

The Oregonian

Comparing Portland's tennis bubble to Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District's: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Andrew Theen
October 03, 2014*

When the indoor bubble at the Portland Tennis Center opens early next year, it won't be the first of its kind in the metro area, but it will likely be the most expensive.

Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District has two "air structures" at its massive tennis center in Beaverton.

The district opened its first bubble in 1991, a second came online in 2006. THPRD officials had to replace the original bubble this year, at a cost of \$387,398.

"We've provided covered outdoor courts to our patrons during fall and winter for the past 23 years," Bob Wayt, THPRD spokesman said in an email.

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council approved an emergency ordinance to move forward with the first bubble at the city's tennis center in Northeast Portland adjacent to Benson High School.

The city's parks bureau owns and operates the facility, and said covering four of its outdoor courts will bring in additional revenue and provide more court time for Portlanders during rainy months.

The construction contract approved Wednesday is for \$672,672, but city officials estimate the entire project costs for the permanent structure are closer to \$1.3 million. Parks system development charges will pay for the structure.

THPRD's bubbles also cover four courts apiece, bringing the total number of indoor courts during the fall and winter at the Beaverton complex to 14.

But the bubbles in Beaverton are removed, deflated and put in storage in the spring, adding eight outdoor courts during the spring and summer.

THPRD pays \$12,500 annually to deflate, reinflate and store each bubble.

Portland parks officials said using a temporary structure was an option, but said that added "significant cost and wear and tear."

Keep it or tear it down? Portland officials defend studying demolition of Veterans Memorial Coliseum

*By Brad Schmidt
October 06, 2014*

After all the big ideas, stalled negotiations and failed development deals, the future of Portland's dilapidated Veterans Memorial Coliseum has returned to the same fundamental question of yesteryear:

Keep it or tear it down?

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council will informally approve a broad plan to study development and closure options for the 54-year-old coliseum. Then, armed with new financial information and alternatives, officials want to return March 31 to outline the slow path toward an eventual decision for the city-owned facility.

"At the end of the day, we have to look at the costs and ask the hard questions," said Susan Hartnett, who manages the city's sports venues.

But while a clear answer could emerge next year, some vocal members of Portland's architecture community are troubled that Portland officials are even reconsidering demolition options.

"I do feel betrayed," said Stuart Emmons, an architect and co-chairman of Friends of Memorial Coliseum. "I think we're going over old turf again."

Many options, no progress

The coliseum became a lightning rod of controversy in 2009 as then-Mayor Sam Adams negotiated a stadium deal with sports owner Merritt Paulson. At the time, Paulson wanted to land a Major League Soccer franchise by renovating the downtown stadium now called Providence Park – but any renovation meant Paulson's Minor League Baseball team would need to find a new home.

Adams and Paulson considered tearing down the coliseum so the city could build a new baseball stadium next to the Trail Blazers' basketball arena, now called the Moda Center. But the proposal was widely panned, Portland lost its baseball team and subsequent redevelopment efforts have gone nowhere.

In the past five years, officials have pursued deals with the Trail Blazers and entertainment-themed developers. They placed the coliseum on the National Register of Historic Places and authorized spending more than \$20 million of public money to restore the building. Improving the coliseum, Adams and city redevelopment officials said in 2011, would catalyze development in the rest of the Rose Quarter.

In 2012, Adams aggressively pushed a \$31.5 million renovation deal involving the coliseum's main tenant, the Portland Winterhawks hockey team, but he couldn't close it before leaving office.

Doug Piper, the team's president, said concerns about league sanctions against the Winterhawks complicated the deal. Piper said it would have been "foolhardy" to make a \$10 million financial commitment when there were concerns that the team might not "survive."

"When that hit us, you can imagine that could have been devastating," he said. "Now it didn't turn out that way, but we didn't know that."

In the end, Piper said, the team was fined \$200,000, it lost draft picks and the coach/general manager was suspended for a year.

Asked whether the Winterhawks pulled out of the deal, he said: "I don't think it's accurate to say we pulled out of the deal."

"There's a lot of factors that made the deal not right at the time," he added. "I think that's fair to say on all sides."

Enter Mayor Charlie Hales, who replaced Adams in 2013.

"Sam was out and Charlie was in, and Charlie put the thing on the shelf because he had other priorities, it wasn't his project," Piper said.

Behind the scenes, officials in Hales' office considered a proposal from developer Doug Oblatz to transform the coliseum into an indoor track facility to open in advance of the 2016 World Indoor Track & Field Championships, which will be held in Portland.

Officials postponed doing a broader study of options while the city dug into Oblatz's renovation proposal, Hartnett said. But the estimated price tag was about \$80 million, she said, too hefty to go forward without looking at alternatives.

The renovation choices

Now, Portland officials will hire three outside firms to study redevelopment and closure options, with associated cost estimates.

The consultants will study five redevelopment scenarios:

- A basic overhaul that would address deferred maintenance.
- Enhancing the coliseum as a sports venue, replacing seats, adding a new scoreboard and improving concessions.
- A broader renovation plan to lure more concerts or events, with improvements to the sound system, staging and loading areas.
- Oblatz's indoor track proposal, although it could not be completed in advance of the world championships.
- An amphitheater concept, first floated a decade ago, that would retain the coliseum's roof but remove its distinctive glass and part of the seating bowl.

Additionally, consultants will consider maintaining the status-quo arrangement with the Winterhawks.

Hartnett said the coliseum hosts about 115 events a year, including Winterhawk games, netting the city an operating profit of about \$73,000. But that is more than wiped out by an annual obligation to spend at least \$500,000 to improve the building.

Hartnett said the Winterhawks remain interested in striking a deal.

"That's still available," she said.

Piper said the Winterhawks would be happy to remain in the coliseum if the building receives upgrades, such as a new scoreboard and better seats.

While the team previously was willing to kick in \$10 million toward a renovation, Piper said the city's assessment will drive any future conversation about what's practical and affordable.

"We're interested to see what they come up with," he said. "If it makes sense, we'd like to participate."

Asset or money pit?

Consultants will also study options to close the coliseum or tear it down for future redevelopment. Under either scenario, the city has already committed to keeping the coliseum open through June 2016, with some events tentatively scheduled into 2018, Hartnett said.

Although the Adams-led City Council supported keeping the coliseum open, Hartnett said it's appropriate to look at all the options with new leaders elected to office. Despite the historic designation, demolition remains a potential option, she said, although it could prove expensive.

"It's not like we could just load it up with dynamite and implode it," she said.

Emmons, who helped lead coliseum preservation efforts five years ago, said the building is a mid-century architectural masterpiece. He said the city should invest money into the building so it can attract more events.

Emmons complained that the city has been opaque about its latest study plans, and the coliseum needs to be spared from talk of demolition – once and for all.

"The bottom line is, as we see it, the building could be a real asset to the city," he said.

Hartnett said that might still be true, provided the city can craft a financially solvent plan for its operation.

"We have shown a propensity to kick the can down the road on VMC," she said, "because it's a hard decision."

The Portland Building follies: Editorial Agenda 2014

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
October 05, 2014*

It's a rare occurrence that the creator of a civic calamity can show up decades later and, perhaps, fruitfully engage on the subject.

Nobody can blame architect Michael Graves for his design of the Portland Building, which fails to pass even a modest Northwest weatherproofing test and has been the source of derision by some who work within its gloomy spaces. Neither can Graves, who helped change the visual vocabulary of American cities by introducing something called postmodernism to big-building design, be held responsible for the failure of Portland leaders to get the thing built right or to fix its penetrating leaks since. But Graves may, at 80, have a few wise words to help guide the city in deciding whether to overhaul or demolish the 15-story structure – home, also, to the crowd-pleasing statue Portlandia.

Graves appears Thursday evening at the Portland Art Museum for a wide-ranging public talk on design but will take questions on the future of the Portland Building. Graves, it is to be assumed, is a brave fellow. Could he really shoot one of his babies?

The Portland Building, completed in 1981 for about \$25 million, quickly found its way onto the cover of TIME magazine, in 1982, and the itinerary of tourists for decades to come. But it split the popular audience between those who loved its audacious exterior configurations and those who, in the words of

Travel + Leisure writer Bunny Wong, reduced it to "an off-putting hodgepodge of faux classical columns, strange and useless decorative elements, and penitentiary-like small windows...." Meanwhile, the building's bright exterior colors – cream, blue, salmon – seemed either to inspire or nauseate, with little room in-between.

But the stakes have grown high to all Portlanders who must now pay crazy sums of tax and ratepayer money to get things right. An overhaul of the Portland Building that would weatherproof the exterior, strengthen its core for seismic stability and dispatch roughly 1,300 city employees to leased offices for about two years was pegged this year by city specialists at \$95 million. Tearing the structure down entirely and building something new was estimated at anywhere from \$110 million to \$400 million, though such a deed might be complicated by the enshrinement of the building, in 2011, on the National Historic Register.

Galling is the fact that City Hall continues to drag its feet in deciding what to do with its Portland Building. The structure only gets more problematic, particularly with the onset of winter rains, and costs of improvements seem to grow exponentially.

Earlier this year The Oregonian's Brad Schmidt polled city commissioners on best next steps. Commissioner Dan Saltzman told him: "We should basically tear it down and build something new." Commissioner Nick Fish told him: "There's got to be a better option than putting another \$100 million into a white elephant." Commissioner Steve Novick, who can be counted upon to think outside the Graves box, floated the suggestion that the city might wish to syndicate with Multnomah County, which possesses an antiquated building situated next-door, and build "one big, fat public-services building and (return) one of those two blocks to the private sector." Mayor Charlie Hales, whose opinion will count most of all, was mum.

Graves can only say so much when he comes to town this week. As a celebrated artist, he cannot address local leadership failures that are proving so costly to the citizens whose money brought life to his work yet who could conceivably pay even greater sums to destroy it. If good design creates things or buildings that are as sustainable and functional as they are beautiful, then something's missing with the Portland Building. The clock is running out on giving it that something – an overhaul, at this point – that could make it function properly. If the building really is an icon, then the unseen structure supporting the façade must work.

This is about civic ineptitude, not aesthetics. Portland's leaders must decide a next-best-course for the Portland Building before the hard rain arrives. Graves' arrival before the onset of winter couldn't be better timed.

The Portland Tribune

Council to consider climate change responses

*By Jim Redden
October 6, 2014*

The City Council will consider plans to respond to climate change on Wednesday.

According to the resolution accompanying the plans, "the scientific evidence is increasingly clear that human activities are largely responsible for accelerating changes in the global climate" and "the impacts of climate change are already evident in the Pacific Northwest region."

Existing impacts include an average annual temperature increase of 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit since the beginning of the 20th Century that has accelerated over the last three to four decades, the resolution says.

There is no estimate of how much the plan will cost to enact, even though it involves 10 different city bureaus that are directed to implement them. Instead, the financial analysis submitted with the plan says the costs will be included in future budget of each agency.

The Climate Change Preparation Strategy and associated Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment is a joint effort with Multnomah County. The plans to be considered by the council was approved by the Planning and Sustainability Commission.

The Climate Change Preparation Strategy has 12 objectives, each with several steps to be undertaken. The objectives range from decreasing heat in certain parts of the city covered with a high percent of asphalt to managing the increased risk of landslides caused by predicted increased winter precipitation. The strategy also calls for protective vulnerable populations to be prioritized.

The Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment analyzes predicted climate change results that could threaten Portland, ranging from higher peak temperatures in summers to heavier rainfall in the winter. It identifies potential risks that include more heat-related illnesses in the summer to more flooding in the winter.

In addition to the PSC, city agencies involved in preparing the plans include: the Bureau of Environmental Services; the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability; the Office of Healthy Working Rivers; the Bureau of Transportation; the Portland Development Commission; the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management; Portland Parks and Recreation; the Portland Water Bureau. Multnomah County agencies include: the Department of Human Services; the Department of Community Justice; the Department of County Assets; the Health Department; the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office; the Office of Emergency Management; and the Office of Sustainability. Outside advisors include the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute; the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development; and the Oregon Department of Geology & Mineral Industries.

To read the resolution and related documents, visit www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=50265&a=505201

Council street fee briefing moved to Oct. 13

*By Jim Redden
October 3, 2014*

The potentially pivotal City Council briefing on street fee options has been moved to Oct. 13.

The briefing had originally been set for Oct. 23. The date was moved so Commissioner Dan Saltzman can attend.

The council is tentatively set to vote on the proposal on Nov. 12.

The briefing will cover options discussed by three different advisory committees. Most of them are very different from the original proposal, which was introduced by Mayor Charlie Hales and Transportation Commission Steve Novick. It was intended to raise \$53 million a year for maintenance and safety projects. That proposal included a monthly fee for households and a fee for businesses based on the vehicle trips they generate.

But options discussed by the committees include a graduated income tax for Portland residents and flat fees on businesses, based on their category and size. The combination would raise just \$40 million a year, and some committee members thought the money should only go to maintenance projects.

Hales and Novick have so far opposed asking Portland voters to approve the fee. Novick says the City Attorney's Office has assured him the council has the legal authority to enact an income tax without a vote of the people. One option would have the fee be referred to voters after it has been in effect for several years.