

# **SOUTH PORTLAND OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION COMMITTEE**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2024**

### **PROPERTY RESEARCH**

Early in 2024, OSAC set its goal to revisit and study the highest scoring desirable properties and to increase strategic outreach methods to those owners for possible acquisition.

OSAC would communicate to potential sellers the advantages of selling their property to the City of South Portland for public use and conservation in perpetuity. Additionally, there is an option for owners to share their land with our residents by using an easement to create public access with ownership intact.

The lack of property owners willing to discuss selling their property to the City has been a constant challenge throughout OSAC's history.

We are thrilled to report in 2024, OSAC completed its work towards the acquisition of 67.5 protected acres.

First, the transaction of the Thornton Avenue parcel was finalized in early 2024, a land swap with American Steel and Aluminum, consisting of three properties, combining to total 30+ acres of wetlands and wild growth that will continue to bring critical carbon sequestration, and habitat resource benefit to these areas.

Second, through a multi-year process, OSAC South Portland has purchased a parcel of 37 acres considered an optimum/priority acquisition since 2001! This Petrulik Property is adjacent to Hinckley Park and offers our residents unequalled access to a pristine forest, rolling open fields, several vernal ponds, and a stream that flows into Hinkley Park. This was a multi-year process. This purchase is surrounded by City neighborhoods and has Metro access close by, allowing this remarkable purchase to benefit residents from the entire city of South Portland and beyond. The final closing occurred in early January, 2025.

City Council voted unanimously to purchase these parcels, with each transaction strategically negotiated by our Assistant City Manager, Josh Reny.

### **ENGAGING OUR RESIDENTS**

In March we discussed the importance of OSAC having a public outreach platform where we could share the focus of the committee's work and how/where the open space bond funds might be used.

We invited Shara Dee, our Communications Director, to analyze, and direct our efforts to inform residents re: ongoing study of the City's remaining open spaces, and their potential for enhancing quality of life for all residents and in all parts of the city. She joined us in June, and brought excellent suggestions and strategic guidance, which we have begun pursuing.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND COMMITTEE UPDATES**

OSAC began 2024 by welcoming new members Tiffanie Bentley and Jonathan Bruel, as well as the appointment of City Councilor, Rachel Coleman and Planning Dept. Staff Laura Berry with pending OSAC Member, Michael Michaelson, appointed in February by City Council.

OSAC was also fortunate to welcome Tex Hauser representing the South Portland Land Trust in June and Peter Wilson for the Conservation Commission in November. Their partnership in our work to preserve open spaces for public use is critical and appreciated.

## **OSAC QUORUM CORRECTION**

In August OSAC formally requested that our City Council hold a workshop to study correcting our quorum, which was proving unworkable. Both February and July meetings had been canceled and the September meeting postponed until later in the month due to lack of members available to attend. Each instance was putting our workflow in jeopardy.

Our City Council provided the workshop to study this issue and voted to correct the quorum from seven out of nine members to five out of nine members, as of December 2024. This was critical in helping OSAC regain the reliability and productivity of our meetings being held as scheduled.

## **SOUTH PORTLAND LAND BOND**

Jan 1 2024 balance was \$3,747,838

Dec 31 2024 balance was \$3,635,818

The closing of the Petrilik Property purchase occurred in January 2025, leaving a balance of \$2,130,484