

The Oregonian

Portland's New HR director Presses Pause on Salary Study ordered by City Council

By Jessica Floum

January 9, 2018

Portland's new human resources director's first major decision in the role left City Hall insiders scratching their heads.

In mid-December, barely two weeks into the job, Serilda Summers-McGee emailed affected city employees a video announcement that she would immediately end a job classification and salary study called for by the Portland City Council in 2014.

"I don't know what her reasons were for cancelling it," Commissioner Dan Saltzman said. "As a new director, I think there is a certain amount of deference we're going to give her."

Summers-McGee wrote that an "outpouring of passionate input" prompted her to end the study in its current form. But she told *The Oregonian/OregonLive* Tuesday she still plans to use information from the study and to streamline and update how the city's non-unionized workers are paid.

"Managers and directors shared concerns, anxieties and outright frustrations about the study," she said in the video announcement. "They were disappointed about the lack of transparency throughout the process, the length of time the study had taken and the compressed time for final reviews."

In 2014, the council approved a \$360,000 contract with consulting firm Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting to help update the city's classification and compensation structure for employees not represented by unions. Documents called the existing categorization inaccurate and "more than a decade out of date." The contract was upped to \$400,000 in April 2017.

Despite all the work and money put into it, "I couldn't see moving forward with the study with (employees) feeling like it was forced upon them," Summers-McGee told *The Oregonian/OregonLive*.

The study will not move forward as is and all deadlines for information from city employees will be void, Summers-McGee said. However, she still plans to update the city's job classification and salary structure for non-unionized workers in the next few months.

Having too many job descriptions and out-of-date salary ranges slows hiring; streamlining and updating them will help address the hiring challenges bureau directors currently face, she said.

Vacancies have been hard to fill because applicants often request salaries higher than the maximum allowed by the current guidelines, and bureau directors lose employees to other offers that they cannot match.

The human resources director said the study will more than likely increase the pay that city employees can receive. It was initially created to help pay city employees market value, which she says has increased over the years even though existing salary ranges have not.

"It's a good thing that we're trying to do," Summers-McGee said. "We're going to do it a little bit differently."

So far, her office has gained a better understanding of how city bureaus and offices operate and obtained position descriptions for non-represented jobs at the city, she said. The consultant also narrowed the number of job classifications from 450 to 150.

Summers-McGee said she's not sure yet whether she will move forward with the consultant for the compensation part of the study.

Whatever she does, she said, she plans to roll out the rest of the study in batches so that her department can collect employee feedback along the way.

"I want people to know that I'm here to listen to the needs, the wants, the interests of the people," Summers-McGee said. "I will not always agree with what they want, but I will take the time to listen."

Human resources officials declined to tell The Oregonian/OregonLive Tuesday how much the city already spent on the study, suggesting they did not know off-hand.

"Everything that we've paid for we are still using," Summers-McGee said. "We're not going to duplicate that."

Portland's Chief Administrative Officer Tom Rinehart oversees the Bureau of Human Resources. He said in a statement Tuesday: "I support Serilda's decision and look forward to reviewing her team's plan to sequence changes to our job classifications over the next year."

Willamette Week

The Dialogue: What Readers Had To Say About Wheeler's Plan To Spend Public Housing Dollars On a Wood Frame High-Rise

*By WW Staff
January 9, 2018*

"\$650 per square foot is beyond ridiculous."

Last week, WW ran a story about Mayor Ted Wheeler's plan to spend public housing dollars on an 11-story, all-wood-framed high-rise. The building would be a boon for the state's timber industry but would be significantly more expensive than a traditional structure. Here's what readers had to say:

PDXBill, via wweek.com: "\$651 per square foot: You have to be kidding me and other taxpayers! You can buy a remodeled house with a view in the West Hills for that kind of money. Portland has to be smarter than this if we want to seriously reduce the number of homeless."

Joe Cooney, via Twitter: "It's definitely a risk. Hopefully, [cross-laminated timber] becomes a viable alternative, especially for (a) jobs created and (b) avoiding the upcoming spike in concrete cost with sand scarcity."

Maddy, via wweek.com: "I'm not sure this building is the only alternative to under-constructed low-income housing. Wheeler needs to spend some time truly justifying this project. This doesn't pass the smell test."

Todd Merkel, via Facebook: "I like the design, but the city should be building bare-bones, inexpensive housing units to get people out of the cold and into secure, low-cost permanent housing."

Jack Scofield, via Facebook: "It's great vision and commendable but not appropriate for low-cost, affordable housing on the taxpayers' dime."

Nathan Oleson, via Facebook: "\$650 per square foot is beyond ridiculous. Just proves Wheeler is more interested in angling for higher office and using Portland tax dollars as a springboard to achieve it than actually solving the underlying problem."

Timber and Climate Change

I've just finished reading your article about the CLT-constructed affordable housing building proposed for the Pearl. I'm a supporter of building affordable housing quickly, and I'm concerned by the high cost of this building.

More than that, I'm bothered by the lack of acknowledgement that the timber industry has overtaken transportation as Oregon's leading producer of greenhouse gas emissions. It may seem like a side issue, but given that we as individuals, Oregonians and Americans have chosen for decades not to take appropriate action to curb climate change, we now find ourselves at an important crossroads: acknowledge the climate impact of our daily lives and large projects such as the one mentioned above and act accordingly, or continue to trick ourselves into believing that switching from incandescent to LED bulbs is an adequate compromise.

Because we, as individuals and as a country, didn't take appropriate action in the preceding decades, we must now consider climate change with every major decision, as failing to do so is irresponsible and reckless. I am writing this letter to you, at WW, because I see it as our best shot in local written news to call on individuals to make the necessary and hard changes to our daily lives, and to hold our leaders accountable for making tough decisions that will benefit all of us in the long term.

Ellen Finneran

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Large-scale Project Gets Cool Reception from City Commission

By Kent Hohlfield

January 9, 2018

New ideas are being proposed to incorporate a contributing structure in Portland's Alphabet Historic District in a new development, and the Historic Landmarks Commission weighed in during a design advice hearing on Monday.

Commissioners praised the project team's plan to preserve the 90-year-old Buck-Prager Building as housing, but questioned whether two new buildings planned nearby would be complementary to the neighborhood.

The Buck-Prager Building, at 1727 N.W. Hoyt St., has sat mostly vacant since 2007. In 2014, developer Gerding Edlen sought to tear it down and construct an apartment building in its place. However, the Portland City Council struck down that proposal, siding with neighbors who

contended that the former Women's Hospital of Portland was too important to the historic district to allow demolition.

Now Northwest Housing Alternatives is planning a multifamily project in which the Buck-Prager Building would be renovated to hold 17 senior housing units. Also, a new four-story building to the south would hold 32 senior housing units, and a new six-story building to the north would hold 116 workforce housing units.

"I am really excited to see the applicants making a few moves," Commission Vice Chairwoman Kristen Minor said.

Carleton Hart Architecture is designing the project.

"We are maintaining the historic structure, which is in the center of the site, so right off the bat that poses a lot of challenges to design around," said Brendan Sanchez, an architect at Carleton Hart Architecture. "We are trying to enhance the building and the district."

Project plans call for seismic upgrades to the Buck-Prager Building. Also, all of the units would be affordable for people making 60 percent of the area median income. To meet those goals in a financially feasible project, the project team says the six-story tower needs to be 66 feet – nearly twice as tall as any other building in the district.

"I am not sure this can be compatible," Commissioner Matthew Roman said. "It may not be possible to get the number of units to make it work."

Numerous residents testified against the project on Monday. Complaints ranged from excessive height to inadequate parking.

"I appreciate that this is a complicated project that we have brought forward," said Stephen McMurtrey, housing development director with Northwest Housing Alternatives.

Despite the issues raised, designers still believe they can present a design able to gain the commission's approval.

"I can't say that I can outline exactly right now what we feel like the path forward looks like," said Michelle Black, a project architect at Carleton Hart Architecture. "I do think we still have a path forward."

No date is set yet for the project team's next appearance before the commission.

The Portland Business Journal

City Council Considers How to Keep Artists in Portland

*By Clare Duffy
January 9, 2018*

City Council Tuesday morning took on the task of considering how to make arts and creative spaces in Portland more accessible and affordable.

As with residential and other commercial spaces, costs for studio and gallery spaces have increased rapidly in recent years, which city leaders worry will push artists out of Portland.

"Why do people live here?" Mayor Ted Wheeler said. "I think there's two key answers: the first is the opportunity for economic prosperity and the second is that we provide world-class livability opportunities, and arts and culture are a big part of that."

Representatives for Commissioners Nick Fish and Chloe Eudaly compiled a list of 24 recommendations for how to preserve and expand affordable arts space in Portland, which were presented and discussed at a work session Tuesday morning. The recommendations are based on conversations with representatives from the city's bureaus, local nonprofits and other stakeholders, and research on strategies used by other cities — including Seattle, San Francisco and Austin, Texas — to preserve their arts scene.

The recommendations will be considered over the next month. On Feb. 15, a short list of the recommendations will be presented to the council as a resolution.

Wheeler and other city leaders were careful to say that they're not prioritizing arts space affordability over other issues like homelessness, safety and the housing crisis.

"This is a both/and proposition," Wheeler said. "Those continue to be priorities that are being worked on by my administration, but this gets to a core reason of why people live here."

The first recommendation is to create an "arts concierge" position within the city's Bureau of Development Services, a role that has existed previously to act as a point of contact for arts groups or developers interested in building arts space, ensuring that projects are completed on time and on budget. Eudaly said BDS, which she oversees, is in the process of creating and hiring for a concierge position that would involve these duties for artists, nonprofits and small businesses.

Among the recommendations are things that could be implemented more or less immediately, like the creation of an online inventory and map of creative spaces in Portland where artists can search for open space. Others would likely receive prohibitive backlash, including the suggestion that new developments featuring creative space be exempt from height limits.

Other recommendations include creating a regulatory system for "art pods" that would operate like food carts, creating an artist-in-residence program in certain public buildings, allowing for short term leases in city-owned buildings awaiting redevelopment like the downtown post office and encouraging colleges and hospitals to increase gallery spaces on campus. Read all of the recommendations [here](#).

OPB

Portland Council Calls On Oregon's Top Prosecutor To Defend Cannabis

*By Ryan Haas
January 9, 2018*

The Portland City Council wants Oregon's U.S. attorney to stand up to his boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

On Monday, the council sent a letter to Billy Williams, asking him to protect Oregon's growing legal cannabis market — and by extension states' rights.

Sessions took action last week to rescind the Cole Memorandum, an Obama-era policy that gave states leeway to create legal cannabis markets.

“We strongly oppose any action from the Justice Department on cannabis enforcement that would subvert the will of voters in Oregon and other states,” Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and the other city commissioners wrote in their letter to Williams.

They argued that “cannabis prohibition has failed” and should be left in the past.

“It has especially failed communities of color disproportionately targeted and prosecuted for low-level drug offenses,” the council wrote.

Sessions has been a vocal opponent of drug legalization, calling his move to rescind the Cole Memo a “return to the rule of law.”

In a statement last week, Williams did not say if his office would change its approach to prosecutions because of Sessions’ direction. Instead, he said his office would continue to have “the diversion of marijuana out of state” and “dismantling criminal organizations” as its main priorities related to Oregon’s market.

Breaking Down The Regulatory Differences Among West Coast Cannabis Markets

The Portland City Council said they were “cautiously encouraged” by Williams’ comments, but added that the job of regulating cannabis should be up to local government.

“Through state and local oversight, we can ensure that cannabis is safe for consumption and that it stays out of the hands of kids,” the city leaders wrote.

Wheeler and his colleagues joined a chorus of West Coast politicians who have said they do not want the federal government to renew the War on Drugs.

Meanwhile, other leaders and cannabis supporters have said they think Sessions’ move may backfire, leading to federal legalization of cannabis.