

Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Ethan Hipple
Director



9/12/23

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of strong support for the Maine Department of Transportation's grant application under the **2023 U.S. Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program**. The application outlines important plans to significantly improve the Libbytown neighborhood in Portland, Maine, via the elements included in the *Reconnecting Our Villages: Historic Libbytown* ("Project") to revitalize and reconnect this area as a result of the construction of Interstate 295 in the late 1960's. The work will improve connections throughout the community by:

- Reconstructing numerous streets to include traffic calming features and ADA-compliant sidewalks and crosswalks
- Installing sidewalks and bikeways to encourage active transportation along right-of-ways that are safe and modern
- Improving transit stops to support stronger community-wide accessibility; and
- Constructing a roundabout that is safe and improves traffic flow for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians.

The Project will lift burdens and support accessibility to housing, employment, retail, healthcare, tourism and recreation – including the state's \$14 billion tourism industry critical to Maine's economy.

In particular, my Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities is very supportive of how this project will increase pedestrian and bike access and connections between parks in the Libbytown neighborhood. Here in Portland, 94% of our residents live within a 10 minute walk to a park or trail, and we are working on getting that number to 100% as part of the national 10 Minute Walk initiative co-sponsored by the Trust For Public Land and the National Recreation and Parks Association.

While 94% of our residents live within a 10 minute walk of a park, it doesn't mean that those walking or biking routes are always safe and easy, and this project goes a long way towards improving those conditions to make sure that park users of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds can get to our parks easily and safely.

Within a 10 minute walk of this project area, we have recently invested heavily in the nearby Dougherty Field Park, with a brand new natural playground, a newly expanded skatepark that is now the largest in the state of Maine, and an outdoor pool facility that is being reconstructed for a new generation. In addition, we have smaller green spaces directly in this project area, such as the Lowell Street Parcel (corner of Lowell and Burnham St), that will be improved by this project. And finally, this project also improves access to Western Promenade Park, where we are completing a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) project to install a basketball court, improved ADA and bike parking, trailhead improvements, dog park improvements, and an expanded community garden.

All of these park improvements in the neighborhood will benefit from having strong bike and pedestrian connections between them, making it easier for neighborhood kids, families, and seniors to access these neighborhood gathering spots.

We are pleased MaineDOT in coordination with the City of Portland are seeking assistance from USDOT for this very important Project and hope USDOT is able to assist in funding these improvements. We recognize the importance of supporting USDOT merit criteria and providing equitable transportation options. Modernizing neighborhood transportation leads to safe and efficient connections and a better quality of life for all.

Sincerely,



Ethan Hipple

Director, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department
City of Portland
212 Canco Rd, Suite A
Portland, Maine 04103
ehipple@portlandmaine.gov