

Portland Tribune

Novick releases revised 'gas consumption' street fee

*By Jim Redden
December 29, 2014*

Commissioner Steve Novick has revised the proposed street fee one more time in a last-ditch effort to win City Council approval and avoid a ballot measure fight.

But Novick warns that if it fails at the council or ballot box, he will campaign for a progressive income tax to fund street maintenance and safety projects in 2016.

The revised proposal drops the progressive income tax that had been the nonresidential portion of the fee. It is replaced with what Novick is calling a "user fee" that will vary by income, based on national statistics showing that gasoline consumption increases as income goes up.

"Gasoline use is one proxy for 'road use,' and gasoline use varies somewhat by income level," Novick said when he announced the change Monday morning.

Novick said the City Council will hold a public hearing on the revised proposal on Jan. 8, with the final vote scheduled for Jan. 14.

Under the revised proposal, tax filers in the lowest fifth of income distribution would pay \$3 a month; filers in the second fifth would pay \$5 a month; filers in the middle fifth would pay \$7.45 a month; filers in the second-highest fifth would pay \$9 a month; and filers in the top fifth would pay \$12 a month.

Although similar to a progressive income tax, the revised proposal varies in two significant ways from the most recent nonresidential proposal. First, everyone who files taxes will pay something, compared to the approximately 40 percent of Portlanders who would have been exempt. And second, the top rate is only \$12 a month compared to \$75 a month.

"My personal preference is for a progressive income tax, which is also the most popular option among Portlanders generally. But pursuing that option would involve a campaign that would not end until at least May, and possibly November of 2016 — which means postponing actual work to repair streets and make them safer. As the mayor and I have repeatedly said, the longer we wait, the worse the problem gets. It seems possible that we could pass a user fee in council that would not require a campaign, which would mean that we could get to work much sooner," Novick said.

The nonresidential portion of the fee is unchanged. It is a sliding scale for businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations based in part on gross revenues and number of employees. Each portion is intended to raise \$23 million a year, for a total of \$46 million a year. It would be collected by the city Revenue Bureau, which would incur initial start up and ongoing administrative costs.

It was not immediately clear whether the revised proposal will prevent the fee from being referred to the ballot. A number of individuals and groups have said they would try to refer a previous version to the ballot. They include the Portland Business Alliance, which opposed the progressive income tax. Sandra McDonough, the President and CEO of the PBA, was on vacation when Novick made his Monday announcement.

In addition, some neighborhood association members are questioning the nonresidential portion of the fee. Southeast Uplift, the coalition office representing dozens of Southeast Portland neighborhoods, filed a public records lawsuit to obtain worksheets used by the Portland Bureau of Transportation to determine the amount each business, government and nonprofit organization will pay. Robert McCullough, an economic consultant who is president of SEUL and chair of the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association, says the worksheets are riddled with errors that undermine the accuracy and fairness of the assessments. Among other things, McCullough says that major transportation companies will not pay their fare share, despite doing a disproportionate amount of damage to the roads.

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Draft comprehensive plan discussions on tap

*By Inka Bajandas
December 23, 2014*

The Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission early next year will hold several work sessions to discuss portions of the city's updated comprehensive plan.

Each work session will focus on different parts of the 2035 Comprehensive Plan – a long-range look at anticipated growth and development in Portland over the next 20 years – before the commission makes recommendations to the Portland City Council in spring 2015. The council has already adopted a series of background reports, but will not review the portion that discusses the types of land needed for expected employment growth until next summer.

The upcoming work sessions are scheduled for Jan. 27, Feb. 10 and Feb. 24 in Suite 2500A at 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave. The Jan. 27 session will start at 3 p.m. and focus on the use of the comprehensive plan in decision-making, as well as the plan's emphasis on mixed-use development on commercial corridors, non-conforming uses and split zoning. The Feb. 10 work session will start at 12:30 p.m. and focus on economic goals and West Hayden Island. The Feb. 24 session will start at 3 p.m. and focus on the David Douglas School District and community involvement policies.

City planners this past summer released a draft comprehensive plan. The effort updates the current comprehensive plan, adopted in 1980, to reflect the increasing popularity of mixed-use developments along commercial corridors.

The new plan is based on a Metro forecast that Portland will gain 200,000 residents between now and 2025.

Affordable housing project will surge in 2015

*By Inka Bajandas
December 26, 2014*

The Portland Housing Bureau is tackling eight affordable housing projects, and ground is scheduled to be broken on four of them in 2015.

LMC Construction crews are scheduled to start work in May 2015 on the \$12.6 million, 47-unit Miracles Central project at 1306 N.E. Second Ave., Portland Housing Bureau spokeswoman Martha Calhoun said. The permanent housing complex designed by Carleton Hart Architecture will cater to individuals recovering from alcohol and drug dependency.

Construction is scheduled to start in early 2015 on a \$4 million renovation of the 64-unit Allen Fremont senior housing complex at 221 N.E. Fremont St. Neither an architect nor a general contractor has been hired yet.

Two other senior affordable housing complexes – the 50-unit Bronaugh at 1434 S.W. Morrison St. and the 301-unit Westmoreland Union Manor at 16404 S.E. 23rd Ave. – are slated to receive renovations next year. The \$13.4 million Bronaugh renovation is being designed by Carleton Hart Architecture. The \$46.9 million Westmoreland Union Manor renovation is being designed by MWA Architects. Walsh Construction Co. will be the contractor for both projects.

A couple of new affordable housing complexes have entered the early stages of design. The NAYA Generations project is sponsored by the Native American Youth and Family Center and the St. Francis Park project is sponsored by Caritas Housing Initiatives.

Carleton Hart is designing the \$10.5 million NAYA Generations project at 5205 S.E. 86th Ave. The 40-unit complex will house children in foster care with adoptive families as well as seniors, and a Native American-focused early learning center is planned. LMC will serve as the general contractor.

MWA Architects is designing the \$19.6 million St. Francis Park project at 1136 S.E. Oak St. It will have 102 housing units, including 25 reserved for homeless women and women who have been victims of domestic violence. O'Neill/Walsh Community Builders will be the project contractor.

Two projects that started this year will continue into 2016. Walsh Construction crews are building The Abigail, a 155-unit complex at 1650 N.W. 13th designed by Ankrom Moisan Architects. It's scheduled to finish in May 2016.

A \$16.8 million full seismic upgrade and renovation of the 62-unit Erickson-Fritz Building in Old Town Chinatown is scheduled to wrap up in June 2016. LRS Architects designed the project and Silco Commercial Construction is the general contractor.