

Minutes
Remote Economic Development Committee
May 14, 2020

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 Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Portland City Council was held on Thursday, May 14, 2020, at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the Committee was its Chair Councilor Justin Costa and members Councilors Tae Chong, Nicholas Mavodones, and Spencer Thibodeau. Also present was Mayor Kate Snyder and Councilors Kim Cook and Belinda Ray. Present from the City staff were Public Works Director Chris Branch, Assistant City Manager Heather Brown, Police Chief Frank Clark, Senior Planner Nelle Donaldson, Associate Corporation Counsel Michael Goldman, Communications Director Jessica Grondin, Business Licensing Manager Jessica Hanscombe, Deputy Director of Parks Recreation and Facilities Ethan Hipple, City Manager Jon Jennings, OEO Outreach and Initiatives Coordinator Angelina Klouthis, Assistant to the City Manager for Constituent Services Dena Libner, Economic Development Director Greg Mitchell, Senior Executive Assistant Lori Paulette, and Parking Manager John Peverada.

Chair Costa welcomed all to this one topic Agenda meeting, that being:

Review and vote on a recommendation to the City Council regarding expanded outdoor seating for restaurants and retail, including closing Portland streets.

Chair Costa said that this item has been the topic of conversation in the community of late. The Committee will hear from staff, then there will be an opportunity for public comment, and possible vote on a recommendation to the City Council for its meeting on May 18th.

Mr. Jennings noted that the Committee has a hard stop at 5:15 for a 5:30 Finance Committee meeting so would summarize the recommendation to expand outdoor capacity to support businesses in their efforts to re-open responsibly. One update is that there is no need to close Cotton Street. There is one restaurant who has indicated that it would not be expanding outside. Middle Street will see an expansion of sidewalk area for use, as well as parklets at a reduced fee. Seating in parking lots will also be accommodated. Businesses can submit plans and the City will review and expedite the process.

Regarding Exchange Street closing from Fore Street to Middle Street, and Middle Street to Federal Street, Mr. Jennings said that he has worked with management at the Temple Street Garage to have 24-hour access from the Temple Street side.

He also noted that the City staff's approach is strategic and cautious, to keep the City moving and for public safety, including emergency vehicles.

Councilor Mavodones asked how will the rules and regulations be maintained, and Mr. Jennings noted that Business Licensing Manager Jessica Hanscombe has overall responsibility for enforcement that will be in place, noting again that this proposal is for both restaurants and retail.

Councilor Thibodeau asked, regarding Exchange Street, would a restaurant/retail shop have the ability to extend to the end of the sidewalk and into the Street.

Mr. Jennings noted that the sidewalks need to maintain a 4-foot walkway for ADA purposes and indicated that tables and chairs can extend into Exchange Street.

Councilor Thibodeau asked if parklet fees would be reduced, and Mr. Jennings said that parklet fees were originally \$5,000 per space, the difference from what the City gets per parking space. It is lower now and no other fees are associated with it, but no fees are to be paid upfront, allowing 60-days to pay for cash flow to return. Outdoor dining will have no cost.

Councilor Ray asked about sidewalk space and can businesses negotiate for space, and Mr. Jennings indicated that the City is not being as strict right now and there is room for negotiating.

Councilor Ray asked if there was any change for food trucks, and Mr. Jennings said that there has been no change.

Councilor Ray commented that the City could look into expanding food trucks off peninsula. She then mentioned Portland, Oregon's Slow Streets Safe Streets that supports physical distancing and the re-opening process.

Mr. Jennings said that the City is looking for any and all opportunities, noting that some streets are owned by the State, which also regulates the speed limits.

Mayor Snyder noted that the draft Order in the packet gives City administration flexibility to use its judgment in working with any business to increase capacity. Other neighborhoods may want something similar. This pilot program is temporary and the City will assess it and watch it closely as it moves forward.

Mr. Jennings agreed. There will be adjustments as needed as the City moves forward on this and appreciated the Administration having the flexibility to use its judgment for the program.

Chair Costa thanked staff for bringing this pilot program forward quickly and emphasized the unprecedented challenges we are all facing. A pilot program like this would generally take multiple meetings and public hearings, so, again, appreciated the speed to get this here today. There will be fine-tuning, and the draft Council Order gives daily flexibility for the public. Chair Costa then opened the meeting for public comment.

Mike Wiley, chef at Hugo's, thanked the City and staff for their creativity. He and his colleagues are thrilled with this idea, noting it is source of solace in very uncertain times.

Casey Gilbert, Executive Director at Portland Downtown, also thanked the City staff for this pilot program. She reviewed it with her Executive Committee and it is happy with this. Ms.

Gilbert said that she has also heard from her constituency support and some non-support, while hoping all will be pleasantly surprised and possibly expanded and offering PD's support and assistance where needed.

Quincy Hentzel, President of the Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce, thanked the City for this assistance for small businesses and thinking outside of the box. It will be extremely helpful and the Chamber will work with the City to help weather this crisis.

Kara Wooldrik of Portland Trails agreed and commended the City for its openness to pivoting when needed, and noted that off peninsula areas could also benefit and to keep that in mind. In closing, she said that it has been good partnering with the City in its efforts during this time.

Steve Scharf, representing Portland's Bike Committee, noted support for closing these streets. The only concern he has is with ADA issues to access storefronts for those impaired, including the blind.

Mary Scott, Executive Director at Portland Buy Local, noted appreciation for the City's flexibility in working with businesses in this pilot program. Nothing will be perfect right away, but Portland Buy Local totally supports this program and also noted other neighborhoods may also want to do something similar. She thanked the City and will follow-up with other questions she has received from businesses.

Erin Kiley, commercial landlord in downtown, said that this pilot program is a lifeline for the businesses. It will help to bolster consumer confidence and to help businesses to survive. Any fees that can be waived by the City would be helpful.

Eric Freeman, resident of Portland, thanked the City for their creativity in this pilot program which will help to promote and sustain businesses.

Seeing no further public comment, Chair Costa closed the public comment session.

A motion was made by Councilor Mavodones, seconded by Councilor Thibodeau to forward this to the City Council with a recommendation for approval.

Chair Costa reiterated thanks to City Staff in moving this program to the top of their plates, which plates are very full with this crisis. The turnaround time has been exemplary and hoped that this experimental pilot program will assist to sustain local businesses and bear fruit. He also noted the flexibility for the program for all unique circumstances; the dialogue will continue as this moves forward.

Councilor Ray understood the request to waive fees, but noted that the City and School Department is also struggling during the pandemic with major revenue losses. Costs have been pared down in this program.

Councilor Chong appreciated the City staff's thorough thought process on this. Reducing fees is a show of good faith by the City, and the City will also incur additional costs for the program, including enforcement. This is a fair approach for all.

Seeing no further comments, a vote was then taken on the motion and it passed unanimously.

On motion then made by Councilor Chong, seconded by Councilor Mavodones, the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully, Lori Paulette