

# City of South Portland

## Historic Preservation Committee 2024 Annual Report

To: Jessica Hughes City Clerk  
From: Robert McKeagney, Designated Spokesperson for the Historic Preservation Committee

Date: January 2, 2025

### INTRODUCTION

The following report is provided in accordance with Sec. 2-145(c) of the Code of Ordinances, which requires the Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) to submit an annual report of the Committee's activities to the City Council.

### MEMBERSHIP (as of 12/31/24)

Erin Van Den Berge / Chair / District 3		
Nicole Reagan / District 2	Kendal Anderson / District 4	Jessie Brakenwagen / Greater Portland Landmarks
Benjamin Martin / District 3	Robert McKeagney / District 5	Kathy DiPhilippo/ South Portland Historic Society

### MEETING DATES

January 22	March 11	April 22	June 10	August 19	October 7	December 16
February 12	March 19	May 13	July 8	September 9	November 18	

### SUMMARY

During 2024 the Historic Preservation Committee continued its work on several issues, most of which resulted in few significant outcomes on behalf of the City. Three major issues dominated the Committee's work: the status of the Sylvan Site neighborhood as the location of a number of buildings of historic significance; promoting the importance of the historic characteristics of Mahoney School as its future use is being planned; and critical consideration of the current pertinence of the City's historical preservation ordinance.

At its January 22 meeting, Erin Van Den Berghe was selected as the new committee chair. This began a series of procedural and structural changes that brought greater focus and continuity to the Committee's work. The HPC also benefited from the longest period of stable staff support during its existence. Planner Kyle Drexler worked with the Committee for eight months through August before resigning. Other Planning Department staff attended meetings through the balance of the year. A newly hired planner, Marin Stephens was introduced to the Committee as the staff liaison for 2025. There was normal turnover in committee membership, but a consistently healthy level of participation among members was maintained throughout the year. The staffing changes, accompanied by resulting inconsistency in communication between the committee and staff, presented significant challenges and resulting setbacks. Nevertheless, the Committee met regularly, continued research on key questions, closely examined the formal mandate established by the applicable City ordinance in relation to its realistic capacity to meet those obligations, and made good faith efforts to forward recommendations to city administrators and the City Council.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Determined that the Sylvan Site neighborhood should, as a whole, be considered as a historical site. No formal resolution of this matter by the City was achieved.
- Reviewed and commented on papers submitted by the South Portland Historical Society in response to City Council mandated reports on two matters: evidence of archeological evidence of historical presence of indigenous peoples in the Sylvan Site neighborhood and biographical background on Frederic Hinckley, developer of Sylvan Site.
- Determined that the Committee, with assistance from the Planning Department, will review and revise existing historic preservation resource sheets for the 38 Sylvan Site properties that are not currently listed on the City Inventory of Archeological and Historic Resources.
- Advocated for the importance of considering the historic characteristics of Mahoney School as its future use is being planned. The Committee testified to the City Council on multiple occasions about the importance of this matter. The status of a historic preservation review remains unclear at the year's end.
- Participated in a review and draft revision of the City building permit approval process as it pertains to the status of potentially historic buildings. The Committee testified to the City Council in support of recommendations by the Planning Department. Although operational changes have been made to the permitting process, the HPC is unaware of any formal action by the City Council.
- Completed one historical preservation review of a building permit application. The Committee recommended that the application be approved.
- Reviewed, but did not resolve, questions about the practical value, as well as the Committee's capacity to complete historical reviews of properties that may be potentially eligible for addition to the City Inventory of Archeological and Historic Resources. The lack of City resources to support this process is a major barrier.
- Determined that the historical status of the South Portland Public Library should be considered by the City in the context of a planned relocation to a renovated Mahoney School. The Committee will review and update the 2018 Maine Historic Preservation Commission's survey form summarizing the historical significance the Library.
- Reviewed and made recommendations related to the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan on multiple occasions.

cc: Milan Nevajda, Planning Director  
Marin Stephens, Community Planner & Staff Liaison

## **City of South Portland Historic Preservation Committee 2024 Annual Report**

- Determined that City Ordinance Chapter 2, Division 9A establishes mandates to the Committee that cannot be met within the Committee's current capacity and posed a formal question about whether or not the Historical Preservation Committee should continue to exist an official appendage of city government.

cc: Milan Nevajda, Planning Director  
Marin Stephens, Community Planner & Staff Liaison