynolds once had a marketing campaign called project SCUM: sub-culture urban marketing targeting gay men and homeless people. The industry knows 95% of smokers' use start before age 21. It is obvious they are targeting people on the receiving end of discrimination and stigma as a coping mechanism.

Public comment closed at 7:50 PM.

Committee questions and comments.

- Councilor Ray is happy see draft chapter 17 language to vote on at the next meeting.
 - She would like a fiscal note included if it would cost over \$50,000.
 - It will not cost more than \$50,000.
 - What happened at the state with these bills?
 - LD1190 in the 129th legislature and held over to the 130th?
 - LD1550 passed but wasn't put in place because funding was cut?
- Councilor Dion and Councilor Chong could vote tonight but will wait for the draft at the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Next Meeting: November 9, 2021

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:55 PM.