

Portland councilors hear from 10 groups vying for Bayside parcels

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By Dennis Hoey

A panel of Portland city councilors met Tuesday evening to weigh the merits of proposals from 10 [groups](#) that want to purchase and develop city-owned land on the western end of the Bayside neighborhood.

After listening to presentations from developers, the City Council's Economic Development Committee also heard from members of the public, who pleaded with councilors to select proposals that support affordable housing.

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"We really need more affordable housing," Portland resident Karen Schneider told the committee. "We're pushing out local residents. They can't afford to live here."

The hearing, held in a basement meeting room at City Hall, attracted a standing-room-only crowd.

Portland wants to sell six parcels of land on Portland Street, Hanover Street, Parris Street and Kennebec Street that were once used by the city's Public Works Department, which is making the transition to a new facility on Canco Road.

Councilor David Brenerman, who chairs the Economic Development Committee, said it could take several weeks before the city makes a decision on the winning bidder or bidders.

Greg Mitchell, the city's economic development director, has said Portland will keep financial information, including purchase offers from developers, confidential.

The Economic Development Committee plans to hold a second hearing before making a recommendation to the full City Council, which has final say.

"The council's decision will be made in public," Brenerman said.

Complicating the selection process is the fact that some developers are vying for the same parcels. The proposed uses also vary widely – from apartments and condos to business incubators and artist space, along with commercial, retail, office and food studio uses.

One developer, the West Bayside Development Group, is offering bids on five of the six parcels and represents a collaboration between Atlantic Bayside, Renewal Housing, Avesta Housing and Northland Enterprises.

Spokesman Jim Hanley said the West Bayside Development Group has the ability to deliver the greatest number of affordable rental units (65) and for-sale units (28) of any bidder. "It goes without saying that this is a team that can deliver," he said.

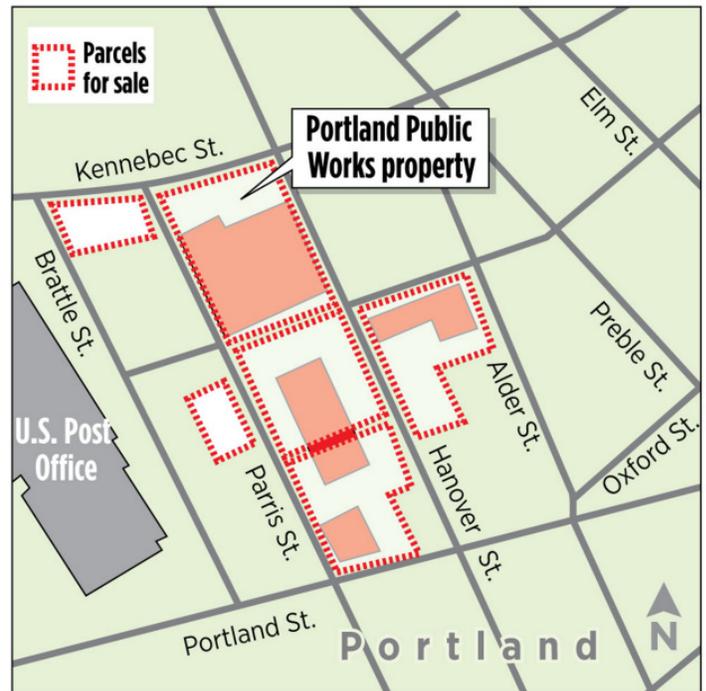
Several audience members praised a proposal from N. Nasir Shir and Community Housing of Maine. Shir said he wants to develop 24 units of affordable housing in a four-story building at 56 Parris St. A small retail store would occupy the first floor.

"We are proposing affordable housing, 100 percent," he said.

Pete Leavitt, who plans to open a deli on Kennebec Street, said he was disappointed that the development proposals did not call for greater density and building height, features he feels would attract more residents to the Bayside neighborhood.

Dinah Minot, executive director of Creative Portland, urged the committee to keep an open mind about some of the proposals. One of the developers plans to create "maker space," where people with shared interests, such as in computing or technology, can gather.

"This is an amazing opportunity to build a community," Minot said. "It's an opportunity to create some sexy, cool buildings."



The city of Portland is selling six parcels of property in Bayside to help offset the cost of relocating its Public Works Department to a new facility on Canco Road.



STAFF GRAPHIC | MICHAEL FISHER

Laura Cannon, vice president of the Bayside Neighborhood Association, said that “Bayside really needs more residents. It would be great if some of that housing is owner-occupied. It would be good to have more people with skin in the game.”

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