

FUTURE OF BUG LIGHT PARK IS ON THE LINE

By Marianne Hill, resident South Portland. Published in Portland Press Herald.

The future of Bug Light Park is on the line. Nestled along the eastern shoreline of South Portland, the park is loved dearly by city residents, who treasure its iconic lighthouse and its panoramic views of Portland Harbor and nearby islands. This month, the City Council votes on plans for the area.

Portland's Eastern Prom and Cape Elizabeth's Fort Williams were both saved from development by citizen efforts. Will similar efforts spare the Bug Light area? The proposed South Portland Comprehensive Plan would allow three-story buildings on lots adjacent to the small park. [1] And, while the City owns, and will keep, the grassy area near the lighthouse, the wooded area by the Liberty Ship sculpture is leased by the City from private owners. Surrounding open space is also private property.

Bug Light is the last prime seaside location in the city that remains open to the public; it hosts kite-flying, 4th of July crowds, an antique auto show and more. Expanding and enhancing the park, as envisioned in the Shipyard Monument Park proposal, offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for creating a heritage for future generations and a cultural mecca for the area.

Surely, there are foundations, corporations and individuals who have the deep pockets needed to fund a buyout of current property owners, and to invest in a well-thought-out vision for the area. The effort to find such donors is well underway, but will take time. Right now, however, there are steps the City can take. For one, the City can require that property owners adjacent to the modest Park preserve part of their properties as open space with public access. Two hundred or more feet going out from the shoreline should be preserved as open space, as well as 400 feet to the west of the current Bug Light park line. No buildings should be built

within 1,000 feet of the fuel storage tanks, whose toxic emissions are well-documented. [2] The City also should carry out its plans to purchase the wooded area of the park.

“Save Our Shipyards” is the organized group of residents who are working towards the creation of the Shipyard Monument Park. This larger park would honor the shipbuilding legacy of the area, while providing more green space as well as cultural and recreational opportunities. The sole sources of opposition to this idea come from financial concerns. Nearby property owners have their own ideas for the area and promise the city increased revenues from high-end housing or lodging. The City wonders whether enough donors will come forward to fund the creation of a Shipyard Monument Park. And, could a Shipyard Park bring in as much revenue as private development?

A Shipyard Park in such a prime location, in fact, could pay for itself over time - but the benefits would be widespread; unlike revenues from, say, a hotel, the revenues would not be concentrated in the hands of a few. Rather, the city would enjoy the benefits of ranking as one of the Best Places to Live in Maine. Cities that rank high in green space, cultural attractions and livability attract business investment, homebuyers and tourists.[3] In addition, with only modest investment, the enhanced Park could host weddings, concerts, fairs and similar events that would directly add to city coffers.

Development in the Shipyard area, however, would reduce its beauty and negatively impact the appeal of the city. Development would increase demands on the city budget and it is far from clear that new revenues would cover the additional costs. In particular, rising sea levels require remediation. The construction and repair of seawalls alone would cost an estimated \$135 million over 50 years.[4] Making Broadway wider for added traffic and emergency evacuation would also be costly and disruptive of the neighborhood.

Health hazards due to emissions from fuel storage tanks near the park are well-documented.[2] Also, the earth there is contaminated by industrial waste

and, even after remediation, human contact with the soil must be limited. [5], [6]

The creation of a beautiful Shipyard Monument Park would stand the test of time, bringing joy and strengthening cohesion in the City. It would preserve this treasured space for current and future generations. The time to act is now.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES (an informal list)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YTrfBs94UvwOa-TOyuZLoeVWid9r6ivl/view>
or

[1] <https://southportland2040.com/>

[2] <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/03/11/science/south-portland-petroleum-tanks-benzene/>

[3] https://www.ignitecda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ULI_Benefits-of-Parks-to-Communities.pdf

[4] <https://www.pearcemarine.com/blog/cost-of-a-seawall#:~:text=For>

[5] <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1288&context=cbep-publications#:~:text=HISTORY>

[6] <https://rjgrondin.com/projects/liberty-shipyard-brownfields-cleanup/#:~:text=R.J.>