

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Committee on Sustainability and Transportation
Councilor Andrew Zarro (D4), Chair
Councilor Victoria Pelletier (D2)
Councilor Roberto Rodriguez (At-Large)

Minutes March 9, 2022

Members Present: Councilor Zarro, Councilor Pelletier

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Christine Grimando, Bill Needelman, Erin Ferrell, Nell Donaldson, Bruce Hyman, Jen Ladd

Meeting called to order.

January Minutes

Councilor Pelletier moves to approve the January meeting minutes. Councilor Zarro seconds the motion. January minutes passed unanimously, 2-0.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon

Officially launched the Electrify Everything! Campaign to be a one-stop resource for residents to switch to electric appliances and go solar. ReVision Energy has partnered with us to provide discounts to Electrify Everything! participants as well as scholarships for low-income households. We are almost at the one year anniversary of compost drop sites. The Sustainability Office is requesting feedback from residents who have used the drop sites. EVgo is installing multiple chargers around Portland. Workshops were held to educate about the new energy stretch code. February Coffee and Climate covered the topic of energy efficient housing with guest speaker Jesse Thompson from Kaplan and Thompson. The Swedish Counsel General visited Portland and the Office hosted her in a tour around Portland, highlighting major climate action initiatives in the city. Rewiring America will be joining us for the March edition of Coffee and Climate to talk about beneficial electrification.

Committee Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilor Pelletier asked about the outreach strategy for Electrify Everything! and the composting program. Will Electrify Everything! materials be available in multiple languages? *We plan to work with the Office of Economic Opportunity to make sure there are translated options of key materials.*

Councilor Zarro asks how someone can sign up for Electrify Everything!? *Residents can go to the Electrify webpage where there is a form they can fill out and tell us what specific appliances they are interested in. The office plans to do direct outreach with Opportunity Alliance and Portland Housing to find out who to reach out to. We are training the Portland Climate Action Team who have volunteered to talk with interested residents.*

Councilor Pelletier asks if people can go to City Hall to pick up a hard copy? *That is a great suggestion. We will print out that form for people who come into City Hall.*

Councilor Zarro asks how renters can be involved. *Renters can participate in community solar and certain weatherization opportunities. This is an evolving program that we hope to bring in more renters as well.*

Councilor Pelletier asks if the office has partnered with any schools to get information to their parents? *We have not yet but that is a great opportunity.*

Councilor Zarro asks if the Electrify Everything! discounts are in addition to Efficiency Maine rebates? *Yes, ReVision Energy will help residents identify all available rebates and help residents apply for those rebates.*

Harbor Dredging Project Updates

Presented by Bill Needelman

All harbors dredge eventually and the piers, wharfs, marinas and ramps of Portland Harbor have not been dredged in decades. Dredging maintains a safe and functional water depth supporting commercial and recreational vessel access. Access allows loading and unloading, berthing (boat parking,) vessel service and repair, marine construction, and the transport of goods and people. Vessel access within the subject project is also the economic lifeline and transportation link between the islands of Casco Bay and mainland services (representing over 1.3 million passenger trips on Casco Bay Lines alone.) The subject project proposes to restore and expand vessel access, while improving the marine ecology by removing and responsibly disposing of contaminants.

The Portland Harbor Dredge and CAD project is a tangible example of this collaborative platform described in OCF. With its goal of stabilizing both the infrastructure and financial future of both cities' waterfronts, the project will be foundational to future resiliency planning on both sides of the Fore River.

In addition to creating a more resilient waterfront, dredging in Portland Harbor will address a legacy of pesticide use, industrial waste, and historically uncontrolled urban runoff. The remnants of past decades of past practices are held in marine sediments alongside of working waterfront infrastructure, creating a barrier to their responsible removal and disposal. The subject project is fully permitted to create a new disposal facility – the Confined Aquatic Disposal (CAD) cell – to address disposal needs.

Councilor Comment on Harbor Dredging Project Updates

Councilor Zarro asks that since this is the third time going up for the grant funding for this project, – How are the private partners contributing to this project to guarantee that we are successful? *Every private business is responsible for their own permitting. They will be responsible for moving their materials. They do have to pay a per cubic yard fee.*

Do you have projections on how much waterfront will be affected over time if the project is not completed? *The areas near Commercial St are most affected but we do not have enough data to know to what extent.*

Portland Rapid Transit Study

Presented by Chris Chop and Kristina Egan of GPCOG

GPCOG is a regional planning organization and houses the Federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization that coordinates transportation planning and investment decisions with the state, municipalities and public transportation partners. Rapid transit is a form of public transportation on a fixed route that includes features that improve the speed, capacity, reliability, and quality of the service. Examples include buses, streetcar, and commuter rail. Features of rapid transit include elevated platforms, enhanced stations, off-board fare collection, traffic signal priority, prominent brand/identity, dedicated lanes.

From 2010-2020, Gorham, Westbrook, and Portland were some of the state's fastest growing communities. Challenges from the increased growth include increased traffic congestion and travel delays, increased emissions, housing challenges, infrastructure strains, municipal expenses. Rapid transit would provide reliable transportation choices, attract new riders, reduce traffic and emissions, help recover from the pandemic, encourage development near transit, protect conservation areas and farmland.

Rapid transit corridors identified in Transit Tomorrow include: Gorham-Westbrook-Portland; Biddeford-Saco-Portland; Brunswick-Portland; North Windham-Portland-South Portland. The Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Corridor would help address people and jobs and equity concerns and connect USM, Rock Row, and Maine Medical Center.

Scope of work would include environmental inventory, alternative analysis, and funding applications. Funding for rapid transit comes from federal discretionary grant programs. RAISE is an example of the federal grant program.

Public Comment on Portland Rapid Transit Study

Bill Weber is excited about the project. Bill's group, PCAT, is very focused on emissions reductions and getting people out of their cars and in alternative transit. Bill asks if the study looked at ghg emissions reductions? Alternatives analysis should look at what would happen if nothing is done.

Councilor Comment on Portland Rapid Transit Study

Councilor Pelletier asks if community transportation leaders were included in stakeholder engagement. *The Community Transportation Leaders program gives people an opportunity to bring additional voices to the table and connect them with different transportation groups in our region. The new cohort is working on other transportation projects and it would be helpful to have them connect on rapid transit and work with the consultant when they come on board. Another great benefit of the rapid transit project is that it will compete with the car. Do we have traffic and population numbers for 2021 and 2022? We do not have that information but there is a lot of big data out there that measures traffic movements. In Boston, we see peak commuting periods have shifted since the pandemic.*

Councilor Zarro notes that the region has grown and asks about how this project intersects with the Gorham Connector project? *They are both big regional transportation investments. The Maine Turnpike intends to use toll revenue to build a limited access roadway between Gorham and the area near the Maine Mall. Rapid transit looks to connect neighborhoods and lessen the number of cars on the road. The Connector approach would be to move vehicles from one*

location to another. The Turnpike Authority is one of the stakeholders for the rapid transit study. The two paths seem to be in conflict with each other. What would the environmental inventory and alternative analysis be for the Connector? *GPCOG is involved with many projects in the region to look towards the future and create sustainable prosperity. We do not know the answers to many of the questions about impacts of the Gorham Connector. The timelines are different. There is more exploration that needs to be done.* Councilor Zarro notes it will be worth it to explore these concerns and questions. The committee can craft a resolve for the council. We would want to know the environmental and equity impacts of the rapid transit and Gorham Connector.

Committee Recommendation of Council Support of the Portland Rapid Transit Study

Councilor Pelletier motions to recommend the council support moving forward with the Portland Rapid Transit Study and additionally request more data and additional information on impacts. Council Zarro seconds. Recommendation passes unanimously.

Review Complete Streets Policy

Presented by Nell Donaldson, Bruce Hyman

Complete Streets Policy was passed unanimously by the council in 2012. The goal of the policy was to reduce chronic disease by allowing more opportunities for people to move around Portland. The policy considers all users of any age and all abilities. Complete streets looks at how equitable access to public streets/transportation is.

Woodfords Corner is a good example of this policy in action. This project aimed to make the pedestrian experience safer by reducing pedestrian exposure to traffic which in turn also reduced traffic congestion. Deering Center roundabout opened in 2021. This project increased accessibility across multiple streets as well as reducing traffic congestion. The project expanded green space and made a safer environment for cyclists. Park Ave road diet with separated bike lanes provided a safer environment for cyclists and pedestrians. A reduction in crashes is a result of this project.

Current projects that implement this policy include: Morrill's Corner Smart Corridor, Stevens Ave Paving, East Coast Greenway Bikeway, Forest ave/Smart Corridor, Woodfords Corner EPS, Somerset St/Bayside Trail Extension, Washington Ave Streetscape, Elm St Paving, Forest Ave Smart Corridor PDR, West Commercial St Pathway, Libbytown Safety and Accessibility Project.

A decade after adoption, it is clear that the city's complete streets policy, in conjunction with other city initiatives, has had a profound effect on Portland's transportation network. The city has upgraded ramps and sidewalks, installed crosswalks, expanded the multi-use pathway network, and striped new bike lanes across our neighborhoods. Successes of these projects include: interdepartmental collaboration, multimodal advances, leveraging of funding. Challenges of implementing this policy include timing and adequate funding, competing design goals, and transformation takes time.

Councilor Comment on Review Complete Streets Policy

Councilor Zarro asks about prioritization of the projects when it comes to applying federal funding. *There is not enough funding and these projects involve large investments. One strategy is realizing there will be large amounts of federal funding and having projects ready to go when that funding becomes available. The conversations are happening on a local and regional level. Another strategy is leveraging money from other projects to get other projects completed. Paving projects are good opportunities to improve bike lanes. This helps to save money on the bike lane projects.* Partnership between the state and the municipality seems to have some friction. How can we leverage the partnership with the state to implement more complete streets projects? *There have been conversations to identify how state and city projects can help achieve state and city climate goals. The state also has a complete streets policy and an aggressive climate action plan. There is a way to balance the competing goals and the conversation is evolving in a positive direction. Jen Ladd adds that they will continue advocating for these important projects.*

Councilor Pelletier moves to adjourn.