

24-073 & 25-005
RESIDENT SERVICES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025 @ 7:00 P.M.

Attendees: Councillor Matt Leming, Committee Chair; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor Emily Lazzaro; Councillor Justin Tseng; City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Chair Leming called the meeting to order at 7:55 p.m. on January 29, 2025 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 publication of the Council Newsletter (Paper **24-354**), and to discuss an Open Data Policy (Paper **25-005**).

Chair Leming thanked participants for attending. He said that the first item was the monthly newsletter. He thanked Councillor Lazzaro for drafting it. He suggested a few minor changes.

Councillor Tseng said he liked the edit for the Governance Committee. He suggested putting in something about how we are keeping discussions open and taking a final vote in a future Committee of the Whole. He said the Committee adopted a number of edits which continue to be up for discussion pending a final vote in a future Committee of the Whole meeting. Councillor Callahan suggested saying something more direct such as no final decisions have been made. The Committee discussed edits.

Councillor Callahan said that at tonight's Planning and Permitting meeting, Salem Street was pushed off from February 5. She said that in Public Works and Facilities, we also heard from the Commissioner.

Councillor Tseng said we could note that we are beginning work on developing an open data policy. He suggested commemorating Lunar New Year.

Councillor Callahan moved to approve the current draft of the newsletter including these edits, and to distribute the newsletter (Councillor Tseng second)—approved on a roll call vote of four in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Scarpelli absent.

Discussion turned to development of the open data policy. Prior to the meeting, a sample ordinance from Cambridge and an executive order from Boston giving similar language, were distributed. There is also a set of questions for departments to be distributed.

Councillor Tseng said residents are excited and eager to help out with policy development. He said that this falls in line with the Council's goals of greater transparency and greater modernization, being more proactive and inclusive. He said people wish they had more data before making decisions or before giving public feedback. He said he believes some municipalities have taken it upon themselves to pass this policy via ordinance or executive order. He said an executive order is obviously very different from an ordinance. He said oftentimes an open data policy is introduced alongside a committee to work through this data. He said that with putting data online, we also have to be aware of security concerns.

Chair Leming said he developed a list of questions for some of the department heads that he thinks have relevant data sets. He detailed the list of general questions, questions for the Mayor's Office, and questions for various departments.

Councillor Callahan said that these are great questions. She suggested asking the Mayor what other data, aside from these, she thinks would be interesting or might be helpful to the community, and to ask the Mayor and department heads to report to this committee.

Councillor Lazzaro said she appreciates the work here but her concern stems from knowing that City Hall is minimally staffed and that a project like this might be difficult to pull off.

Chair Leming said that this comes with a caveat about concerns over staff capacity. He said we can't just copy the open data policies of cities with much larger budgets than ours.

Councillor Tseng said that as this becomes a bigger thing, as we get past the step of low-hanging fruit, he envisions this becoming a bigger project after that step. He said a lot of cities have an open data review board. He said it might be staff members who get a stipend or community members. He said that question is a kind of farther future thing.

Councillor Callahan said that staff capacity is a real concern and it is a question people can answer in many ways. She suggested adding a question about a rough cost estimate. She said getting an idea of what each department thinks might be the cost to putting it up for the first time.

Councillor Tseng said that in addition to the staff capacity and resource questions, we could add a question about what additional staff capacity might be needed.

Councillor Lazzaro said it is important that this is a big picture issue. She said it is critical that we focus our attention to the greatest degree possible on things that are most critical for our residents. She said she can't imagine anyone has any extra time

available. She said as good as it is to have open data and having it posted online, she said she is curious to learn if this something to which we could assign a dollar amount. She said some people who might be looking for a place to live might not find this data as useful.

Councillor Tseng said that this level of transparency should be the standard. He said that part of the idea behind doing a policy like this is that many hands make light work. He said that there is a lot of work that our residents want to see our departments doing but our departments don't have the capacity right now.

Chair Leming said that staff capacity to support this would really come into play if we are asking departments to develop databases or something similar.

Councillor Lazzaro said that having a document that breaks this into phases would also be helpful. She said it is still good to start someplace.

Councillor Tseng moved to send the questions to the Department Heads and City Administration, and moved to adjourn at 8:39 p.m. (Councillor Lazzaro second)—approved on a roll call vote of four in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Scarpelli absent

Chair Leming adjourned the meeting at 8:39 p.m.