

The Oregonian

Portland Tennis Center: Plan to cover 4 outdoor courts in 'bubble' awaits City Council approval

*By Andrew Theen
September 30, 2014*

The Portland Tennis Center, a city-owned facility adjacent to Northeast Portland's Benson High School, is ready to break ground on a long-discussed plan to cover four of its eight outdoor courts with a bubble-like structure to allow year-round play.

If the Portland City Council approves an emergency ordinance Wednesday, a \$1.3 million plan to build a new "air-supported structure" could move forward as soon as November.

Portland Parks & Recreation officials say converting the outdoor courts makes sense for several reasons. It could bring in double the existing revenue generated by the tennis center, adding much-needed cash to help maintain existing tennis courts across the city. And the bubble fills a need, they say, for more dry courts during Portland's long, wet and often dreary winter.

"We really want to grow the sport," said Jennifer Yocom, Portland Parks & Recreation's community relations manager. Parks officials said the bubble is made out of "a structural-rated architectural vinyl coated polyester fabric."

The city currently owns and operates just four indoor tennis courts citywide but is responsible for more than 100 outdoor city courts in varying states of disrepair. Parks leaders say there's a need to provide more covered courts that are reservable and available any time of the year.

"It's a great indoor sport," said Doug Brenner, the citywide services manager for the parks bureau, "and this provides year-round tennis."

Unusual project

Portland is entering uncharted territory, having never contracted for a building quite like this.

City engineers initially estimated construction to cost \$400,000, but that jumped to \$672,672 in the contract proposal from Skyward Construction. City leaders said it's not just this project -- contracts in general are coming in at higher prices and with fewer bidders than in past years.

The bubble would cover the four courts nearest to the tennis center's existing indoor facility.

Jonathan Shapiro, a long-time user of the Portland Tennis Club on Northeast 12th Avenue, said he's "divided" on the plan to cover half of the courts.

He said there is a need for more indoor courts. But Shapiro is wary that the tennis center will continue to devote the four remaining outdoor courts to group play, such as the co-ed competitive World Team Tennis league. Shapiro said the center typically reserves courts for the league during the evening, forcing other players to fend for themselves at courts where reservations aren't allowed.

"There's really not a lot of well-lit outdoor courts in Portland," Shapiro said.

The \$1.3 million bubble project will be paid for entirely by the bureau's system development charges and not by general fund property tax revenue.

The parks bureau has a \$68 million property tax bond on the November ballot, which would continue an existing tax rate used to maintain and repair city parks and other facilities. Yocom said the bond measure wouldn't touch many tennis courts, saying the plan calls only for revamping existing courts at Argay Park in east Portland.

'We need more'

Portland owns four indoor tennis courts at the Portland Tennis Center, and an additional three indoor courts at St. Johns Racquet Center. The nonprofit Portland After School Tennis & Education Program operates the North Portland courts under a 20-year lease agreement with the city.

Portland isn't the only local government in the tennis court industry. Glendoveer Golf & Tennis, the Metro-owned facility in east Portland, has four indoor courts as well.

But Danice Brown, general manager of the St. Johns club and executive director of the nonprofit, said the need for additional indoor play space at public facilities was "desperate."

Brown said she served on two task forces in recent years to study the problem, and the bubble plan for the Portland Tennis Center has been under discussion for a long time.

"There are plenty of private ones," Brown said, citing several more expensive private tennis clubs in the metro area, "but we just need more public ones."

Hot ticket

The Portland Tennis Center's courts are often a hot ticket.

The club is open from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m. every day. Booking a court can be difficult, according to Shapiro, the longtime player, who said most slots are filled at the center on any given day.

Brenner, the parks bureau official, said the city has roughly 200 to 250 members at the tennis center and a similar number on a waiting list.

According to parks bureau revenue estimates, the tennis center paid for itself each of the last five fiscal years. In 2013-14, Portland brought in \$483,853 from the tennis center.

Covering four courts could generate approximately \$272,943 in revenue on the low-end, city officials said, with \$448,141 as the most optimistic expectation.

Brenner said the city would have more lessons, more tournaments and more courts to offer year-round with the bubble.

He said the city hadn't determined whether it would raise court fees after the bubble is operational. "We are analyzing that," he added. The bureau believes the structure will pay for itself within three to six years.

Shapiro said he's hopeful the bubble pans out, and he'd like to see the additional revenue go to tennis maintenance elsewhere.

If the City Council approves the contract, the remaining four outdoor courts will be out of commission for several months as a staging ground for the project.

The bubble could be opened early next year.

Children's Levy can thrive without a special district: Editorial

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
September 28, 2014*

Oregon allows 26 different types of special taxing districts, which can be approved by voters to fund services ranging from parks and recreation to rural fire protection to utilities. Some of the districts have a narrow focus – vector control or geothermal heating, for example. So would anyone notice if the state added another?

Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman, architect of the Portland Children's Levy, would like the Legislature to add children's service district to its list of approved special taxing entities. Saltzman told The Oregonian editorial board that his primary goals are to expand the levy countywide and to establish a funding structure that doesn't require the time and effort of an election campaign every five years and will outlast his tenure in office.

In the 12 years since its creation, the Children's Levy has become an important part of Portland's social safety net. It generates \$10 million annually to help feed underprivileged children, prevent child abuse and enhance educational opportunities, among other positive influences. Voters have approved the Children's Levy by large margins each time it has been on the ballot. The Oregonian editorial board has supported the levy.

By just about any measure, the Children's Levy is a very worthy cause. But that doesn't mean authorizing another type of taxing entity, designed with a single agency in mind, is a good idea. Legislators should politely decline Saltzman's request for three reasons: First, the program is functioning at a high level under the current taxing system. Second, Saltzman and other proponents could work with the county to create a countywide levy without a permanent district. And, third, adding service districts magnifies flaws in Oregon's property tax system.

Though Saltzman did not cite tax policy as a primary motivation for his effort, Measure 5 property caps do put programs funded by levies in a vulnerable position. Permanent districts get their slice of the tax pie before temporary levies – a consequence that Saltzman noted when the Multnomah Library District was created in 2012. The League of Oregon Cities has suggested that temporary levies should be exempted from Measure 5 caps, which limits taxes for general government to \$10 for every \$1,000 of a property's market value and taxes for education to \$5. That idea merits consideration. Such an exemption would raise the possibility of increased taxes for homeowners but only with voter approval.

It's understandable that Saltzman wants to ensure that the Children's Levy, his signature accomplishment, survives when he no longer is around to champion it. Given the margins in past Children's Levy elections, securing votes should not be too difficult. But ballot measures, even for popular causes, do require advocates to guide the effort.

Creating a taxing district, however, would block voter input after the initial election and reduce accountability. That's one reason that The Oregonian editorial board opposed creation of the Multnomah County Library District in 2012. Voters approved the library district, which reduced the amount of money flowing to the Children's Levy and other entities.

It's hard to blame Saltzman for pursuing the children's district idea; his intentions are good. But instead of lobbying to make a flawed system more flawed, he should push for a more constructive change – such as exempting levies from property-tax caps. And he should mentor someone to take his place as the levy's chief champion when he leaves public life.

The Portland Tribune

City's island plans put neighbors on edge

*By Steve Law
September 30, 2014*

Plans for marine trade terminals on West Hayden Island are back on the table — but not if neighbors and environmentalists have their way.

A parade of critics bashed the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and Port of Portland last week, charging them with a “back door” effort to revive industrial development on the island.

City planners, in a draft of Portland's new comprehensive land-use plan, included 300 acres on West Hayden Island among the city's industrial lands available for future development, in order to meet a state mandate to provide adequate land for future jobs.

Several nearby residents and environmentalists panned the idea last Tuesday, testifying at the first public hearing on the comp plan before the Planning and Sustainability Commission.

“The Port of Portland is the bully in the sandbox here; it found another way to get what it wants,” said Pam Ferguson, who represents 440 families living in a manufactured home complex blocks from the potential marine terminals.

Just eight months earlier, the port withdrew its request to have the city annex its 800 acres on West Hayden Island and rezone 300 of the acres to allow marine industrial terminals. The port backed off when it became clear the Portland City Council would not ease the strict environmental remediation and other terms approved by the Planning and Sustainability Commission as preconditions for the annexation. The port said those terms were too costly to make a marine trade terminal development pencil out, on what is a strategic site for such a project along the Columbia River.

Many residents — and some planning commissioners — were miffed that the West Hayden Island issue was back before the commission, but this time without the environmental and other conditions approved late last year by commissioners.

“Others have disregarded the careful work you did over a year ago,” said Hayden Island resident Timme Helzer. Now city planners want to go in the “opposite direction” from where planning commissioners landed last year, he said.

Bob Sallinger, conservation director of the Audubon Society of Portland, said the marine terminal project should have died once and for all when the port dropped its proposal in January. “That should have been the end; they said they would not protect the community and the environment,” said Sallinger, who helped galvanize opposition to the trade terminals.

By designating the land as a future industrial site, he said, “It virtually guarantees that development will happen.”

Greg Theisen, a Port of Portland planner, told planning commissioners it’s important for the city to preserve the option for shipping terminals on West Hayden Island, to secure its historic role as a marine trade center.

“Portland’s future hinges on the success of linking to the international marketplace,” Theisen said. “West Hayden Island is an important element of that future.”

Kelly Hossaini, a Miller Nash attorney who represents the Portland Business Alliance, defended city planners’ inclusion of West Hayden Island in the developable lands inventory. “We face an industrial lands shortfall of more than 600 acres,” Hossaini said. And some of the city’s other ideas to meet the state industrial lands mandate, such as redeveloping golf courses into industrial sites, may never be realized, she said. “Don’t exacerbate that shortfall.”

Chris Smith, a member of the Planning and Sustainability Commission, said he was frustrated that city planners brought forth a proposal that was inconsistent with what commissioners decided last year.

Commission Chairman Andre Baugh promised that the panel will debate the West Hayden Island proposal and other policies in the comprehensive land-use plan starting in January.

A mix of uses

After the hearing, the Portland Planning and Sustainability Bureau deferred interview requests to Eric Engstrom, the principal planner who has worked closely on West Hayden Island issues. Engstrom did not return calls, but issued a written statement.

“The proposed comprehensive plan is a set of broad goals, policies and maps that describe how the city should develop over the next 20 years,” Engstrom wrote. “The plan does not rezone or annex West Hayden Island.”

Engstrom said that the site’s current farm-forest zone would remain and the Planning and Sustainability Commission’s terms for accepting annexation of the site haven’t changed. He said the comp plan proposal was consistent with Metro’s regional growth management policies and City Council Resolution 36805, “which anticipate a mix of marine industrial development and open space uses on West Hayden Island at some point in the future.”

Josh Thomas, the Port of Portland spokesman for marine and industrial development, said after the meeting that the port agreed West Hayden Island should be included on the city’s inventory of future industrial lands, but the port didn’t lobby the city to do so.

“It was initiated by the city, as part of their comp plan,” Thomas said.

Including the port’s property helps the city satisfy its state mandate to provide adequate industrial lands for future jobs, he said. “As a long-term direction-setting document in the comp plan, it’s logical the city staff would include West Hayden Island as a place for future marine operations and natural resource protection.”

When the port withdrew its annexation request in January, Thomas said, “We said at the time it was not a ‘no,’ just a ‘not now.’ ”

Listing the property in the industrial lands inventory doesn’t mean the port will get more lenient terms should it want to develop the land in the future, he said.

"I would say it's premature to gauge the level of requirements that would be placed on future development."

New Powell Butte reservoirs in service

*By KOIN 6 News
September 30, 2014*

Nearly a year behind schedule, the new \$138 million Powell Butte Reservoir is now open and fully functional.

Both 25 million gallon tanks of the underground project at Powell Butte are full of water, feeding Portland's homes and businesses.

Many of the delays in opening the facility were because there were more than 3,000 cracks in the concrete that the contractor had to fix.

The city said the contractor fixed the concrete, and some of the cost of the concrete repairs were included in the bid. Additional costs are being negotiated with the contractor.

One tank opened in July and the second tank opened at the beginning of this month.

"Those hairline cracks that had to be discovered, repaired and then checked, that all took a while so we are behind in our original construction schedule," said Portland Water Bureau administrator David Shaff. "But as I said, the reservoir is now online."

The Powell Butte Reservoir is next to another underground reservoir that opened 30 years ago. Work is currently in progress on another underground reservoir at Kelly Butte.

The city said that will be finished in Summer 2015.

The federal government ordered Portland to do away with open-air reservoirs, and work to disconnect those — including three at Mount Tabor — begins early next year.

The Mercury

All Three Police Reform Finalists Pass Muster. Now It's Your Turn.

*By Dirk VanderHart
September 29, 2014*

Remember earlier this afternoon, when we offered a brief rundown of the three contenders who may oversee Portland police reform?

It turns out the committee that is helping select that person found each of the finalists compelling enough to move them to the next step of the process. That's where you come in.

According to a release from Mayor Charlie Hales' office, the special selection committee forwarded each finalist (and their respective teams) on for public scrutiny. That comes after a day of persistent grilling of the three men, local consultant John Campbell, Chicago criminology professor Dennis Rosenbaum, and Oregon Drug and Alcohol Policy Commission Executive Director Daniel Ward.

"The community members who committed their time to the interview process were tremendous," Hales said in a press release. "Now I ask the community as a whole to participate and contribute feedback on the candidates."

To that end, the mayor's office will include an online form for offering your input on his website this afternoon. You'll also be able to watch candidate interviews, and read their applications (which we've posted before).

In a city with no end of public process, this is one of the more important bits of input you can provide. Whoever gets the lucrative "compliance officer/community liaison" gig will help set the tone for the city's federally mandated police reform, and will have a huge role in seeing that the police don't beat up mentally ill people for no good reason. Candidates have also voiced a hope that the reforms will help address all types of disproportionate use of force, including against minorities.

It's worth your time to take an interest. Full release after the jump.

MONDAY, SEPT. 29, 2014 — The City of Portland is seeking public feedback on three candidates vying for the Compliance Officer/Community Liaison (COCL) position that will oversee the police-reform agreement crafted with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Today the candidates went through a public interview process, including presentations to and questions by the Selection Advisory Committee. Now, the DOJ agreement requires a 30-day public comment period to collect community advice to City Council regarding candidate strengths and weaknesses. Public input is welcome until Oct. 29.

"Everyone's input is important as the city works toward fulfilling the settlement agreement," Mayor Charlie Hales said. "The community members who committed their time to the interview process were tremendous. Now I ask the community as a whole to participate and contribute feedback on the candidates."

An online form for public comment will go live at 4:30 p.m. today on Hales' website, www.portlandoregon.gov/mayor/. The page will include a link to video of the interviews, which aired live today on Channel 30. It will also include links to candidates' original applications and a link to the Portland Police Bureau's webpage on implementation of the settlement.

Public comments may also be submitted by e-mailing mayorcharliehales@portlandoregon.gov or by calling his office at 503-823-4120.

More on the candidates:

- *John Campbell of Campbell DeLong Resources Inc., a Portland firm that has provided research, training, facilitation, and planning for the purpose of public safety problem-solving, community-oriented policing, and the goal of more effective law enforcement results since 1989.*
- *Dennis Rosenbaum of Chicago, executive director of the National Police Research Platform, which oversees a seven-university research program in more than 100 U.S. cities, funded by the National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice, to advance the current state of knowledge and practice in American law enforcement.*
- *Daniel Ward of Portland, executive director of the Oregon Drug and Alcohol Policy Commission and a former CEO (2009-12) of Metro Crisis Services Inc. in Colorado.*

Who Should Oversee Portland's Police Reform? The Finalists Make Their Pitches

*By Dirk VanderHart
September 29, 2014*

The three finalists for the important job of overseeing Portland's federally mandated police reform made their formal introductions this morning—and two of them had backup.

The city's got until late November to pick a "compliance officer/community liaison" that will scrutinize police activity, listen to community concerns, and, hopefully, shepherd Portland toward a future where the mentally ill aren't at outsized risk of being beaten by cops, as the US Department of Justice says they have been. The job pays handsomely—\$240,000 a year—but two of the finalists will be divvying that money if selected.

John Campbell, a local facilitator and consultant who's worked extensively with the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) over the years, unveiled a team of seven people he'd bring to bear if selected. Campbell made clear he'd be the primary actor, along with local labor attorney (and German-car blamer) Akin Blitz.

But he'll have help— notably from local mental health professionals and former police officials (including erstwhile Hillsboro Police Chief Ron Louie, who saw controversy in efforts to reform his former department). As Denis has pointed out, Campbell was the only of the finalists not to have some personal history in dealing with people in mental health crises. The size and scope of his team is plainly one way to address that.

Campbell spent much of his 25-minute presentation discussing his background as a Portlander, including efforts as a neighborhood activist and experience working to bolster citizen oversight of cops. And he stressed that the settlement is confusing, and will require diligence.

"If there's people who understand the opportunity for this to accomplish not a lot, that would be us," Campbell told the selection committee. "Let's make this one matter."

Also coming in force is Dennis Rosenbaum [pdf], who announced a five-person team he'd use if chosen. Rosenbaum is a criminology professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, and he's studied perceptions of policing in cities across the country (including here). He's also been invited to participate in reforms like the one Portland's undergoing in the past, he said, but this is the first time he's been interested.

"I see Portland as a progressive place that could adopt innovation," Rosenbaum said. "There's an opportunity for a new model here that is driven by the people and not Washington (DC)."

But there's a hitch. Rosenbaum's team is mostly comprised of data-crunching professors from Chicago and South Carolina. It's a team unquestionably steeped in police policy (including how cops deal with people in mental health crisis) and fiddling with the metrics that can bolster evidence-based decision making, but Rosenbaum's presentation was the least engaging, and it wasn't totally clear how frequently most team members would be around. To address that, he's recruited former Oregon Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul De Muniz to act as a local liaison.

The last finalist, Oregon Drug and Alcohol Policy Commission Executive Director Daniel Ward [pdf], had the most personal and engaging presentation. Ward described how he's battled depression for 25 years, and laid out a lengthy history of working with addictions and mental illness. He's lost friends to suicide, Ward says, and one of his children "survived a use-of-force incident with an officer."

"All of these lived experience have given me an understanding of the issues facing the city of Portland," he said.

If he gets the job, Ward said he'd have an open-office policy, where community members could feel free to bring him their concerns. He'd tap into relationships with law enforcement officials in Colorado and elsewhere for outside perspective, and he would "expect to learn a lot continually." He'd also be flying largely solo, where the other finalists have teams of folks from a variety of disciplines. It's possible that will hurt him in the eyes of the selection committee.

This morning's presentations were only the beginning. Each of the candidates also met with three different subgroups of the selection committee. The committee will decide this afternoon whether to forward all three names for public review and comment. If the committee doesn't, it could reset the whole process—something certain mental health advocates have called for, anyway, claiming none of the finalists are capable of handling the task (though that was before the full teams had been assembled).