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From: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>

To: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>

Sent: Friday, August 11, 2023 at 10:14:29 AM EDT

Subject: Munjoy South Urban Renewal: Looking Back 60 Years, Participating in the Development Review Process, and More

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization

92 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
info@munjoyhill.org
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Proudly serving Portland's Munjoy Hill neighborhood since 1979.

Looking Back 60 Years -- Urban Renewal on Munjoy Hill

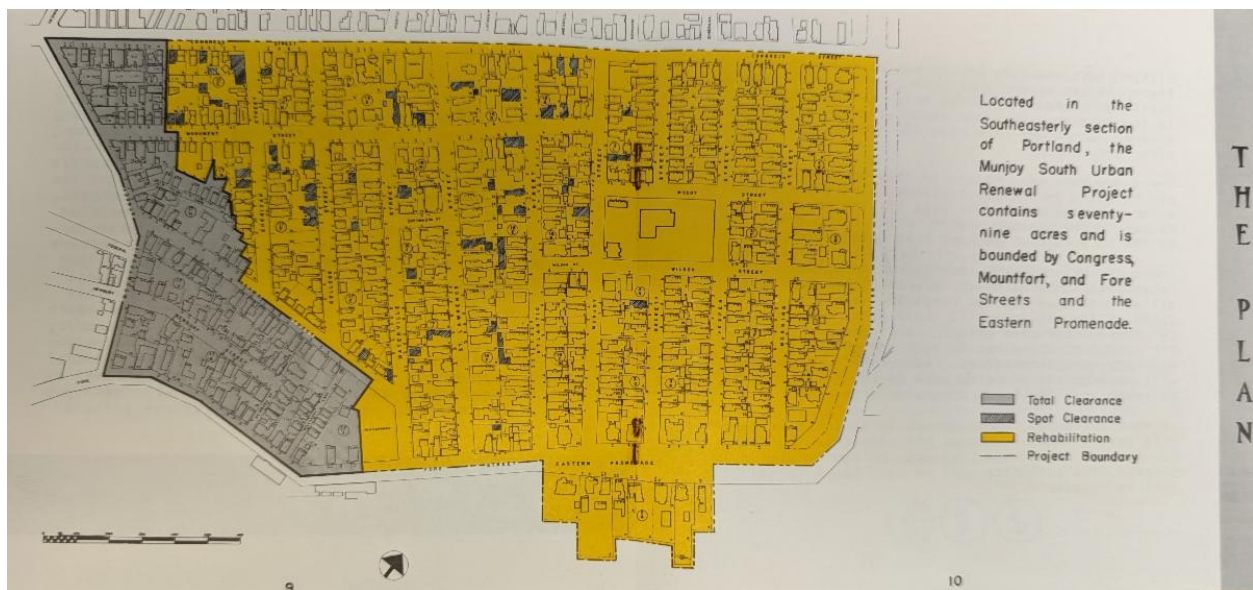
Recently a 60-year-old notebook surfaced which contains numerous, painstakingly-kept, minutes of early 1960s of meetings hosted by the Munjoy South Association (MSA). The officers and directors of the MSA, almost exclusively men, served as the interface between the residents of the southern half of Munjoy Hill and the Portland Renewal Authority (PRA).

The PRA “had chosen” the south half of Munjoy Hill (between Mountfort Street, Fore Street, Eastern Prom and Congress Street) as the “Munjoy South Urban Renewal Project”, the City’s third urban renewal area.

The minutes give a fascinating glimpse into a protracted and painful period of Munjoy Hill’s history. Statements by some residents complain of a few years of turmoil and uncertainty while a plan was developed. People were afraid to invest in their homes,

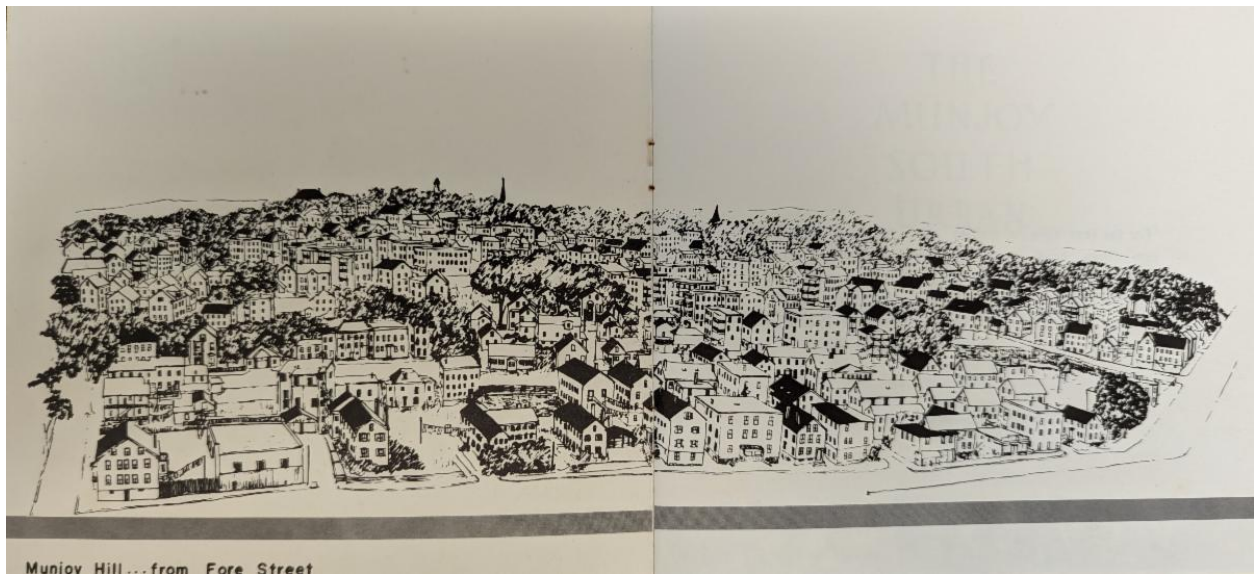
banks stopped loaning money, and families, both owners and renters, were unsure whether they would be forced to move. They worried about where they would go, the cost of replacement housing, and the loss of community connections.

The urban renewal plan, as it was eventually finalized, called for **total clearance of 11 acres** of the neighborhood (the area now occupied by Munjoy South and Washington Square, shown in gray below), “**spot clearance**” through demolition of **more than 50 properties** scattered across the remainder of the area (gray cross hatched), and **rehabilitation in the remaining 68 acres** outside of the total clearance area (shown in yellow below) through financial assistance for private rehabilitation and public investment in streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, sewers and playgrounds.



It was acknowledged that even though it was slated for demolition, 40-60% of the housing in the hard hit total clearance area was in “adequate to excellent condition.” But these homes were interspersed with what was described as “slum” properties. The City declared that the blight would spread unless it was excised by total clearance.

A drawing (below) “Munjoy Hill . . . from Fore Street”, featuring the clearance area in the foreground, was included in a brochure prepared for the PRA by the Planning Board. (It appears that Fore Street is in the foreground, Mountfort Street is on the left and Waterville Street is located toward the right, going diagonally up the Hill.)



Owners of homes in the area to be cleared were promised that they would be offered “a fair price” for its purchase. They were also told they might have an option of physically moving their home to a vacant lot. Non-owners were promised “many valuable aids” available through the PRA.

As part of the urban renewal project, approximately 200 units of new housing were constructed, the bulk of them in the total clearance area. Munjoy South and Washington Square, still providing homes today, were originally designed to give first preference to people who were displaced by urban renewal. The 140 unit Munjoy South complex continues to be subject to affordable housing covenants, with occupancy restricted to families whose incomes are 80% or less of the area median income.

The process was contentious, but it seems to have been cast in a patina of patriotic duty that is hard to appreciate from this vantage point. In early 1961, at individual block meetings a survey was taken of those in attendance. Respondents were made up 68% of property owners and 32% of tenants. The results from the individual block meetings, reported to a general meeting of the Munjoy South Association on February 23, 1961, attended by about 200 people, were:

Do you wish to sell your home to the Renewal Authority: No - 95%, Yes 5% and Are you in favor of total clearance: No 97%; Yes 3%.

There are obviously many individual stories of hardships imposed by the total clearance in this section of Munjoy Hill. At the time, the occupants were told by the Portland Renewal Authority “[T]he personal satisfaction and sense of achievement will more than compensate for your effort to restore this historic and scenic part of our community to its renowned beauty. It is a challenge that must be met. Let us help you.”

Do you have stories to share -- good, bad, or mixed -- about your family’s involvement with the Munjoy South Urban Renewal Program? We would love to hear from you. Help us honor the experience of those who were who were most directly affected by it. Please write to info@munjoyhill.org.

Want to Weigh In On A Proposed Development Project in Your Immediate Neighborhood? Some Modest Tips on the Process

Our members frequently love their corner of Munjoy Hill and want to see that a proposed new development is respectful of its context and will add to the neighborhood. These tips might help with an understanding of the process.

Depending upon what is proposed, development review may be handled by the Historic Preservation Board and/or the Planning Board. Matters that involve an amendment to the zoning ordinance or a zoning map change may also go to the City Council.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: POSTCARDS

Getting **notice** of applications and meetings can sometimes be difficult. The primary mechanism for neighbors to receive notice of workshops and hearings is via a **postcard** sent to the first listed owner of the property at the mailing address listed in the tax assessor's records (the mailing address for the tax bill).

Notice is sent to properties within a certain radius of the proposed development (100 feet for historic preservation certificates of appropriateness or 500 feet for most planning board reviews). If there are multiple owners, only the first listed owner will be sent the notice. If you recently bought the property, your new ownership may not yet be in the tax assessor's records so you would not be mailed a notice. Even if a postcard is put into the mail 10 days before a hearing, these postcards frequently don't actually get delivered until a few of days before the scheduled date. That may leave you scrambling to rearrange your obligations so you can attend the meeting and review lengthy submission packets in just a couple of days.

NEWSPAPER AND SIGNS

There are two other ways in which notice may be given. If you know to look for it or are alert, it may be more reliable than a postcard. There are some variations depending upon the reviewing authority, but, in general, **newspaper notice** of the agenda is required to be published at least 10 calendar days prior to a meeting. The City uses the Portland Press Herald. And for matters requiring Planning Board review, a notice of a public meeting must be **physically posted on the property** at least 10 days before the meeting, in accordance with standards established by the Planning Department.

SUBSCRIPTION NOTIFICATION

There are a couple of other steps you can take to try to increase the odds that you will receive advance notice of a proposed development. You can **subscribe to notifications** through the CivicPlus Portal, accessed at: <https://www.portlandmaine.gov/1297/My-Portal>. They are not limited by geographic area. If you subscribe, you will receive all of the notices of that type for the City. These notices seem to be limited to two types of events: 1) notification of a **developer-sponsored neighborhood meeting** relating to a project already under review (typically only once per development); or 2) a **new development review project notice** when the application is first filed with the City of Portland. These events will just occur at the very beginning of the project or the beginning of a phase of a major project. It does not appear that subscription will provide notice of each meeting (e.g. workshop or public

hearing) scheduled on the development. (The postcards, newspaper notice and posting are for individual City-sponsored meetings.)

REVIEW OF EACH POSTED AGENDA

You may also regularly **review the agendas for each entity** (Historic Preservation Board, Planning Board and City Council) as they are posted each week. This may not give you any earlier notice than a postcard because usually the agendas are not posted until late on a Friday for meetings scheduled to take place on the following Monday (City Council), Tuesday (Planning Board) or Wednesday (Historic Preservation Board). Each body typically meets twice a month. The agendas are available at the Agenda Center, <https://www.portlandmaine.gov/602/Agendas-Minutes>

ACCESSING MORE INFORMATION

Once you are able to locate a **posted agenda for the site** you are interested in, a lot of information may be available. For example, for a July 11th workshop for the proposed site plan review for Blocks 4, 5 and 6 of the 58 Fore Street development, by clicking on various **blue links in the posted agenda**, one was able to review about 1,700 pages of staff memos and attachments, applicant submissions, and public comment. But the material was not available to review until late on Friday July 7th, four days before the Tuesday workshop. That timing is not unusual, although the quantity of material was.

The posted agenda (and postcard) also refer to a CSS site where additional information is said to be available. By clicking on "search public records" at the **Citizen Self-Service Portal**, found at https://selfservice.portlandmaine.gov/EnerGov_Prod/selfservice#/home, and entering the plan number contained in the notice, by clicking on attachments additional information is available such as copies of the list of addresses of neighbors who were to have received notices, applicant submissions, etc.

WORKSHOP VS PUBLIC HEARING

It is important to understand the **difference between Planning Board workshops and public hearings**. Workshops are preliminary public meetings. By ordinance, no votes are to be taken nor decisions made at a workshop. It is an opportunity for the public and the board to understand what the applicant is proposing and to ask questions of the applicant. **Public comments**, strictly limited to 3 minutes, will be taken at a workshop, although the focus is more on the board getting an understanding of what is being proposed and asking for more clarification about areas of confusion or discomfort. Formal final action by vote of the Planning Board will be taken at a public hearing. There is usually at least one workshop before a public hearing is scheduled. **Public comments** are taken at a public hearing prior to the Board taking action, and are usually strictly limited to 3 minutes. At least 4 affirmative votes are required for project approvals to be granted. Every project is a little different in terms of what approvals and waivers are being sought by the applicant. The staff memo accompanying each item should outline the basic decisions to be made.

SUBMITTING WRITTEN COMMENTS

In addition to speaking at a workshop or public hearing, citizens also have the ability to **submit written public comments**. Sometimes that is preferable if you have more to say than can be expressed in three minutes. If you want the Board members to have time to read and think about your comments, it is beneficial to submit comments by

noon on a Thursday before an agenda will be posted on Friday so that your comments will be duplicated and distributed to the Board and the public as part of the official meeting materials. That is not always possible if you need to wait to review the posted materials before you are in a position to finalize your comments.

Submissions should be emailed to the:

- Planning Board at planningboard@portlandmaine.gov
- Historic Preservation Board at hp@portlandmaine.gov
- City Council at publiccomment@portlandmaine.gov

It is NOT appropriate to try to contact individual Planning Board or Historic Preservation Board chairs or members outside of official channels.

The MHNO encourages all of its members, in their individual capacities, to involve themselves in the development review process, to the extent they are interested. A robust review process will benefit the neighborhood as a whole. However, the current policy of the MHNO is that the organization does not take formal positions on individual development projects. The MHNO does monitor and will advocate for the neighborhood on broader policy matters that might affect the neighborhood as a whole, such as the current effort to rewrite Portland's Land Use Code, known as ReCode.



EECS Educator Is Semifinalist for 2024 Maine Teacher of Year!

East End Community School teacher Joshua Chard, recently honored as the 2023 Cumberland County Teacher of the Year at a ceremony at the State Capitol on May 11, has now received additional recognition: Chard is among eight County Teachers of the Year named as semifinalists for the 2024 Maine Teacher of the Year honor.

Chard, currently a looping teacher of grades 2 and 3 at East End, has been an educator for more than three decades, began working for the Portland Public Schools as an educational technician in 1992, at, among others, the former Jack elementary school. He has taught at East End School since it opened in 2006.

East End School Principal Boyd Marley said, "Joshua Chard is the teacher any family would want their student to have. He is kind, smart, and loves to

partner with families and students in learning. The Portland Public Schools has a history of strong teaching and learning and Mr. Chard personifies the best of our educators.”

Chard has previously said that he is “humbled by the recognition and honored that what I do is being recognized as being representative of the quality instruction happening in classrooms every day. I am especially excited to have a platform to talk about diverse, urban schools and to be a voice for the outstanding things happening there.”

Spirits Alive Presents Eastern Cemetery Walking Tour Saturday, August 12th at 2:00 on Colonial Enslavers and Enslaved People

Spirits Alive invites you to join Vana Carmona of the Prince Project for this tour visiting the grave sites of colonial enslavers and enslaved people.

From the time Portland was settled by European colonists, enslaved and free black people were part of the community. Many of their names have been lost to history, sometimes listed only as property in wills or on bills of sale. In death, they were usually buried in unmarked graves. But they had a critical role in enabling the success of those early white settlers. Vana Carmona visits the graves of some prominent enslavers, some her own ancestors, and reveals the names of enslaved people who helped make their success possible. She also visits the two African American sections of the burial ground.

See the Eventbrite link, or <https://www.spiritsalive.org/tours/> for more information.

Free Summer Community Concerts in Fort Allen Park

Friends of the Eastern Promenade host FREE, family-friendly concert series on Thursdays, 6 p.m. at the Fort Allen Park Bandstand. The remaining concerts is:

- August 17th Samuel James

PRESIDENT'S NOTE:

Greetings, Munjoy Hill Friends and Neighbors!

An area of MHNO focus over the last few years has been the crisis in long-term and workforce housing. The piece on the 60-year old Munjoy South Urban Renewal project revisits a traumatic period in our neighborhood's past. It is sobering to realize that 11 acres of homes, some of them perfectly sound and fully integrated into a close-knit immigrant community, were demolished to remove "blight," housing and buildings seen as "sub-standard" in the eyes of civic leaders.

Against this history, the 140 affordable housing units of the Munjoy South complex, built on a portion of the cleared site, carry added significance. The protections that reserve them for lower income residents are due to expire in 2042 (or some claim as early as 2027). It is up to Maine Housing to enforce those affordable housing covenants. But the City of Portland, through zoning decisions, is also likely to have some influence on what becomes of that site in the future. Out of respect for the families who were displaced 60 years ago, I believe it is important for the site to continue to be used for at least 140 units of affordable or workforce housing.

If you have a family story (or photos) to share about the impact of the Munjoy South Urban Renewal project, the community that lived there, or the housing, gardens and pathways that were removed, please email info@munjoyhill.org. It is important to preserve the memories of living family members that recall the displacement before they are forever lost.

Enjoy the rest of the summer,

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, September 11th 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.



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

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