

24-006
PUBLIC WORKS AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024 @ 7:00 P.M.

Attendees: Councillor Anna Callahan, Committee Chair; Councillor Emily Lazzaro, Committee Vice-Chair; Council President Isaac “Zac” Bears; Councillor George Scarpelli; City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Chair Callahan called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. on January 31, 2024 in the Medford City Council Chambers on the second floor of Medford City Hall, and via Zoom. The start of the meeting was delayed by a committee meeting immediately beforehand. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the City Council’s governing agenda for this term, and to discuss papers referred to the Committee.

Chair Callahan thanked participants for attending. She highlighted the governing agenda and the documents and papers in committee. She said we want to provide residents with some awareness of what the City is going to do for items such as street and sidewalk repair.

President Bears said that this is one of the top three issues in the city. He said most of our residents are upset about the conditions of our streets and sidewalks.

Councillor Scarpelli said we have provided a lot of bonding for roads and sidewalks and then the roads and sidewalks continue to deteriorate. Councillor Scarpelli said that the Administration comes to the Council with loan orders and it is frustrating when the work can’t get done because of a lack of licensed contractors. Councillor Scarpelli advocated having a sidewalk and hot-top crew year-round. Councillor Lazzaro wanted to keep an eye on how much we are requesting City Staff to work on these requests.

President Bears moved that we create a new paper in this committee to request an update on (1) the pavement management plan and sidewalk management plan from the DPW, including the financial plan recommendation that the City adopted based on the pavement and sidewalk management plan; (2) what the city has spent on pavement management and sidewalk management since the plans were released; (3) how much was spent from authorized bond orders, if funds were spent on streets and sidewalks other than those initially listed for the bond orders; (4) and when the pavement and sidewalk management plans may be updated (Councillor Scarpelli second)—approved.

Councillor Scarpelli moved to ask the DPW Commissioner to do a cost analysis for road and sidewalk repairs, and to request a sidewalk and hot-top crew to do that work in-house, and to look at the costs for “Luke Sidewalker”, and to have that be added into the duties (Councillor Lazzaro second)—approved.

On facilities and equipment, President Bears said we are trying to get a handle on all the facilities we own, the annual costs to maintain them, and the costs to get them into a state of good repair. He said we have the Hegner Center, we have a new library and a new police station, and we have fire stations. He said we have 80-100 year old windows and punched-out panels in City Hall. He said we're going to be building a new fire headquarters. He said that the money from the casino should have been going to fund the Chevalier. He said he would be happy to take the lead on this project.

Councillor Scarpelli said he doesn't know if we can do this job unless we know what is needed for each of our facilities. He said in the past, there has been a comprehensive plan. He said he has yet to meet the Facilities Director. He said he would like to see what other municipalities have in terms of facilities management. He said the Medford School Department used to have its own maintenance team. He said we might need to ask the Mayor to bring in a consultant to review all our buildings.

Chair Callahan said she completely agrees on the need for some sort of assessment and having a new Facilities Director is the right time to have this discussion. Chair Callahan discussed plans for parks and squares.

On ordinances, President Bears said that the Lead Ordinance hasn't been formally introduced yet but he would be willing to work on this with the DPW Commissioner and Water and Sewer Superintendent.

Chair Callahan said that there could be a home rule petition to increase excise taxes on large vehicles. President Bears said that larger, heavier vehicles damage our roads more quickly than lighter vehicles do. He said the intent is to ask the legislature to let us assess our excise tax based on the size of the vehicles.

Chair Callahan discussed Public Utility Accountability. Councillor Scarpelli said that in certain utility work, homeowners now need to pay contractors to pave curb to curb. He asked if utilities on their own work are mandated to do curb to curb restoration. He said he doesn't believe they are, and that this is not fair that a private homeowner has to pay to repave curb to curb when a utility does not need to do the same thing.

Councillor Scarpelli said a big complaint is that utilities are not being held accountable and we also do not have a Clerk of the Works. He said he wanted a fee to be added to roadwork to pay for a Clerk of the Works.

Councillor Lazzaro said that gas leaks are also important issues. She said that Somerville had the highest density of gas leaks. She said that there was a bill in the legislature.

The City Clerk discussed an ordinance passed by the Council several years ago, and said that utilities informed him that they do not even need to respond to him under this ordinance.

Councillor Scarpelli said that there were a number of gas leaks on Harvard Street. Councillor Lazzaro said we could pick up the work that has been done without replicating it. She said she would be happy to do that, working with Councillor Scarpelli. Councillor Scarpelli recommended getting an update from National Grid.

Councillor Scarpelli moved to ask the City Engineer for what the utility standards are for utilities opening the streets, and for private residents who need the streets opened for work on their water lines and other needs (President Bears second)—approved.

Councillor Lazzaro moved to be the co-lead on the oversight/engagement of public utility accountability with Councillor Scarpelli (Councillor Scarpelli second)—approved.

Chair Callahan said that the final item is the tree planting volunteer effort. She said that is in a very early stage. She said the idea is that the city would allow certain volunteers and residents, with proper training, to participate in the planting of certain city trees. Councillor Scarpelli said that the union president should be involved when it comes to the issue of volunteer work that might normally be done by the DPW.

President Bears said that there have been targeted increases in the forestry department. He said he worked with Rep. Donato to get some additional funding here. He said 19-554 is a resolution to add noise barriers on I-93 North.

Andrew Castagnetti, 23 Cushing Street, congratulated the new Councillors that were elected and congratulated those who ran. He said that one side of 93 got noise barriers and the other side did not.

Ken Krause, 50 Mystic Street, thanked the Council for putting the governing agenda together and committing to regularly scheduled meetings. He said he is excited about this particular committee. He said that the Chevalier Commission and the arts community are excited to work with the Council on these topics. [Mr. Krause also submitted written comments which are included at the end of this report, after adjournment.]

President Bears said that the Capital Improvement Plan is not attached to the assessments such as the pavement management assessment and the sidewalk management assessment. He said he wants to know how much this accomplishes.

Councillor Scarpelli moved to adjourn at 8:15 p.m. (President Bears second)—approved.

Chair Callahan adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

In addition, Ken Krause submitted the following written comments:

Dear Medford leaders,

Thank you to the Medford City Council for revamping its committee structure for 2024 and also scheduling regular committee meeting dates.

I am particularly interested in how the Public Works and Facilities Committee and the Education and Arts Committee can help advocate for more funding in the city budget for Chevalier Theatre and for the Condon Shell Park.

There currently is no money in the city's annual budget for the Chevalier complex other than a \$33,000 line item for a part-time custodian's salary, which in FY24 was taken out of the \$100,000 annual payment the city receives for Chevalier from the Encore Boston Harbor Casino. The 85-year-old facility, more heavily used than ever, would greatly benefit from the addition of dedicated annual funds, particularly for regular preventive maintenance.

The Condon Band Shell has undergone welcome renovations in the last few years, with repairs to the structure itself; painting and new murals; electrical and lighting upgrades; and landscaping improvements. The shell and park also have seen a large increase in use, with 40 public events presented there in 2023.

However, as identified in the city's 2019 [Parks and Open Space for Climate Resilience report](#), the Condon Shell park suffers from a highly inadequate drainage system, is quickly saturated after heavy rains, and takes a long time to dry out. This makes attending a concert or a movie or the Medford Farmers Market a challenge and can even be a deterrent. Attached are some photos from last Friday showing how the park looked after last week's rain.

The report also noted that the Condon Shell is a critical park for serving climate equity, as it is located in a current and future flood zone and adjacent to critical infrastructure. Due to its location by the Mystic River, it is critical for managing stormwater and has high runoff potential. Consequently, the report accorded the Condon Shell Park the highest priority park for implementing green infrastructure and nature-based solutions for climate resilience in Medford, some of which were recommended in the report.

I'm not sure who would be responsible for taking the lead on a major drainage improvement project, since the Department of Conservation and Recreation still owns the park and the City of Medford only manages and maintains it.

But I would very much welcome and encourage a coordinated effort between the city's administration, departmental staff, and related boards and commissions; state and perhaps even federal agencies; the Mystic River Watershed Association;

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; and our state legislative delegation to address this situation as a very high priority matter.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Condon Shell
drainage.pdf