MEMO

To: Council
Fr: Bill Bridgeo, City Manager
Da: October 10, 2017
Re: Council Goals and Actions 2014 to 2017

In preparation for Thursday night’s meeting and discussion of the Augusta Housing Authority’s request for a land lease and TIF for the proposed workforce housing on Maple Street, I have compiled several years’ worth of Council Goals which reference housing needs and Council’s intention to address them.

2014 COUNCIL GOALS AND ACTIONS
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GOAL 2: MAKE NEIGHBORHOODS ATTRACTIVE AND WELCOMING

The city of Augusta has long been a home for families, children, senior citizens, and for immigrants coming to make a better life. The city needs to continue to be a welcoming place and to provide a rich and secure environment for family life. For 2014, the priorities in this are to:

A) Create a housing strategy that facilitates opportunities for middle class and upper end housing; promotes the rehabilitation of the aging housing stock; and addresses the need for affordable housing for households of all incomes.

B) Enact the historic district ordinance to protect Augusta’s beautiful architecture in downtown and the West End.

2015 COUNCIL GOALS AND ACTIONS
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GOAL C: CONTINUE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS

“As a regional service center, Augusta will always have a population of people with lower incomes and/or special needs.” Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 17.

The recession is over, but still 18% of Augusta residents live below the poverty line. Around half of the children in Augusta schools receive free or reduced price lunches, an indication that
poverty rates are even higher for young people. The rate of “cognitive disability” in Augusta for 18-34 year olds (17%) is three times the rate of the rest of Maine. All of these are populations that experience hunger and homelessness, and are often involved in the criminal justice system. As this is going on, state government is proposing major changes to General Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs, all of which will reduce resources available to address these issues. There has been an increase in heroin use and addiction in Augusta, as has happened in cities all across Maine. Other concerns include the lack of pay increases for working people, and a continuing need for decent affordable housing.

Actions for 2015 include:
1. (INITIATE) The Police Chief and Manager will present information about heroin use and addiction in Augusta, and possible actions for its elimination, at an upcoming informational meeting;
2. (INITIATE) Upon the receipt of policy information from the Mayor and staff at an informational meeting, Council will deliberate upon the advisability and potential impact of a local minimum wage ordinance at an
3. (INITIATE) Ask the Joint Conference Committee of the Augusta School Board and Augusta City Council to study the issue of childhood hunger and homelessness, define the scope of the problem, and recommend steps towards its alleviation; and
4. (SUSTAIN) Continue to work with the Augusta Housing Authority to assure the development of more safe and affordable housing in Augusta.

2017 COUNCIL GOALS AND ACTIONS

GOAL A: FIX OLD HOUSES, BUILD NEW HOUSES, ATTRACT NEW RESIDENTS

There are roughly 28,000 people who work in the city of Augusta. Of these, about 23,000, or 86.4%, live outside of the city, and commute in to work every day (see chart). This proportion has grown from 79.9% in 2002. If the 2002 proportion still held, Augusta would have 1,750 more workers and their families. More families in Augusta would mean better neighborhoods, more children in the schools, a stronger tax base, and a broader group of volunteers.

To attract middle class families, Augusta must improve the quality of its housing stock, and stimulate the construction of new housing to meet the demand from those who don’t want to live in, and fix up, older homes.
**Action A1. Develop a strategy to rehabilitate existing older housing.**
This year the Augusta Housing Authority and City of Augusta will implement a multi-family rehabilitation program using state Community Development Block Grant funds. This is a positive first step, but more needs to be considered. Can funds raised from selling tax-acquired property be used to supplement rehabilitation funds? Can local banks provide below-market rate funds as part of their Community Reinvestment Act strategies? Can the Augusta Housing Authority’s development corporation be a vehicle for buying, fixing, and selling housing back into the private market? These and other options should be considered as part of a City/Housing Authority rehabilitation strategy.

**Action A2. In conjunction with the business community, create a marketing program to sell the virtues of living and working and playing in Augusta and Central Maine.**
The City of Augusta should partner with other organizations such as the Augusta Board of Trade, the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Kennebec Valley Board of Realtors, and the Kennebec Valley Tourism Council, to design a marketing program for Central Maine. One possible theme for such marketing is to promote a “green” lifestyle – emphasizing the leadership of the City on environmental issues, such as walking and biking trails, recycling, alternative energy, and so forth.

**Action A3. Explore ways to incentivize the development of infrastructure for residential projects, in ways similar (but not identical) to business development.**
The City of Augusta is highly skilled at using tax incentive and grant programs to stimulate economic development investment. This same skill – using different tax incentive and grant tools – should be used to incentive private developers to build market-rate residential housing within the city.

**Action A4. Monitor the implementation of three new codes passed in 2016 designed to improve housing quality: historic preservation, property maintenance, and yard sales.**
A lot of thought and discussion went into the creation and adoption of ordinances to preserve housing quality in Augusta. This year the City Manager should provide quarterly reports to the Council on the progress of implementing these ordinances.

**GOAL B: PROMOTE A HEALTHY, DIVERSE, THRIVING POPULATION**
The aging of the population; the in-migration to the city of people from different cultural backgrounds; the continuing scourge of drug addiction; poverty and hunger among children and their families; an observed increase in incivility among schoolchildren and their parents – all present human challenges for the city. Goals to address these issues include:

**Action B1. Step up activities to ensure that drug addiction treatment is available to residents, including the consideration of funding of interim and gap treatment programs.**
The City has participated in drug addiction forums and discussions, and has stepped up its enforcement activities. However, more needs to be done to ensure that treatment is available in a timely fashion when people need it. More federal and state grant funds for this purpose may be available this year, which will help. City staff should examine this issue, and make
recommendations to Council about how to improve the availability of treatment services for Augusta residents in need.

**Action B2. Create a small childhood hunger working group to continue to make progress in eliminating hunger in Augusta.** With the help of local church groups, teachers, nonprofits, and city staff, more healthy food has been made available to young people and low-income residents of subsidized housing in the past year. To coordinate future progress, a working group should be established that would include a city councilor, a school board member, the Augusta Food Bank Director, a school department staff designee, and city staff designee.