

# Super Fun, Wicked Cheap Major Project Engagement



CITY OF  
**SOUTH  
PORTLAND**

Shara Dee, Communications Officer

# About me

- Clown at heart
- Nonprofit background
- City of South Portland's 1<sup>st</sup> Communications Officer
- Love where I live & work

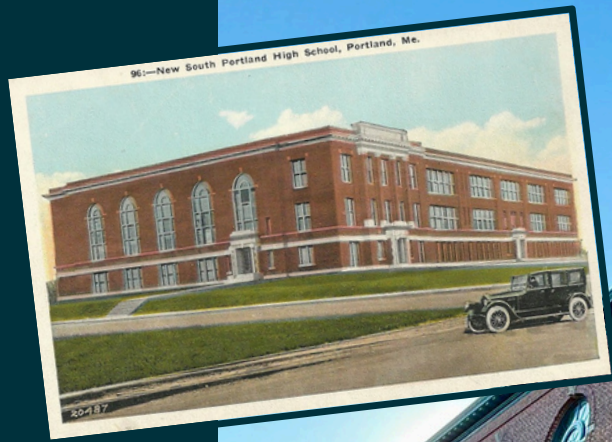


# In this session we'll...

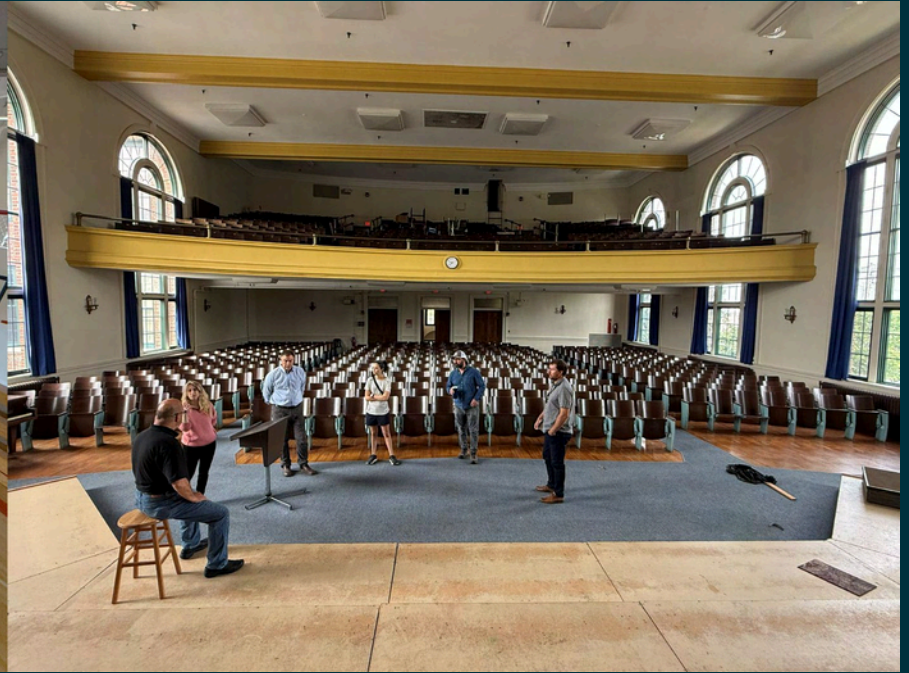
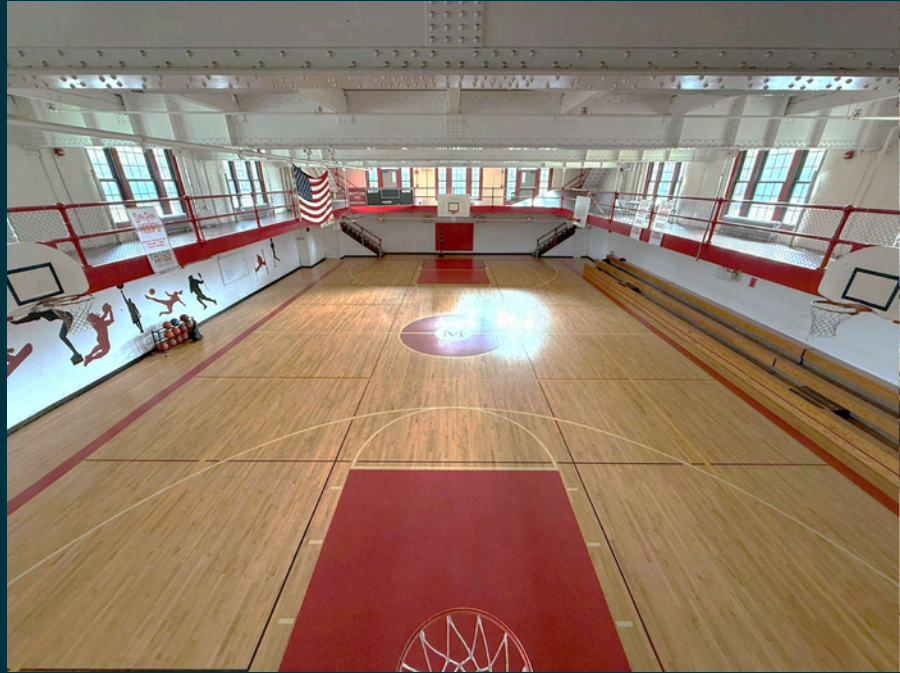
- Focus on harnessing joy, connection, and collaboration in your engagement
- Walk through a case study from my city
- Get you thinking about your own project
- Your job: Get inspired and be playful!

# You'll learn how to:

1. Plan, promote and execute a **fun major engagement event** that delivers . . .
2. With a **puny budget**, tiny staff, and little time!
3. Enlist, inspire, and effectively engage **volunteer champions**
4. Get **business partner** on board with ease
5. Build **community** while gathering critical **input**
6. Avoid pitfalls and benefit from **lessons learned**



# Mahoney: Future City Center?



Mahoney: Future City Center?



# Outreach goals

- Get residents to understand / believe the need for the project
- Invite our community to give input and help shape their new City Center
- Engage & inform our community about the proposed new **City Center** ahead of a bond referendum vote

# Barriers

- Need and desire for affordable housing
- Recent increases in assessed values & property taxes
- Online commentary like:
  - “New City Hall...more like Taj Mahal!”
  - “Sell it to the highest bidder.”
  - “Can you believe city workers want AIR CONDITIONING?”

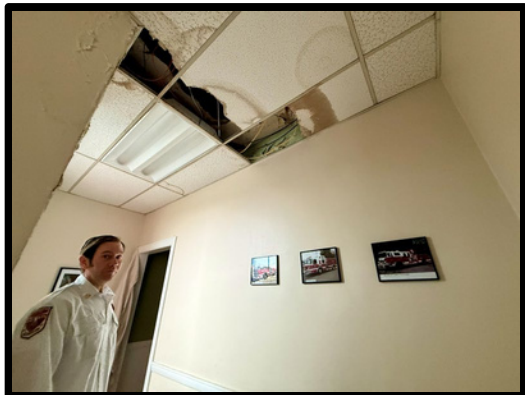
# Stop and chat!

Talk to a neighbor about a project coming up in your city or town.

- » What do you want to **gain** from engaging your community?
- » What are the **challenges** to getting their involvement or support?

# The idea: “Building Crawl”

- Like a pub crawl, but for deteriorating municipal buildings! 😎



Join us for the ...

## ***Building Crawl***

Food! 🍔  
Raffle Prizes! 🎟️  
Discounts at local businesses! 🛍️

***Drop in!***

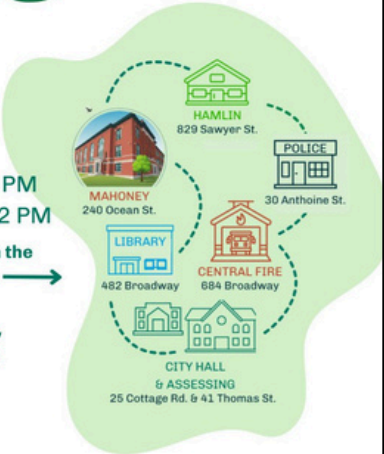
» Tues., Sept. 30th 5 - 8 PM  
» Sat., Oct. 4th 9 AM - 12 PM

Tours EVERY HALF HOUR on the half hour at every building →

Get info about the proposed **Mahoney City Center & Public Safety Buildings** project and share your ideas!

 CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

Learn more & sign up for updates:  
[southportland.gov/mahoney](https://southportland.gov/mahoney)



The map shows a route connecting several locations in South Portland. The locations are: Mahoney (240 Ocean St.), Hamlin (829 Sawyer St.), Police (30 Anthoine St.), Central Fire (684 Broadway), Library (482 Broadway), and City Hall & Assessing (25 Cottage Rd. & 41 Thomas St.). The route is indicated by a dashed line with arrows.

# To make it happen...

I needed 5things:

1. Buy-in from decision makers
2. A planning team willing to work
3. Day-of volunteers (lots) also willing to work
4. Business & community partners
5. Good, cheap promotion
6. Luck

# 1. Getting decision maker buy-in



## 2. Recruiting a planning team



### 3. Enlisting day-of volunteers



## 4. Getting business & community partners on board





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## Building Crawl Punch Card

Visit 3 or more buildings, get discounts at  
participating local business (listed on back)

City  
Hall

Central  
Fire

Police  
Station

Mahoney

Library

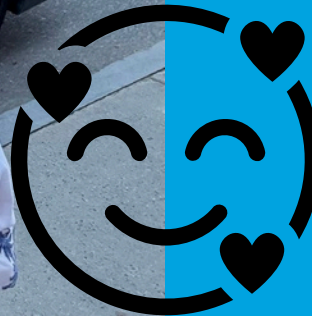
Hamlin



## Participating Businesses

Show your punch card for a discount at these  
businesses. Good through October 31, 2025. Contact  
the business for discount details.

Belissimo Salon (Dani or Jamie) - Flair for Hair  
The Garden Bar - Good Point Acupuncture @  
Working Well - The Send Brewing Co. - SoPo Seafood  
Sunday Town - Taylor in Maine @ Belissimo  
Tres Leches - Verbena - You Dirty Dog Wash & Boutique





## Mahoney City Center & Public Safety Facilities Project

*Follow along to get info, get interested, and get involved!*

### Current City buildings are in decline.

The current Central Fire Station, Police Station, Library, City Hall, Hamlin, and Assessing buildings are **aging, need major repairs and/or renovations, and no longer meet the needs of the community.** These buildings:

- Fail to meet today's building codes
- Fail to meet ADA requirements
- Fail to meet fire safety standards
- Have old and deteriorating mechanical and electrical systems
- Contain hazardous materials
- Suffer damages from water intrusion
- Rely on inefficient heating and cooling systems
- Are inadequate to perform today's city functions



### Major issues:

- ✗ Buildings are not ADA compliant, making parts of our public facilities inaccessible for some.
- ✗ Flooding and leaks cause damage, make spaces unusable, and put essential documents and equipment at risk.
- ✗ Lack of sprinkler systems and non-compliant fire systems pose safety risks.
- ✗ Building materials contain hazardous materials like asbestos.
- ✗ Heating and cooling buildings is challenging, inefficient, and costly.
- ✗ Building systems fail often. Repairs are becoming more frequent, time intensive, and costly.
- ✗ There's not adequate space in current buildings for the services the City provides to the public.
- ✗ Inefficiencies and increased maintenance costs result from city offices being scattered across several buildings.

**Action is needed.**



## Mahoney provides a unique opportunity.

South Portland has an opportunity to revitalize our main public safety buildings and reimagine the former Mahoney School, transforming this property into a **lively, community-centered asset** that serves South Portland for the next 100 years.

- Offices at City Hall, the Hamlin Planning & Development building, Assessing, and the Main Library would join together at the new City Center at Mahoney
- A new Police Station would be built on the Mahoney campus
- A new Central Fire Station would be built at its current location
- Spaces in the new City Center would be reserved for community uses (TBD)

### This project would come with big benefits.

If approved by voters at a future Bond Referendum, this project would:

- ✓ Create a vibrant, welcoming hub for community life and city services in South Portland's downtown
- ✓ Enable the continued public use of Mahoney for generations with attention to the building's historic significance
- ✓ Create a consolidated service center and one-stop shop for community members to connect with staff and conduct city business
- ✓ Solve the major problems at current city facilities more affordably and with a longer lifespan than some other options
- ✓ Create opportunities for redevelopment and potentially housing on sites that would be vacated, like the current City Hall
- ✓ Upgrade our main public safety buildings to provide top-notch fire, EMS and police services

### Guiding principles are at the heart of the design.

The following Guiding Principles, adopted by the Mahoney City Center Committee (M3C), steer the design of the new proposed facilities:



Community Centered Design



Achieve One Climate Future Goals



Safe, Accessible & Healthy



Integrated City Functions



Future-Focused Design with a Respect for History



Smart Investment of Public Funds

### You can make this project better.



Visit the project web page, [www.southportland.gov/mahoney](http://www.southportland.gov/mahoney), to learn more, sign up for updates, connect with the committee, and share your input. Your participation is key to helping create future facilities that best meet the needs of our community.

## 5. Good Promotion



# Promotion

- Social media campaign
- Newsletter/website posts
- Paper flyers
- Banners & street signs
- Community partners / business outreach
- News release
- Invite to groups, committees, leaders



## 6. Luck



# Results

- Over **200** people made over **500** visits to City facilities.
- Stronger relationships with **75** of local businesses + volunteers
- **500** residents & **3** state legislators provided input and stay informed
- **Numerous** community champions
- **Several** news stories
- Noticeable **shift** in narrative





## South Portland hosts 'building crawl' to showcase future city project plans

by Allyson Lapierre, WGME | Sat, October 4, 2025 at 5:03 PM  
Updated Mon, October 6, 2025 at 3:19 PM



South Portland city leaders hosted what they call a "building crawl." (WGME)

Sections

Portland Press Herald

My Account

MAINE NEWS

## Hoping to build support for redevelopment, South Portland gives tours of old city buildings

With a referendum vote still more than a year away, the city is launching a public awareness campaign for a Mahoney Civic Center.

Community: **South Portland**

Posted October 3, 2025  
Updated October 3, 2025



**Dana Richie**  
Staff Writer



Listen to this article now  
Powered by Trinity Audio

100%

# Greetings!

It was a pleasure to serve as South Portland's 2025 Mayor. It was an exciting year that was filled with new adventures and possibilities.

One example was our work on a plan to open up the creative thoughts and dreams for a one-stop community service center in the old Mahoney Middle School building! I think one of the best parts of the year was the "Building Crawl," where we gave tours of our facilities. They were a chance for our community, committee members, and staff to connect, and for everyone to see the challenges we face with our aging buildings. I want to give a huge shout out to our Communications Officer, Shara Dee, who did an amazing job coordinating.

Here are a few other highlights: 2025 was an election year. Councilor West, Councilor Scott, and I were elected. The Planning Department put the final touches on our Comp Plan, with continued community meetings and input. As Mayor, I worked very hard with Councilor West, locally and in Augusta, to bring a local tax to our hotels and motels. South Portland has over 1,000 rooms where many visitors to South Portland stay without a local tax that could provide needed revenue to our city. We came very close, but unfortunately our effort ended up just short in Augusta. We will continue to fight for this revenue that would benefit our community.

It was an absolute honor to serve as Mayor in the city where I grew up. Most important is the feeling that my mom was smiling upon me every day. South Portland is a thriving community, and I hope to have it always be that way.

Richard T. Matthews  
Mayor (2025)



# Stop and chat!

Brainstorm community engagement ideas for your upcoming city/town project with your neighbor.

- » What are some **strengths** where you work that you can tap into?
- » What's one "**outside the box**" engagement idea you could try?
- » What **barriers** do you expect? Does your neighbor have any ideas for helping overcome them?

# Lessons learned

1. Give yourself time you need to execute
2. Plan help schlepping stuff
3. Spend money and time wisely on promotion
4. Train volunteers on answering questions
5. Enlist volunteers to help post-event
6. Build in time for the post-work
7. Stay in touch with your people!

# What's happening now

- Exploring public-private partnership to develop Mahoney into a new City Center
- Residents will vote on a new Police and Fire Station in November

# Get materials!



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*[southportland.gov](http://southportland.gov)*