

The Oregonian

Portland street fee: Transportation officials don't expect consensus from working groups ahead of City Council vote

*By Andrew Theen
September 15, 2014*

With time running out to make formal recommendations to the Portland City Council, city officials don't anticipate any consensus to come out of the three committees tasked with revising a controversial street fee proposal.

In lieu of lockstep recommendations, the transportation bureau drilled down to common areas of agreement among the work groups. PBOT circulated a draft version last week of what could end up being the final report from the dozens of business owners, developers, nonprofit leaders, and low-income advocates volunteering their time on funding plan.

The overall takeaway: city officials seem to have convinced many residents that there's no magic budgetary solution to find additional money to pay for street maintenance and safety projects. But despite meeting throughout the summer, there's still widespread disagreement on how long a new tax or fee should be allowed to continue and whether or not the issue should go before voters.

Where are some areas of agreement?

A sampling: The city isn't fat with cash to spent on pavement maintenance, there's a "considerable need" for more money to fix streets and address safety hazards for all Portlanders, and the net revenue expected from any of the current funding proposals "would not be sufficient to meet the backlog of needs." PBOT officials say they'd need to spend \$91 million per year just on pavement maintenance to bring roads up to good condition.

PBOT officials also gleaned there's widespread support for creating an oversight body to ensure the city is spending revenue wisely, and there's "general support" that whatever City Council approve is not unduly burdensome to low-income residents.

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick spent much of the first six months of this year pushing for some sort of solution to address Portland's woeful transportation infrastructure. After a rotating circuit of town halls and meetings, the pair settled on a monthly street fee for residents and businesses.

The original \$53 million proposal was abruptly tabled in early June, and PBOT convened committees to help find a solution that was palatable for many, if not all. Novick and Hales plan to return to City Council with a revised plan in November.

The draft report has the same funding proposals The Oregonian reported last week (a progressive income tax of some sort and a flat fee on businesses according to their gross revenue, employee size and square footage.

Here's the draft report.

(Programming Note: Tune in to OPB's Think out Loud on Monday to hear more about the street fee developments.)

The Portland Tribune

City Council to air proposal to shift some of its utility spending oversight to independent authority

*By Steve Law
September 12, 2014*

The Portland City Council on Wednesday will consider a Portland City Club recommendation to create a “semi-autonomous Portland Water and Sewer Authority” to set utility rates and recommend bureau budgets to the council.

The proposal is the latest in a series of ideas to rein in what many see as out-of-control spending by the Portland Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services.

The City Club, in a report issued April 24, wound up recommending a “no” vote on a ballot initiative that would shifted control of the two city utilities to the Portland Public Water District, run by an independent elected board. The club, made up of civic leaders, said the initiative was poorly conceived. Portland voters agreed, rejecting the idea in the May primary.

However, the City Club concluded the city has been spending city ratepayer funds on projects that are unrelated to water and sewer services. The club put some of the blame on the city’s commissioner form of government, which puts city commissioners in charge of the two bureaus, saying that can lead to “short-term political expedience” that substitutes for wise planning at the city-owned utilities.

The City Club recommended that the City Council appoint people with experience in utility finance, engineering and other fields relevant to utility management to serve as the Portland Water and Sewer Authority.

The City Council would retain ultimate authority to approve the Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services budgets, but “would no longer have authority to direct any specific expenditure from those budgets.” That power would rest with the Portland Water and Sewer Authority, under the City Club proposal.

The City Council will hear a report on the City Club proposal at 2 p.m. Wednesday, in council chambers at Portland City Hall. Mayor Charlie Hales has asked for one hour to discuss the proposal.

To read the City Club report: www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=50265&a=502999.

The Skanner

Portland Can't Afford a Bad Hire for Compliance Officer/Community Liaison

*By Jason Renaud
September 10, 2014*

For over a decade advocates for people with mental illness have steadily watched one police reform effort after another launch grandly and flop summarily. The settlement in DOJ v. City of Portland has been, from our point of view, just one more flop.

According to police, most of the agreement items are well underway, and many are finished. But with no decrease in police violence toward persons with mental illness those “well underway or already complete” fixes show their unilateral actions to be unsuccessful.

Mental health advocates opposed the settlement of DOJ v. City of Portland because it does not protect our friends from certain and continuing harm by police officers. The evidence of failure is already available. The homeless are still routinely hassled and routed; two persons with mental illness were shot and killed by police officers so far this year; it took 100 officers to collect a young sick man waving a air pistol on Labor Day.

The settlement agreement calls for an independent court monitor to report to U.S. Judge Michael Simon and to the Portland City Council on the implementation of over 100 action items.

The court monitor, called a "Compliance Officer / Community Liaison," or COCL, must scrutinize fixes made by the police and report on progress or lack thereof. With a broad perspective developed from substantial experience, the COCL will be tasked with evaluating what has been done - and what ought to be done - to improve safety from police officers for persons with mental illness.

To be effective and assert justice, the COCL must bring a complex set of skills to this work.

- The COCL must have the ability to listen to people who have mental illness and understand their experience, from their perspective - not a police perspective, not a neutral perspective, not a clinician's perspective. Only the perspective credentialed by lived experience of mental illness will illuminate solutions and should guide implementation, from a potent mix of compassion, presence, resources, authority and action. Further, the COCL must be able to distill that lived experience into an assessment of trust - not by meeting a vetted set of advocates, but by listening to a wide variety of people, some of whom may be reluctant to talk due to mistrust of police and repeated city outreach failures.
- The COCL must be adept at issues concerning racial justice, because persons of color who also have a mental illness are at extreme risk of police violence. Additionally, their friends, families, neighbors and caretakers need to gain trust and confidence that police officers won't bring more danger than help when called to a crisis.
- The COCL must know how a confluence of collected data influences both police actions and oversight. Use-of-force by officers is closely tracked by the PPB in-house, but as of today, no independent and empowered person has had access to those files or the resulting data. A successful COCL will show past experience extracting and analyzing data to determine whether police and the city are in compliance with the court agreement.
- The COCL must have demonstrated capacity to speak truth to power and hold the police bureau, its administrators and individual officers, accountable to the settlement, both items and spirit.

The three current candidates to be presented to City Council do not have the sufficient qualifications to be successful in the COCL position. They appear to be thoughtful men, each with an aspect of the qualities needed, but a quick scan of their resumes shows none are fully capable to monitor DOJ v. City of Portland.

To accept the current candidates is to resign the city to another layer of police oversight and eventual failure; and to promote all or any as a best candidate expects a rubber stamp of approval.

City Hall, by disrespecting the concerns of our community, tries to spoon-feed us the agreement, and we're supposed to say it's tasty. Actually it makes us trust the city's police even less than we did before. After being routinely ignored, our community needs a sign of good faith - such as a public announcement the city has rethought its blind rush to tap any candidate in a storm.

City Council should acknowledge the current candidates are not sufficiently qualified, and post the RFQ again, invite the current candidates to re-apply, and select a "Compliance Officer / Community Liaison" with both the necessary and sufficient skills.

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Jason Renaud

Secretary, on behalf of the

Mental Health Association of Portland