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From: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>
To: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>
Sent: Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 11:16:17 AM EST
Subject: December Events on Munjoy Hill

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization

92 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
info@munjoyhill.org
December 2, 2023



Proudly serving Portland's Munjoy Hill neighborhood since 1979.

Winter Comes to Munjoy Hill



**Join us for a reading of A Child's Christmas in Wales
on Sunday, December 10th at 1:00**



*Photos are of the author's
childhood home in Swansea, Wales*

**READING OF THE CLASSIC
NARRATIVE POEM
A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS IN WALES
BY DYLAN THOMAS**

Sunday, December 10, 2023

1pm-3pm

92 Congress St, Portland, ME

The MHNO is pleased to present this reminiscence of a Christmas from the viewpoint of a young child, written by Welch poet and author, Dylan Thomas in 1952. This holiday classic will be read by Munjoy Hill resident Abraham A. Schechter on Sunday, December 10th at 1:00.

Abraham Schechter, returning to the MHNO for the second year, has read this poem in several other Portland venues in prior years. Schechter is a librarian and archivist at the Portland Room of the Portland Public Library. Following the reading, he will present a brief slide show of his studies while staying in the childhood home of Dylan Thomas in Swansea, Wales.

All are welcome to come to listen and enjoy tea and sweets to celebrate a Welsh Christmas. Iechyd da! (Cheers). Free and open to the public, at the Hill House (Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization office), 92 Congress Street.

Coffee & Climate: 2023 Recap

An invitation from Portland's Sustainability Office:

On **Friday, December 8th from 9am - 10am** please join the Portland and South Portland Sustainability Office staff to revisit the wins that advanced us toward our One Climate Future climate action goals this year. You don't want to miss it!

Sign up for this Zoom get-together through this [Zoom registration link](#). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**Observe the Winter Solstice from Fort Sumner Park
on Dec. 21st at 3:45 pm, Cookies, Cocoa and Cheer**

**WINTER
SOLSTICE**

December 21, 2023 | **Join Us for Cookies, Cocoa
and Cheer at Ft. Sumner
Park!**
at 3:45 pm

**Hosted by the Friends of Ft. Sumner Park
64 North Street, Portland, ME**

Monthly Highlights:

MHNO SUSTAINABLE LIVING

By Maggy Wolf, MHNO Board of Directors, m.wolf@munjoyhill.org

As winter arrives officially this month, we are facing the peak months of our consumption of energy – not only for heating in the coldest season, but also more lighting, and perhaps more indoor electronics as we seek shelter from those icy winds. I wrote a few months ago about insulation and it remains the number one step you can take if you own an old drafty home, as many of us do on Munjoy Hill. Once again, there are really excellent rebates and federal tax credits, in addition to the lower heating bill; here is the link to Efficiency Maine's Insulation program: <https://www.energymaine.com/at-home/weatherization/>

Next up for discussion is going solar. Putting solar panels on my roof three years ago has meant that I only pay CMP's flat monthly distribution fee for each of the two apartment. That recently went from \$13 to \$21 apiece, but at least the generation from my rooftop panels more than offsets our annual consumption, including a home heat pump and two heat pump water heaters. Due to the somewhat awkward layout of my 1870s building, the heat pump is not enough to replace my gas boiler, but it does reduce the gas consumption and I hope to add another heat pump to get off the natural gas entirely at some point.

While heat pumps and insulation are really only applicable for homeowners, there are ways renters can switch to solar for electricity if they have their own CMP accounts. The most direct ways to make sure you are using solar energy are by 1) installing rooftop panels on your own roof, or 2) buying shares in a community solar farm. The main items to consider for the first option are:

- Not available for renters
- The condition of the roof
- Nearby shade throwing trees or building, OR the risk thereof – the way buildings are going up in our neighborhood, it is prudent to consider whether your neighbor could build up or sell to somebody who would.
- Historic district considerations – as of the last five years or so, the Historic District is not supposed to restrict the addition of roof solar panels, but they sometimes can give applicants a hard time. If you are told by the Historic Preservation staff or the Historic Preservation Board that you cannot have solar panels (or a heat pump), please let me know. I will support you taking that issue to the Sustainability Office and/or the Sustainability and Transportation Committee. I am a great supporter of historic preservation, but in my position as a climate activist, preservation cannot stand in the way of energy efficiency. This is my personal view and not necessarily the view of the MHNO.
- The up-front expense : Solar installations can require more than \$20k capital investment, although rebates and tax credits can bring those costs down substantially.
- The potential savings over the life of the panels is potentially greater than a community solar farm, plus a rooftop installation may add value to your home.

Community Solar farms can offer renters a way to powering their apartments with solar and even for homeowners, can present a lower entry barrier, especially since the previous governor's tight restrictions (only allowed 9 owners per installation, putting it out of reach of many) have been loosened by the legislature and the Mills administration. Briefly, you purchase a share of a large array or "farm" – could be anywhere in the state, and CMP credits you with the number of kilowatt hours generated by your shares. You don't have to do any of the work involved or worry about shade from your neighboring lots. The city of Portland has partnered with an online "electrification marketplace", "EnergySage" <https://www.energysage.com/p/Portland/> . Their website allows you to research both rooftop and community solar farms and their service will help you pursue either option.

Ultimately, in order to fully leverage renewable energy, we will have to find more places to put solar panels, so if you can afford it and your site and roof are favorable, rooftop solar is a great contribution to Portland's renewable energy supply. And if you are a renter, you can take these ideas to your landlord and try to convince them to add rooftop panels. In the meantime, supporting community solar farm projects is a great option as well.

Brief Recap: Current Development Projects on Munjoy Hill

This is a brief summary of a few development projects on Munjoy Hill. This is not an exhaustive list.

19 Willis Street (also sometimes known as 33 Montreal Street) seeks to construct 12 housing units in a 4-5 story building. The project was originally approved by the Planning Board on December 14, 2021 over the concerns of various neighbors. It was at that time controlled by the Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone (since repealed), which allowed a 10 foot height bonus (maximum of 35' to maximum of 45') if the project included one unit of workforce housing, as it proposed. Several neighbors appealed the project approval to Superior Court on the grounds that the height was improperly calculated, that it did not properly setback proposed retaining walls from the project boundary, and that the design review by historic preservation staff, which was required due to its proximity to the Munjoy Hill Historic District, was not properly done. The Superior Court upheld the decision of the Planning Board. On appeal to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, that court found that there wasn't enough evidence in the record for the highest court to meaningfully review the basis for the Planning Board's decision. It ordered the Superior Court to remand the case back to the Planning Board to make findings of fact, to explain what they relied upon in making their 2021 decision. The Planning Board heard the matter on remand on November 28, 2023 and adopted an expanded staff memorandum which focused on the three grounds for appeal as constituting an accurate reflection of the basis for their decision. The matter will return to the Law Court for further deliberation.

58 Fore Street, Portland Foreside Development (also sometimes known as the former Portland Company project) received conditional Planning Board approvals for the buildout of the rest of the 10-acre site on September 12, 2023. This proposed last phase of the project involves 600 housing units, a hotel, retail/service/restaurant space and large parking facilities in buildings extending up to 115 feet in height. A Fore Street abutter to the proposed development filed an appeal in Superior Court to protect the peaceful enjoyment of his own property and to ask the court to determine whether the regulatory authorities properly lived up to their responsibility in regulating and permitting this level of growth in the Munjoy Hill community. Among the specific grounds for appeal are whether the Master Development Plan had become void and of no effect on December 22, 2022; whether proposed buildings of up to 115 feet improperly exceed the 45' height maximum in underlying zoning (with limited extensions permitted up to 55 and 65 feet) due to several irregularities in how allowable heights are calculated; whether the portion of the project which is located in the shoreland zone violates the Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act; and whether the project lacks the necessary easements to construct the project. The litigation is in the early stages.

56 Cumberland Avenue: The City of Portland has sent a notice that Fafnir Cumberland, LLC has filed a major site plan application to develop a 5-unit residential condominium on the 5,976 square foot lot. Property owners within 500 feet of the property are required to be notified prior to any Planning Board workshops and public hearings. The initial application may be viewed at the citizen self service portal by referencing Plan Number PL-002733-2023.

90 Atlantic Street: The City of Portland has sent a notice that Atlantic Street Properties, LLC has filed a major site plan application to demolish an existing four-unit building and construct a new four-story, six-unit residential condominium on the 4,650 square foot lot. The lot is across Monument Street from the Munjoy Hill Historic District. Property owners within 500 feet of the property are required to be notified prior to any Planning Board workshops and public hearings. The initial application may be viewed at the citizen self service portal by referencing Plan Number PL-002600-2023.

MHNO ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Handcrafters -- Needlecraft Sundays Every Week, 3-5



**Knitters!
Crocheters!**

All hand needlecrafters!



**The MHNO welcomes you to our
Needlework Sunday afternoons!**



**Sundays from 3-5
92 Congress St**



For more information, contact:
info@munjoyhill.org



Volunteers Needed for Senior Snow Shoveling

Will you volunteer to shovel the sidewalk for a Munjoy Hill senior? You will be paired with one senior for the season. It may give service providers safe access. There are already many long-time volunteers in this City-administered, neighborhood-facilitated program. But a few more volunteers are needed for this season. For more information, please contact Karen Snyder at k.snyder@munjoyhill.org.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE:

Greetings Munjoy Hill Friends and Neighbors!

The issue of what the City's policy should be with regard to unhoused people is undoubtedly complex. Portland is not unique. Many communities across the country have been grappling with similar problems for years. The economic forces/choices resulting in a scarcity of affordable housing, destructive substance abuse and mental health crises, broken health care system, tattered social safety net, and international demographic shifts, along with other phenomena that defy easy identification, have combined to produce a "world of hurt."

It is no doubt worst for unhoused individuals who are trying to stay alive while living outside, now in below freezing weather. But their very visible presence among us is also a painful reminder to the housed population of our collective policy failures and our own vulnerability.

The Board of the MHNO is paying attention, as are most caring people, as the City struggles to calibrate its options and policy decisions. There is, admittedly, little the MHNO can do on its own beyond being part of an ongoing community conversation of well-intentioned people, non-profits and government entities as we work to identify the most viable strategies to reduce the harm.

A couple of weeks ago, the MHNO weighed in against a proposed City Council amendment that would have opened most parks and public spaces throughout the city (with a few specific exemptions) to overnight "camping" through April 30, 2024. This was probably proposed as a reaction to encampment sweeps, to temporarily eliminate the option to clear encampments even if they were determined by the City to pose a significant risk to public safety. We expressed the view that the proposed amendment was overly broad, unwisely abdicated governmental control over most overnight use of public spaces, and was a poor substitute for what should be a more targeted discussion about what the policy should be on encampment sweeps, including whether/when/under what circumstances/humanitarian accommodations, etc. The proposal to allow unrestricted overnight use of most public parks and open spaces failed on a 6-3 vote (Trevorrow, Rodriguez, Pelletier), but the proposed amendment has been referred to a Council committee for further review, so may well return in some form in the near future.

City policies are in flux. Next week we swear in new Mayor Dion and two brand new Councilors (filling the seats formerly held by Mark Dion and Andrew Zarro). Mayor Dion will kick off his 3-year term with the tough challenge to tackle this issue by mustering all of his leadership skills.

The situation in Portland continues to evolve. There are reports of a hepatitis A outbreak in one of the large encampments. As people increasingly turn to propane to try to stay warm, three tents pitched in the Eastern Prom Park were destroyed by fire. Tragically, one unhoused person died along Marginal Way when his tent caught fire.

On the other hand, the City has recently added capacity to the formerly full shelter system. The City Council voted to add 50 more beds in the Homeless Services Center. On November 29th, a new emergency shelter for single asylum seekers (not families) with 179 new beds opened at 166 Riverside Street. That is expected to free up approximately 120 shelter beds at the Homeless Services Center. Those 170 beds are to be prioritized for individuals who are sleeping outside. As of this week, the City's tent count reports that a total of 208 tents are being occupied in Portland (143 on City property, 29 on private property, and 36 on state property), some of which house more than a single individual.

The City Manager and staff have been working hard to get unhoused individuals inside for the winter. The increased shelter capacity of 170 beds would suggest that goal seems almost achievable. But individuals cannot be forced to move into shelter beds. Reportedly, many unhoused individuals find that the shelter is not a viable option because its environment and/or its rules are not compatible with their needs. It is unclear whether they will continue to make that calculation when the full harshness of winter conditions set in.

Meanwhile, even as the City scrambles to minimize the risk of immediate tragedies, we also need to keep an eye on the most appropriate long-term strategies given available resources. Some people are pushing for a "housing first" approach -- getting the unhoused into permanent housing as a first step, on the theory that stabilized housing will then allow engagement with services to address the issues that conspired to land them in that dire situation. While much has been written, a recent New York Times op ed piece about Houston's housing first approach (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/22/opinion/homeless-houston->

[dallas.html](#)) highlights multiple factors, including housing availability, that must align in order to make progress. (For additional background, see for example: <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/how-houston-moved-25000-people-from-the-streets-into-homes-of-their-own/> and <https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/howardcenter/caring-for-covid-homeless/stories/homeless-funding-housing-first.html>)

This issue evolves rapidly, is extremely complex, and is likely to be top of mind for years. We all need to educate ourselves so we can continue to be a productive part of the ongoing community conversation. If you want to share your opinions with the Munjoy Hill community, please email info@munjoyhill.org. During this cold holiday season, the plight of the unhoused portion of our community should not be far from our thoughts.

Barbara

Barbara Vestal
President, MHNO
b.vestal@munjoyhill.org

The next monthly business meeting of the 13-members of the Board of Directors of the MHNO will be held on Monday, December 4th at 5:00 p.m. Monthly meetings are held in person at the Hill House, 92 Congress Street. If you are a member of the MHNO and are interested in sitting in on the Board of Director's meeting, please join us in person.

The MHNO is a membership organization, with our work supported by annual memberships (\$20 for an individual, \$35 for a household). For more information or to join or renew, or to make a much appreciated donate, please visit www.munjoyhill.org.

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization | 92 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101

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