

Minutes
Remote Economic Development Committee
September 15, 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 Tuesday, September 15, 2020, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. Present from the Committee was its Chair Councilor Justin Costa and members Councilors Tae Chong, Nicholas Mavodones, and Spencer Thibodeau. Mayor Kate Snyder joined the meeting as noted herein. Present from the City staff were Housing and Community Development Division Director Mary Davis, Major Frank Gorham, Acting Inspections and Permitting Director Jessica Hanscombe, Office of Economic Opportunity Director Julia Trujillo Luengo, Economic Development Director Greg Mitchell, Senior Executive Assistant Lori Paulette, School Facilities Manager Doug Sherwood, and Associate Corporation Counsel Anne Torregrossa.

Item #1: Review and vote on August 18, 2020, draft meeting Minutes.

On motion made by Councilor Chong, seconded by Councilor Mavodones, the Committee voted unanimously to accept the Minutes as published.

Item #2: Discussion and Committee direction related to the Downtown

Entertainment Overlay District

Chair Costa noted that the City Council requested the EDC review possibly amending entertainment licensing and the Downtown Entertainment Overlay District to allow additional

venues in the Old Port. This was in response to a license application that did not meet the 100-foot requirement between venues.

Ms. Hanscombe noted that in 2006, the Downtown Overlay District started, requiring a 100-foot distance from entertainment venues. In 2018, Chapter 4 was rewritten and the 100-foot distance remained, noting that the Police Department agrees with that requirement. It helped with less Police calls for assaults and basically changed the Old Port to be a safe place.

Ms. Hanscombe then referred to Anne Torregrossa's memo in the packet that had six options to move forward from keeping it as is to Ordinance amendments to Chapter 4 and/or 14.

Major Frank Gorham from the Police Department said that with the 2006 Downtown Overlay District placed into existence, the Old Port started to see a change in behaviors. Prior to that, significant Police resources were used to keep the peace, as these entertainment venues were one after the other. The 100' distance was key and amending it will be a step back for the Old Port, creating more assaults and violence. The Police Department's recommendation is to keep it as it is now.

Councilor Mavodones said that he was on the City Council when the 100-foot distance was created, and it has worked so preferred to keep it as it is. Regarding measurements, he suggested that perhaps staff confirm the way to measure so that it is consistent and concrete.

Councilor Thibodeau agreed, noting this is not a priority as Portland and the world gradually comes out of COVID.

Councilor Chong concurred, adding that Portland is now on lists for best places to visit and needs to keep that brand.

Chair Costa agreed with the majority guidance, noting that he was open to the last option but is not a priority, with that last option being to create a new category of entertainment licenses

and request the Planning Board to consider modifying the Entertainment Overlay District to allow holders of that new category of license to operate not subject to the 100-foot distance restriction. At this time, however, he is not hearing that there are concerns so would also agree to leave it as is. It could be a conversation in the future noting that traditional categories of businesses are changing.

Chair Costa closed noting Committee consensus was to recommend it remain as is.

Item #3: Update of City Pilot Tax Increment Financing Workforce Training

Program and City staff recommendation on unused funds.

Mr. Mitchell indicated that Ms. Luengo will provide an update, and then he will provide staff recommendation on unused funds for direction from the Committee.

Ms. Luengo said both recipients of TIF funding, Portland Adult Education (PAE) and Coastal Counties Workforce (CCW), had individual timelines and different challenges when the pandemic hit. She noted that City provided \$100,000 in TIF Funds to PAE, and then issued an RFP for a pilot workforce training program investing up to \$150,000 of TIF Funds. Coastal Counties Workforce (CCW) was the only respondent and offered a Pilot program in conjunction with Maine Health. Both PAE's and CCW's focus was on the immigrant and refugee communities, which communities need assistance with training and connections to specific industries and are not always supported by Federal and State funds so this TIF investment filled that gap.

Ms. Trujillo Luengo then described the key highlights and results from both PAE and CCW as noted in her memo to the Committee.

Councilor Chong noted that PAE's goal was to serve 84 in their program and in actuality

served 99, asking how they adjusted to exceed targets, as well as their offering job advice and support services.

Ms. Love from PAE noted that it closed its doors 3/16/2020 due to COVID and shifted to online training which proved to be a success for the new programs for teller training, training in the field of education for employment in school systems, as well as intensive English training. Should PAE be provided additional TIF funding, it can increase the virtual enrollment. Ms. Love then gave a successful example of a New Maine Teller graduate who was a Teller in the Congo and was working here as a personal care attendant at \$13/hour. She is now employed at Bangor Savings Bank at \$15.50/hour with benefits. Ms. Love also indicated, regarding job advice and support services, that often a teacher is the employment advisor helping to prepare resumes, interviewing skills, and job connections. Regarding personal support services, PAE has connections with support services for their students.

Adrian Cohen at CCW thanked all for this opportunity. She described the Pilot Program for the Career Navigator at MaineHealth to work with incumbent front-line staff for career advancement and assistance with planning and expanding training pathways. The Career Navigator was learning the target audience, working one-on-one with incumbent employees, and their needs when the pandemic hit which hindered this program and resulted in CCW spending less than the budgeted \$150,000.

Councilor Chong, noting MaineHealth is one of the City's largest employers, questioned how many of its employees are under-employed in the environmental, food, and linen services.

Jennifer O'Leary, Manager of Workforce Development at MaineHealth, described how those front line services are integrated into many departments at MaineHealth, with each

department working with staff for additional career opportunities, including under-employed individuals.

Ms. Luengo summarized that connections with employers and potential employees is now stagnant due to the pandemic. National discourse, however, has been raised on these issues.

Councilor Mavodones thanked all, and noted support for the staff recommendation to retain the approximately \$58,000 under-spent from CCW for possible use in the FY2022 budget process.

Chair Costa agreed, noting these two were pilot programs and thanked Ms. Luengo for the highlights of the accomplishment by each organization.

After discussion and upon forthcoming confirmation by the City Manager, Chair Costa noted that during the FY2021 budget process, \$100,000 was set aside in the Downtown TOD TIF for a continuation of a workforce training program, and the \$58,000 under discussion here has the recommendation from staff to retain for future uses and possibly for FY2022 for additional workforce training.

Councilor Mavodones thanked the Chair for his leadership on this Pilot Program, starting in 2018, and then noted his support of staff's recommendation to hold the \$58,000 at this time.

Councilor Chong noted his support to reallocate the \$58,000 in FY2021 to PAE in support of their ability to pivot during this pandemic. Their programs will help those at poverty level to obtain more skills and thus more earning power to get out of poverty, including asylum seekers who have degrees in their native country and need assistance and guidance to move into the job system.

Chair Costa agreed with Councilor Mavodones and staff's recommendation, noting the Finance Committee can decide it if it is feasible.

Councilor Thibodeau supported staff's recommendation, and the City Council can discuss/confirm on Monday whether there is \$100,000 set aside in the Downtown TOD TIF for workforce training in FY2021.

(Mayor Snyder joined the meeting.)

Chair Costa thanked all for this discussion, and PAE and CCW for participating in this Pilot program for workforce training.

Item #4 – Public Hearing on possible disposition of City-owned property located at 157 Brackett and 176 Clark Streets – Committee to provide direction to staff.

Chair Costa noted that the Committee members have received feedback on this item, which came from the Housing Committee. It is here for review and recommendation to the City Council, for the Council's meeting on October 5, as this Committee handles land transactions. There is history on this back to 2014.

Ms. Davis provided a brief summary of the history of this item noting that in 2014, a developer contacted City staff about the Brackett Street parking area as part of an overall plan to develop Joy Place. An RFP was advertised, which included restrictions to address parking needs of the City, school safety, and safety improvements. It proved to not be feasible to the City or the developer to use the Brackett Street parking lot. At the time there was robust discussions with all involved, including the neighborhood.

Chair Costa thanked Ms. Davis and then opened the meeting for public comment.

Joanne Bisson of 15 Park Street, living there 15 years, noted that she was opposed to the City selling and developing the property, and that there is insufficient parking for the Reiche School and its events, as well as for the community.

Kristi Camps of 174 Clark St, also there for 15 years, concurred. Development of up to 5-stories would also be an imposition on the neighborhood. She supports increasing housing but not on these actively used lots.

David Doyle agreed with both, noting the already over-crowded parking areas. The neighborhood also lost two parking areas in the past couple years and urged the Committee/City Council not to sell.

Todd Backus, renting at 174 Clark, agreed, noting removing these parking areas would be detrimental to the neighborhood and school.

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

Councilor Thibodeau made a motion to recommend to the City Council to not dispose of either property; Councilor Mavodones seconded the motion.

Councilor Thiobdeau thanked the Housing Committee for their work over the last few years to increase housing in Portland. There would be many issues if these two parking areas were removed for both the school and neighborhood. Given the times we are in, and for the school and community space, it makes sense to hold onto them as important uses in the area.

Councilor Mavodones agreed and noted that back in the 90's these lots were heavily used and still today. He thanked the Housing Committee for their work to increasing housing, but these two properties should be retained by the City.

Councilor Chong and Chair Costa agreed, with the Chair noting he heard of this back in 2014 when he was on the School Board.

The Chair then asked for a vote on the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Item #5 – Update of Housing Committee’s discussion and direction to staff related to possible City property disposition of 622 Auburn Street and 0 Gray Road.

Ms. Davis summarized the two properties, noting that 622 Auburn Street has 4.85 acres of land, and 0 Falmouth has 13.3 acres, both of which have challenging topography.

Ms. Davis then noted that the City-staff of COTAPC (City-Owned and Tax-Acquired Property Committee) recently recommended to the City Manager that the City sell these two properties together as they abut each other, and the City Manager supports that recommendation.

Ms. Davis then updated the EDC that the Housing Committee expressed interest in sole sourcing this to whom the EDC recommended a PSA for the 165 Lambert Street property, that is to Maine Cooperative Development Partners. The Housing Committee also requested that staff notify the EDC of this approach as it may be relevant to discussions regarding the disposition of City-owned property at 43 and 91 Douglass Street. In closing, Ms. Davis indicated that the City Manager is requesting direction from this Committee for the method of sale.

Councilor Mavodones said that it is a good idea to sell these two together but was uncomfortable with sole source approach, preferring that this be sold through the RFP process.

Chair Costa noted agreement among all Committee members to move forward with the RFP process.

On motion then made by Councilor Chong, seconded by Councilor Thibodeau, the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at approximately 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully, Lori Paulette