

The Oregonian

City Schedules Monthly Meetings on Status of Police Settlement Reforms

*By Maxine Bernstein
February 28, 2018*

The city Wednesday night will hold the first of what will be monthly meetings to update the public on the status of Portland police and other reforms mandated under a federal settlement agreement approved by a judge in 2014.

Tonight's "Forum on Public Safety and the DOJ Settlement Agreement" will be held at 6:30 p.m. in Room 2500B of the Bureau of Developmental Services, at 1900 S.W. 4th Ave.

According to the mayor's office, the city will hold these meetings the last Wednesday of each month at the same time and place until a new community oversight committee is created.

The Oregonian/OregonLive wrote last week about how it's been more than a year since there have been any public discussions concerning the status of the reforms.

A U.S. Justice Department investigation found in 2012 that Portland police used excessive force against people with mental illness. The negotiated settlement with the city, approved by a federal judge in 2014, calls for changes to Portland policies, training and oversight. A central part of the settlement was to have independent oversight by community members.

Portland's mayor wants to hire a consultant to help organize and train a new community police oversight committee, a group required by a city agreement with the U.S. Justice Department but which has yet to be formed a year after the city disbanded its predecessor.

A Community Oversight Advisory Board, known as COAB, was formed but disbanded in January 2017 due to internal conflicts and the lack of feedback from former police chiefs, city officials and federal officials to more than 50 policy recommendations its members crafted. Those recommendations involved police use of force, improving police encounters with people in crisis and ways to combat bias-based policing.

The city is seeking bids to hire a consultant to help organize and train a new community police oversight committee.

City attorney Tracy Reeve, Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw and representatives from the mayor's office are expected to speak at Wednesday night's meeting. Public comment time will also be included.

Mayor Ted Wheeler, who serves as police commissioner, posted a notice on his website about the meeting. But it was not posted as of Wednesday morning on the Police Bureau's list of community meetings nor on the City of Portland's general list of community meetings or events. A press release about the meeting also was never issued.

Mandi Hood, project manager for the new Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing, said the mayor's office sent alerts about the session to "our Settlement Agreement updates mailing list" and posted notices on Twitter and Facebook.

"In this new media landscape, we are not able to generate a formal press release exclusively for media contacts for every significant mayoral event," wrote Nicole Grant, the mayor's senior policy advisor.

Portland City Council Aims to Expand Renter Protections

By Bethany Barnes

February 28, 2018

More Portland renters may soon be insulated from the financial blow that comes with finding a new place to live.

The Portland City Council heard hours of testimony Wednesday about a plan to make permanent a rental protection rule put in place on a trial basis last February. It requires landlords to pay relocation costs if they evict a tenant without cause or issue a rent increase of 10 percent or more.

The proposed change would also expand the rule to cover more tenants.

The temporary rule didn't apply to landlords who own a single rental unit. An expansion, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said, is needed considering there are as many as 20,000 units that weren't covered by the old policy because they fell under the exemption.

Another change under the rule: Portland would track landlords who request exemptions from this rule. In addition, landlords would have to notify the city whenever they issue no-cause evictions or raise the rent enough to trigger the requirement to relocation requirement.

City documents about the policy note, "The collection of this data would be the beginning of a rental registration database."

Some landlords who own a small number of rentals pushed back. They argued no-cause evictions provide relief in situations where it's too tough to prove a tenant's bad conduct in court. One landlord noted relocation expenses are paid before a tenant moves out and before a final walk-through, meaning a landlord can hand over money and be left with thousands in damages that they'll likely never recoup.

A point of tension: What if small-time landlords decide the risk of being on the hook for relocation costs is too great and take their units off the market, making the housing shortage even worse?

"Could it cause some landlords to remove their units from the rental market?" Wheeler said at the meeting. "On the margin, I believe it is very possible that some landlords will remove their units from the market. However, broader stability outweighs the concern of the loss of some units."

Portland parents give emotional plea to City Council after forced out of homes

Housing advocates praised the temporary rule, saying it acted as a deterrent to displacements over the last year and also helped families who faced a rent hike or eviction move without undue hardship.

Still, while some landlords chafe at how broad the new requirement would be, housing activists say it doesn't go far enough. The proposed ordinance includes eleven exemptions, and Commissioner Amanda Fritz wants to add a twelfth. Some of these exceptions include: owner-occupied duplexes, rentals regulated by affordable housing requirements, and a landlord renting while he or she serves in the military.

Another sticking point for renter advocates is the fact that the proposed ordinance doesn't bar landlords from sneaking an increase into fees such as parking, pet rent, and storage costs.

Mayor Ted Wheeler said the logic behind fee increases not being subject to the ordinance is those are under a renter's control and they can make a choice -- even if that choice isn't a happy one.

"So the choice is get rid of your pet, get rid of your car, get rid of your stuff?" Eudaly asked.

Wheeler said he was focused on keeping people sheltered, not cars or pets, and pointed out many neighborhoods have free street parking.

He urged everyone when examining the ordinance to not let "perfect be the enemy of the good."

Talk about the new rule went so long, the council members present dwindled to three.

The council will take up the rule again next week.

Sixth Sextant? City Considering Changing Thousands of Addresses to 'South Portland'

By Andrew Theen

February 28, 2018

SoPo, here we go.

Transportation officials are considering changing thousands of addresses on the west side to a newly created directional area: South Portland.

The city's transportation bureau notified thousands of homeowners west of the Willamette River, but in a narrow slice of the city broadly east of Southwest Naito Parkway, to alert them of the potential address change.

Portland currently has five designated directional areas of the city - North, Northeast Northwest, Southwest and Southeast.

Dylan Rivera, transportation bureau spokesman, noted politely that Willamette Week, which picked up on the issue Wednesday, inaccurately said Portland was considering adding a sixth quadrant.

Rivera said quadrants are defined as four parts of a body.

"In coming up with how to announce this, we've leaned on the side of adherence to proper English usage and a good sense of humor," Rivera said.

Thus, Portland is considering creating a sixth sextant.

Rivera said the agency isn't trying to create new neighborhoods out of whole cloth. Rather, it's responding to a request from law enforcement and emergency personnel.

"This is a high priority for the fire bureau," Rivera said, "and we've tried to be responsive to them."

Some 5,000 property owners, largely in the South Waterfront neighborhood and surrounding areas, have what city officials call a "leading zero" address. For example, The Old Spaghetti Factory is listed at 0715 S.W. Bancroft St.

That leading zero can be a point of confusion for people calling 911 and trying to give directions to first responders, Rivera said.

That's become more of an issue as the neighborhood on the bank of the river continues to grow. Confusion can add to delays for dispatchers, and those delays in response time can affect all Portlanders relying on emergency services.

Rivera said the South Portland designation would convert 8 percent of the residents with a Southwest Portland address currently. The Old Spaghetti Factory's new address would be 715 S. Bancroft St.

South Portland isn't an entirely new idea.

There's already a South Portland Neighborhood Association. Rivera said the transportation agency has discussed the changes with other affected parties in the Collins View and Lair Hall neighborhoods, too. "They are very supportive of it," he said.

Lewis & Clark College is in the Collins View neighborhood.

Changing thousands of addresses is a lengthy process outlined in city code.

If approved, the changes would be implemented starting in May 2020, and signage indicating both the new South Portland and old Southwest designation for those affected would remain in place until 2025.

The first open house on the issue is March 8 from 11 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. at the Mirabella Auditorium, 3550 S.W. Bond Ave.

The City Council is tentatively scheduled to hold a hearing on the designation change May 31.

The process includes no mention of the area broadly known as East Portland east of Interstate 205.

The largest geographic part of the city is already underserved politically and has the highest proportion of low-income residents and people of color.

It's also currently classified as either Northeast or Southeast Portland.

There's an East Portland Neighborhood Association, too, but no East Portland directional address.

That isn't expected to change anytime soon. "We have not proposed any change to addressing east of 205," Rivera said.

The Portland Tribune

Sources Say: Emmons Touts his Cred to Tackle Growth

By Jim Redden

March 1, 2018

Plus, Lynn Peterson has already won the Metro President races and growth wars in California are different than here.

Portland architect Stuart Emmons became the first City Council candidate to forcefully question the pace and style of change in town last week. In a Feb. 22 email news release, Emmons said, "Are you happy with what new buildings are doing to Portland? Are you happy with how Portland is growing? Are you happy with the homelessness and unaffordable housing? Well, I'm not either. Now you can do something about it!"

Perhaps surprisingly, Emmons, who is running for the seat being vacated by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, is the first council candidate to focus on the issue.

A November 2016 poll commissioned by Metro found that almost 60 percent of regional residents are dissatisfied with how their local governments are handling growth.

Although Emmons did not offer any specifics in his release, he said, "One big reason the changes in our city lack direction is because we do not have anyone on City Council who understands design and creative problem-solving, or someone versed in architecture and urban planning. We need someone on our City Council who understands how all the parts of a city affect each other so everyone benefits. Especially now."

Let's just declare Peterson the winner

Although the filing deadline for the May 15 primary election is not until March 6, you might as well declare Lynn Peterson the winner of the Metro president race.

For starters, no one else had filed as a candidate by press time. Peterson also has raised more than \$197,000 for the race and still has more than \$76,000 in the bank, according to the most recent campaign filings. Contributors include business leaders, labor organizations and other elected officials. And she has been endorsed by just about every current and former politician in the region.

Peterson's dominance is especially impressive since she last held elected office in 2011, when she was chair of the Clackamas County Commission.

After that, she served as a transportation adviser to former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, chief executive officer of the Washington State Department of Transportation, interim executive director of 1000 Friends of Oregon and, most recently, senior transportation policy advisor for the Portland office of Smart Growth America, a national advocacy organization.

Growth wars in California

Should the state of Oregon override local zoning policies to increase residential densities and ease the affordable housing crisis? A bill to do that in California has ignited a firestorm of controversy, according to a recent article in The Guardian, headlined "Declaration of war: liberals divided as California mulls housing push."

The article focuses on a bill introduced by state Sen. Scott Wiener that eliminates height and density limits around all transit stations and major bus routes in the state, to allow construction of buildings five to eight stories high. It has won support from developers, smart growth advocates, and a group of 100 Silicon Valley tech industry leaders, who signed a letter saying workers desperately need the housing.

But it is strongly opposed by some homeowners and local elected officials, including Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin, who calls it extreme. "This will change the character of neighborhoods in the Bay Area and throughout the state," Arreguin says in the article.

That's a different reaction than here in Portland, where Mayor Ted Wheeler did not oppose a bill introduced in the 2017 Oregon Legislature by House Speaker Tina Kotek along the same lines as Wiener's bill.

Willamette Week

Portland Police Union Criticizes President Trump's Suggestion to Arm Teachers

*By Katie Shepherd
February 28, 2018*

"A teacher's job is to educate children."

One of the most powerful law-and-order forces in Portland politics has broken rank with President Donald Trump and the National Rifle Association in the aftermath of the shooting at a Parkland, Florida high school that killed 17 people.

The Portland police union has publicly rebuked the president's suggestion to arm teachers in order to prevent future mass shootings.

"Without the proper training, the outcome could be disastrous," Portland Police Association president Daryl Turner said in a press release Wednesday. "A teacher's job is to educate children and it would be hard for the vast majority to quickly become highly skilled marksmen equipped for a confusing, rapidly unfolding crisis."

Many law enforcement groups have opposed Trump's suggestion to give guns to instructors. Some have also criticized the president himself for saying he would have personally rushed into the school, armed or not, after a sheriff's deputy posted in Parkland waited outside when the shooter opened fire on students and staff.

The Portland union president says arming teachers would do little but cause chaos and confusion.

"In an active shooter incident, having teachers running around a school with guns while law enforcement enters the building could make it difficult for us to differentiate between the good guys and the bad guys. It would increase the risk of innocent people—children, other teachers, and police officers—being injured or killed," Turner said.

The PPA also urged lawmakers to pass laws that would ban the sale of accessories that make legal guns more deadly and increase penalties for people who violate gun laws, commit mass shootings or use guns to perpetrate domestic violence.

Although the position itself is not unusual—urban police often support gun control measures—the PPA's break with Trump's political messaging highlights fissures that started to widen in conservative politics in the days following the most recent mass shooting.

Trump himself shocked lawmakers Wednesday when he urged Congress to bring back legislation that has long been opposed by the National Rifle Association and most Republicans.

The Portland Mercury

LIVE UPDATES: Portland City Council Could Strengthen Renter Protections on Wednesday

*By Dirk VanderHart
February 28, 2018*

Here's what we know, heading into this afternoon's city council hearing on Portland's renter relocation law: The council plans on passing something that will enshrine the law permanently (this is the proposal that it will take up).

That means many tenants who are issued no-cause evictions, or have to move because of a rent hike of 10 percent or more, can count on between \$2,900 and \$4,500 to help defray moving expenses well into the future.

Here's what we don't know: When the city council will pass that permanent ordinance, and which landlords will wind up with exemptions to the law when all is said and done.

The answers to those uncertainties will unfold this afternoon, as the council embarks on a hearing that is sure to draw ire from tenants and landlords alike. The hearing is supposed to begin at 3 pm, but will likely begin later.

As we noted in this week's paper, landlords are fired up about the apparent support on City Council to require small-time landlords to pay relocation fees. Since the law was first passed last February, people who rent out a single housing unit have been able to skirt the requirements. But with three council members—Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, and Commissioner Nick Fish—all sending a clear signal they'll support closing that loophole, that's not likely to last (Commissioner Dan Saltzman is also seen as likely to support killing the loophole). Plenty of landlords should show up today to try to change their minds.

At the same time, tenant advocates are fired up about other potential changes. They're particularly concerned about a new provision that would allow landlords to escape relocation payments when they move one of their family members into the unit.

"When did this get added? Why?" tenant activist Margot Black, who helped shape the proposal as part of a volunteer "technical advisory committee," wrote to city officials earlier this week. "We never discussed this in the TAC. There are so many ways for this to be abused, especially as written, I don't even know where to start."

Black and others are also concerned by language that suggests that new fees, or hikes to utility payments, wouldn't be considered rent increases for purposes of the relocation payment law. They think that could lead to landlords levying capricious fees, and thereby creating de facto rent hikes, without having to pay the relocation money.

We wrote more about what's in the ordinance last week.

The timing of the passage of this ordinance is also a question. Some are pushing council to pass the law as an "emergency," which would mean it goes into effect immediately. That could be hard if Commissioner Amanda Fritz opposes killing the single-unit exemption, as some expect, since an emergency ordinance must be passed unanimously, with at least four votes of council. There's talk in City Hall that the council has achieved some sort of understanding among itself ahead of this afternoon's hearing, so perhaps all of this is moot.

So that's where we stand. Everyone here is expecting a long (and probably endlessly repetitive) hearing. I'll update this post with interesting bits.

3:45pm: We're finally underway here, after a hearing on maintaining affordability for the arts ran longer than scheduled. Mayor Ted Wheeler kicks it off, by thanking everyone who showed up (he's even letting some people in the balcony, which is new), and saying "it will be a long afternoon."

The mayor starts off by explaining his position on this, which has wavered in recent weeks.

"I see this as a pragmatic approach that addresses the primary issues that have been expressed through this process," Wheeler says. "I had to take time to consider recommendations from our technical advisory committee. I relied on the ideas and advice of my fellow city commissioners. I sought to understand alternative points of view. I worked hard to engage all of those who would be most impacted."

Wheeler says he believes landlords and skeptics are probably right when they claim killing the single-unit exemption will convince landlords to sell their properties. "Could this policy effect the rental landscape for landlords who have only one unit of rental housing?" he says. "On the margin, I believe it is very possible that some landlords will remove their units from the market."

But he says it comes down to the fact that "we are in a housing emergency and people are suffering." And he says: "We have to do the best we can to address the crisis that exists today in our community with the tools and the resources that we have available."

3:59 pm: Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, who first pushed the relocation law last year, is next. She recounts the situation playing out early last year, when entire buildings of tenants were being kicked out of their buildings, or facing enormous rent increases.

"We had communities begging us to help keep them together," Eudaly says. "As a renter myself, I could directly relate to what they were going through."

She says not a day goes by that her office doesn't get some call about the relocation ordinance—good or bad. "The communications that have been the most challenging are those we've gotten from tenants who were not covered by relocation due to the one-unit exemption. Our policy wasn't benefitting tens of thousands of the residents that it was designed to protect."

Eudaly acknowledges that relocation payments present a hardship "for a small number" of landlords. She says she's open to creating an exemption for those hardships, though there's not a proposal on the table today.

4:07 pm: Commissioner Amanda Fritz already has an amendment. She'd like to add another exemption for landlords who give tenants a fixed-term tenancy, and tell tenants before they move in that the landlord will sell or convert the unit at a point in the future.

"This is to address one of the challenges we received in testimony," Fritz says.

I'll be curious to see if this is all Fritz needs to be okay with the ordinance. Again, there's talk of agreement between council members. The council hasn't voted on Fritz's amendment, and might not until well later.

4:14 pm: First invited testimony comes from Laura Golino de Lovato, of the NW Pilot Project. Her organization works with low-income renters, and she served on the technical advisory committee that gave input on what this law should look like. First up, she says, "I can't emphasize enough how important it's been for our clients."

But Margot Black isn't the only one questioning the proposed exemption for landlords who move in family members. Golino de Lovato re-iterates that the advisory committee never talked about such an exemption, and says it was frustrating to see it put forward with no discussion. Things she takes issue with: "The possibility of abuse. Lack of definitions about what a family member is. Lack of definitions about timing."

4:21 pm: Mike Nuss is a real estate investor who also served on the advisory committee. He showed up to City Council last year, as council was passing the relocation ordinance for the first time, and gave an impassioned speech that not all landlords were greedy stereotypes.

Today he says the law council is considering isn't perfect, but that it's getting there.

"There's plenty of complaining on both sides of the table, which probably says that this is a good place to start," Nuss tells council. He also favors getting rid of the single-unit exemption, as long as the city creates a hardship waive.

"I do support this policy," Nuss says. "I think it's a bold step. I said that a year ago and I still think that today."

4:40 pm: Some interesting points, as invited testimony continues.

Christian Bryant, of the Portland Area Rental Owners Association, served on the city's advisory committee, but is also the type of person you'd expect to be on the strident side of this. He's not. In fact, while Bryant clearly communicated concerns about the relocation policy, he also acknowledged "housing issues," which he said had been brought on by supply and demand imbalance.

The relocation ordinance "does seem like our only specific tool that we have at our disposal right now to address those issues," Bryant said, adding that he doesn't think the policy should be on the books forever. He also doesn't want to do away with the single-unit exemption, but says the city should find away to assist landlords who would be put in financial jeopardy.

Then Katrina Holland, executive director of the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) raises a question about an exemption in the new law. It would exempt people who manage regulated affordable housing projects from having to pay relocation payments. The mayor's office has argued that affordable housing already has robust safeguards for tenants built into it. But Holland doesn't think that's the case, and Saltzman chimes in to say he doesn't get it either.

4:49 pm: By the way, a landlord group took the extraordinary step of sending out its own mailer to draw landlords to the hearing today. Here it is. Will it work? That's not clear yet. We haven't gotten to public testimony.

4:59 pm: The council hits its first snag after testimony from Christina Dirks, of Legal Aid Services of Oregon. As she did several months back, Dirks says her organization is seeing landlords skirt the relocation law by raising fees instead of rents.

"I have seen landlords issue excessive increases such as parking or pet rent," Dirks says. "Landlords are getting more than 10 percent rent increase, just in a different form."

Under the proposal before council, that would still be allowed (as I noted above). Wheeler says that was a sacrifice his office felt compelled to make. He suggests fees around parking and pets are a "choice" that tenants make.

"Their choice is get rid of their pet, get rid of their car." Eudaly shoots back. Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz are concerned as well, but there's concern about lumping utility costs into what counts as rent hikes.

Dirks suggests taking utility fees out of the equation. "You could speak to associate housing costs controlled by the landlords," she says, adding that landlords "can raise the associated housing costs so much that you force someone to move out without relocation. That person moves out and you can raise the rent as much as you want. It is a big loophole that we're seeing being taken advantage of."

We still aren't to public testimony.

5:20 pm: More confusion. Saltzman wants to do away with the exemption on affordable housing. Others are interested, but Wheeler wants to keep it. Shannon Callahan, interim director of the Portland Housing Bureau, says the city thinks the exemption isn't necessary, but that affordable housing providers are extremely concerned about the relocation law.

Saltzman puts forward an ordinance to strip the exemption. The plan, as of now, is to vote on the ordinance next week, adding an emergency exemption so it takes effect immediately.

It's 5:20 and we're finally on to public input. Fifty-four people have signed up. They get two minutes apiece.

6 pm: So either the landlord mailer was a dud, or they just got here late and are far down the testimony list. Whatever the case, the testimony this first 40 minutes has heavily favored supporters of the proposal before council—on the part of landlords and tenants alike. True, one small time landlord railed against the council for the policy, but in almost every case, people are for it.

There's been some spirited speech, but by far the most passionate oratory we've heard today came from Wheeler. As part of her testimony, city council candidate Jo Ann Hardesty commended the mayor for changing his position on the single-unit exemption (first he was against, then he was for).

"I want to personally thank you," Hardesty said. "It's never too late to do the right thing, especially if it's for the right reason."

Hardesty had two minutes to make her statement. Wheeler took well more than that responding. He conjured a rhetorical medical student, who wants only to "make people better." This hypothetical student gets a patient, diagnoses their malady, and sets a treatment plan.

"Over a period of days, weeks, or longer they get more information," Wheeler said. "They read journals. They hear about research. They talk to colleagues... They come back to the patient and say, 'You know what, I just learned a few things. I'm going to change either your diagnoses or change the prescription.' Why don't we call that person a flip-flopper? We call that person a good doctor."

He kept going, saying, "Throughout this process my values have remained rock solid... This idea that in the public sphere there is no room for movement is part of the problem we're experiencing in Washington."

6:30 pm: Oh, nevermind. Landlords showed up.

"I am no longer taking chances on marginally qualified applicants" because of the relocation law, says a landlord whose name I believe was Marie. "Before, I knew a third of people I took chances on I'd be giving them a no-cause. Since this went into effect I've been raising rents I wouldn't normally raise."

Another woman named Estelle speaks of "stinker" tenants who create problems and need to be evicted. "Sometimes I get a stinker and it's just time to move on."

Another woman who rents out a property says: "Why would I continue operating in an area where there are unnecessary risks piled on by local government? I'm beginning to think that I don't [want to]."

Meanwhile, tenant activists are playing "Landlord Excuse Bingo."

6:55 pm: This baby is winding down. As I type, the last three people are testifying. Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman are gone (Fish to represent the city at some event, Saltzman... somewhere else).

And as often happens in big hearings like this, the ending will be pretty unsatisfying. This was merely a first reading of an ordinance, meaning the council will take it up again next week. At that hearing, expect commissioners to take up amendments—over Saltzman's qualms over exempting affordable housing from the law, and Fritz's proposal to include a new exemption—and for the council to weigh whether landlords are able to raise fees without triggering relocation payments.

It also sounds like council will see if there's support for putting an "emergency" clause on the law, meaning it could go into effect next week. Single-unit landlords the city over are preparing their 10 percent rent increases as we speak. Probably.

Portland's Trying to Bring Displaced Residents Back to Their Old Neighborhoods.

*By Dirk VanderHart
February 28, 2018*

Why Isn't It Working?

MAYOR TED WHEELER had a change of heart on Valentine's Day.

At its meeting that morning, the Portland City Council was set to hear a report on the city's signature anti-gentrification gambit—a groundbreaking policy that gives preference for affordable housing and housing loans in historically Black neighborhoods to those who have been displaced from the area.

The report was to be delivered by members of the committee keeping watch over the policy, known as the "N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy." Their draft report [PDF], published online ahead of the hearing, suggested the group had less than stellar news to impart.

But Wheeler, the city's housing commissioner, canceled at the last minute.

"Rather than having the Housing Bureau and the oversight committee and our nonprofit partners potentially pointing fingers," the mayor said at the time, "what I want us to do is meet and come to a consensus on how to address the concerns laid out in the report."

The report will now come before council in March, but that's no reason not to talk about those "concerns." Years into its experiment, the city has been largely unsuccessful in helping former residents of North and Northeast Portland come back as homeowners.

Since the experimental housing strategy passed in early 2015, the oversight committee reports, just four households have been able to purchase homes using city loans of up to \$100,000 for down payments. (Housing officials say a fifth household was scheduled to close on a home on

February 28.) In 2015, the Portland Housing Bureau's five-year goal for creating homeownership through those loans was 40 households.

"To date we have made little progress," says the oversight committee's report, calling the finding a "significant concern."

It's not the only issue the committee raised. The report mentions a decreasing number of loans to help existing residents of the area repair their homes (only 18 were granted in 2017, compared to 40 in 2016), suggests housing officials haven't provided "timely information" to the committee, and worries that affordable housing isn't being added quickly enough in the 4,000-acre area covered by the strategy.

As a result of these misgivings, Wheeler is calling a huddle, and housing officials are retooling their calculations. "I've instructed PHB to come up with a specific set of action items to address the oversight committee's concerns," the mayor said on February 14.

This year's report is notable for its difference in tone from past reports, which were more upbeat.

"We ran into some challenges in the last year," says Bishop Steven Holt, who chairs the committee. "We are making sure promises made are promises kept."

The promises he refers to were made nearly four years ago, when a city-backed proposal to build a Trader Joe's at the corner of Northeast MLK and Alberta sparked intense backlash. Community activists were outraged the city would welcome a grocery store that could contribute to displacement, rather than building cheap housing to help people remain in the neighborhood.

The controversy ultimately spooked Trader Joe's. More importantly, it led to a commitment from then-Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who pledged \$20 million to pay for housing initiatives the city's historically Black neighborhoods (roughly \$90 million more has since been added to the effort, according to the PHB).

The Beatrice Morrow apartments on Northeast MLK will offer 80 units of affordable housing, giving preference to people who've been displaced from North and Northeast Portland.

Hales and Saltzman promised more than just cash. The politicians sought community input on how to use the money, which resulted in a detailed strategy involving loans for down payments, money for new affordable housing complexes, funds to help people repair their homes, and more.

Far more groundbreaking, though, was the "preference policy" the city came up with. It established a process that gives priority to people who were pushed out of inner North and Northeast Portland in past decades—an injustice that especially affected Black Portlanders. Under the plan, highest preference for housing or financial support goes to those who can show that their families were forced to move in the wave of displacement that occurred to make way for Memorial Coliseum, Interstate 5, and Legacy Emanuel Medical Center. Those who'd been forced to leave for other reasons also get a leg up.

The preference policy "has the opportunity to set the pace for the nation," the newly released report says. But so far, it hasn't done much.

The Oregonian reported in 2016 that an early effort to sell tiny condos via the policy didn't attract interest. And the fast-rising real estate market has meant the city has had to repeatedly raise the amount it's willing to loan for down payments—from an initial proposal of \$60,000 to \$100,000.

It hasn't worked.

According to city figures, 52 households have been approved for down payment loans under the preference policy—but just five of those have actually been able to purchase a home. The reasons are partly due to the way the city decided to implement the policy, according to Shannon Callahan, the housing bureau’s interim director

“We’ve chosen to prioritize folks who do have some barriers and challenges,” says Callahan, . Unlike other PHB programs, she says, the city didn’t screen applicants based on their income or readiness to own a home under the preference policy. “That has definitely made a difference.”

Despite this slow progress, supporters argue it’s too early to write off Portland’s preference policy. “The policy itself is fantastic,” says Holt, the chair of the oversight committee. “The implementation has had challenges.”

City officials promise that results are coming. A large chunk of the plan focuses on making affordable apartments available to people who were pushed out. But while there are hundreds of units in development, the first won’t be available until later this year.

And Callahan says there’s still hope for creating new homeowners under the policy, even if they’re not buying the single-family homes that have become wildly expensive in the neighborhoods targeted under the plan. There are currently two condominium developments in the works that will be available to preference policy applicants.

That’s not to say change isn’t necessary. Callahan says the city is taking a fresh look at how it screens applicants for loans under the policy, and whether to forgive those loans completely if a homeowner lives on their property for decades. She plans to have answers on hand when the policy comes back up before city council once again later this month.

“This has taken longer than we all initially anticipated,” Callahan says. “I think we understand why. I think we also need an action plan to explain where we’re going.”

Hall Monitor: The Relo War Approaches

By Dirk VanderHart

February 28, 2018

Landlords and Tenant Groups Are Gearing Up for Their Biggest Skirmish Yet.

IN A CITY HALL that’s hosted countless heated hearings, it’s entirely probable that none has merited its own partisan mailer.

But to hell with tradition—the city’s landlords are angry.

In a move more typical in an election season, local landlord coalition More Housing Now! recently dropped 10,000 postcard-sized flyers [PDF] in the mail, calling for its members to show up in force to a city council hearing on February 28.

“Attn: Single-unit rental property owners,” the mailer reads. “Portland City Council is planning to force you to pay up to \$4,500 in tenant relocation fees.”

If there had been any doubt that the debate over tenant moving expenses is now an all-out war, it ended with that mailer. The hearing scheduled for Wednesday afternoon is shaping up to be a proxy for the rental battles playing out around the city.

At issue is a policy that’s been a part of Portland’s rental landscape for a year: Under the Mandatory Rental Relocation Assistance law, landlords must pay between \$2,900 and \$4,500

when they issue no-cause evictions, or force tenants to move with rent increases of at least 10 percent.

The law is scheduled to sunset next month, but city commissioners plan to pass a permanent version. And last week, after nearly a year of debate, Portlanders got their first look at what that new proposal looks like.

The central fight—and the reason why landlords have sprung for mailers and Facebook ads—has to do with property owners who rent out a single unit. These landlords used to be exempt from the payment policy. Now, after some public dithering from Mayor Ted Wheeler, it appears Portland City Council has the votes to do away with that exemption.

“Only two weeks after [Wheeler] assured small property owners he was sticking to his guns, he has caved in to radical groups, reversed course, and is planning on joining with Comm. Chloe Eudaly to make sure you have to pay, too,” the mailer says. “We need your help if we have any hope of making the Mayor stick to his original promises.”

If the postcards are successful, council chambers will be packed to the rafters with small-time landlords. But they won't be the only ones with gripes.

On the other side of the housing debate, tenant advocates are displeased with new exemptions to the relocation payment policy the Portland Housing Bureau has proposed. They include loopholes for landlords who rent out their primary homes for three years or less, people who are in active military service, and property owners who want to move a member of their immediate family into a home.

The city's proposal also suggests that raising utility payments and rental fees don't constitute rent increases—a provision that could lead to de-facto rent hikes.

Groups like Portland Tenants United have begun circulating their own calls to action, urging vulnerable tenants whose rental agreements could be affected by such loopholes to come before council and explain why it matters.

The two groups will square off, West Side Story-style, at 3 pm on February 28.

May God have mercy on us all.

OPB

Portland Agrees To Work Harder At Preserving Space For Artists

*By April Baer
February 28, 2018*

The Portland City Council has approved an initiative to work on preserving creative space throughout the city.

Commissioners accepted a list of 22 recommendations Wednesday — from leasing space in city buildings for arts to creating a registry of creative spaces.

The recommendations were steered through by Commissioners Nick Fish and Chloe Eudaly and co-sponsored by Mayor Ted Wheeler.

Eudaly, a former independent bookseller, acknowledged that action is overdue.

“Portland has really built its brand on the backs of our arts and culture community without doing enough to support them, and in particular, preserve affordability,” she said

Commissioners accepted the plan more or less intact.

One suggestion — to exempt creative space from floor area ratios and height limits for certain projects — was withdrawn following objections last month by Commissioner Amanda Fritz. A second amendment, offered by Fritz, proposed that Portland Parks and Recreation — a bureau she oversees — consider integrating the arts into long-range planning currently underway.

Only one other recommendation will be enacted immediately: the creation of a resource staffer to help smooth the permitting process for artists and their landlords, as well as other small businesses.

Perhaps the biggest commitment in recommendations is the dedication of a staffer in Commissioner Fish’s office, Jamie Dunphy, to spend the next two years working on implementation.

In that capacity, Dunphy will work with a range of bureaus and other city entities, such as Prosper Portland and the Regional Arts and Culture Council.

However, to continue the work, Fish must defend his seat in this fall’s election. He’s drawn three registered challengers for the May primary: environmental activist Julia DeGraw, freight clerk Nicholas Sutton and Phillip J. Wolfe, who serves on the city’s commission on disability.

It’s not immediately clear what might happen to Dunphy’s work if Fish were defeated.

Portland Council Takes Up Permanent Renter Protections, Facing April Sunset

By Amelia Templeton

March 1, 2018

Portland City Council is strengthening a law that requires landlords to pay tenants if they are forced to move out.

The law awards tenants payments if they are evicted without cause or forced to move because of a rent increase more than 10 percent.

The payments range from \$2,900 for a studio to a maximum of \$4,500 for a three-bedroom apartment.

In a public hearing Wednesday, the council began deliberating an ordinance that would make the policy permanent, establish a rental registration system and narrow exemptions.

Without council action, the program would sunset in April.

Mayor Ted Wheeler has said the policy will help residents being pushed out of their neighborhoods by rising rents.

“We are in a housing emergency and people are suffering,” he said.

The bill exempts some landlords from making the payments. For example, people renting rooms in their own homes, renting out half of a duplex, or renting an accessory dwelling unit wouldn’t have to pay.

But in a change, other landlords renting out just one unit would have to pay the relocation fees.

In January, Wheeler said he supported maintaining a broader exemption for single units. Renter advocates responded by producing research that suggested 1 in 5 renters in the city live in a unit that fell under that exemption.

“Our policy wasn’t benefiting tens of thousands of the residents it was designed to protect,” Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said during Wednesday’s hearing.

The mayor reversed course and the ordinance he introduced this week eliminates the exemption.

Wheeler has acknowledged that the policy may push some small-scale landlords out of business.

“Yes, on the margin, some landlords will withdraw from the rental market,” he said in a video posted online in advance of the hearing. “The broader rental protections provided by this ordinance make that trade-off worthwhile.”

At the hearing, landlords urged the council to create a hardship exemption for those who struggle with a new expense on their balance sheet.

“That could be the difference between them being able to afford their next two mortgage payments on that property or not,” said Christian Bryant, with the Portland Area Rental Owners Association.

Other exemptions to the rule include landlords renting out their own homes during an absence of three years or less, landlords renting their homes while on active duty military service and landlords ending a rental agreement so an immediate family member can move in to a unit.

Tenants also came to the hearing with requests for additional amendments.

Katrina Holland, the executive director of the Community Alliance of Tenants, said she had “grave concerns” about a blanket exemption for organizations that provide federal, state or locally regulated affordable housing.

Those groups, which provide thousands of income-restricted units in the Portland area, are exempt from making the relocation payments.

“If anyone needs relocation the most even in nuanced circumstances, it is this population,” Holland said, referring to people living in affordable housing. “They are the least likely population to be able to save for an unexpected displacement event and they’re already scraping by.”

Commissioners Dan Saltzman and Amanda Fritz both indicated they’d like more information on Holland’s concerns and would follow up with their staff.

“I thought that was a curious exemption,” Saltzman said.

“Is it very common for a household to receive a no-cause eviction or a double-digit rent increase if they are in income restricted housing, unless their income exceeds the threshold?” Eudaly asked.

“We have seen it on the ground, and it is very distressing,” Holland answered. “One person I can think of off the top of my head ended up homeless.”

The council will likely vote on the ordinance next month.

The council first passed renter relocation aid as a temporary measure last February. Eudaly, who won election on a renter-rights platform, introduced the measure.

At that time, Eudaly, Wheeler and other city leaders lobbied state lawmakers for broader housing policy reforms, including a statewide ban on no-cause evictions.

Democrats in the Legislature who supported that idea failed to win enough support to pass it.

Wheeler has said he will continue to push the state Legislature to require just cause for evictions.