

Medford's Office of Planning, Development, and Sustainability is good news for both our environmental and economic initiatives.

Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn

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This is the first in a series of open letters to the Medford community regarding our priorities and plans as we enter Fiscal Year 2022.

Medford has long been committed to environmental planning and sustainability and has been proactive in making climate issues a priority. In 2001, Medford was the first community in Massachusetts to publish a Climate Action Plan. Soon after, the City created a dedicated Office of Energy & Environment that has overseen and implemented environmentally sound programs and policies in Medford. Since then, we have created a Municipal Energy Efficiency Policy, worked (and continue to work) to make municipal buildings and vehicles more energy efficient and reduce our carbon footprint, expanded renewable energy sources, increased our tree canopy, and much more. We work hard to make sure that environmental practices and policies are incorporated into every aspect of our planning and project implementation.

In 2020 we took a hard look at how the current breakdown of work - staff resources and connectivity of all our efforts across both offices - was working for Medford. Specifically, we reviewed how the work of both offices. What we found was that their areas of focus are closely intertwined and need to work together to best serve the needs of the community. To do that most efficiently and effectively, we realized we could and should tap into the staff expertise and resources by combining their work under one office.

With that, we're excited to formally announce that the Office of Community Development and the Office of Energy and Environment have merged into the newly named Office of Planning, Development, and Sustainability. This new chapter brings together the previously separate work of the two offices under a new and refined focus and will allow us to work efficiently and effectively to achieve our planning, environmental, and economic development goals. This is good news for the City of Medford. It means that climate resiliency and sustainability efforts will be built into all of our planning and economic development work, and our environmental initiatives will help bolster our business development and community planning efforts, making a sustainable and thriving Medford for all.

The Office of Planning, Development and Sustainability will drive the City's efforts on economic and business development, climate resiliency and energy efficiency, parks and open space planning, affordable housing and more. By merging offices and staff resources, the new office now includes experts in economic development, housing, environmental issues, land use and zoning, Federal Community Development Block Grants, and in the coming years, an additional expert on climate, resiliency and energy to complement the department's already substantial experience. Much of this work naturally overlaps. For example, both offices have been leading projects improving and expanding the City's parks, shared use paths, and open

spaces. The merging of these departments will facilitate communication between staff working on these projects and allow incidental collaboration across all areas, as they are now sharing offices. It also allows us to more fully leverage the resources of both departments; the projects of the Energy & Environment Office will benefit from additional administrative and financial staff support, and the work of the Office of Community Development will benefit from the climate and adaptation expertise found in the E&E Office.

We realize there may be some who worry about what it will mean for environmental efforts to not have their own department. However, bringing together this work means that the City's environmental and sustainability initiatives will now be fully integrated into our planning and development efforts. After leading the Office of Energy and Environment for more than a decade, Alicia is both excited and prepared to lead this work. Medford has a long history of leadership in environmental matters, including the passing of the City's solar ordinance, which I, Breanna Lungo-Koehn proposed as a city councilor a couple years back, and the creation of the first municipal climate adaptation plan in Massachusetts, and building these goals into our planning and development work will allow us to achieve even more.

Making smart, sustainable decisions is good for our community and business development efforts as well, and the integration of these departments will allow us to create a resilient and flourishing city that is a great place to live for decades to come.