

The Oregonian

Canzano: MLB to PDX Group Gets Momentum, Meets with Portland City Officials

By John Canzano

April 15, 2018

The ownership group focused on bringing Major League Baseball to Portland met privately with city officials to discuss downtown Portland stadium plans, The Oregonian/OregonLive has learned.

A city hall source confirmed that Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler is in communication with representatives of the group. A second source indicated that the group is engaged in talks to secure two potential stadium sites.

I love the idea of baseball in Portland. A lot of you do, too. But the hang-up in our state and in the city of Portland has always been the notion of using public dollars to fund a stadium. The latest murmur is that the Portland-based group would use mostly private funds.

There's an expected news release coming this week from the group. I'd target mid-week for that if you're following this closely. But it feels like this is a real effort with some real possibilities.

Last September, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said that Portland would be on a list of potential expansion cities. The potential stadium would include funding from a \$150 million grant that was approved by the state of Oregon in 2003 when the Expos were exploring relocation.

In October, former Trail Blazers broadcaster Mike Barrett confirmed that he was part of the group. He said, "There is also a formally organized, sophisticated and seasoned management group running this initiative."

Relocating a current MLB franchise such as the Oakland A's or Tampa Rays is also a viable option in this sports columnist's opinion. Maybe the more likely option in fact. Neither franchise has a viable stadium plan. There's a lot of posturing but no real action. Both could move, with Montreal and Portland ending up as the merry beneficiaries.

The A's, who are seeking a new stadium, have emerged as a possible candidate for relocation to Portland in the last few months. It makes sense. They'd stay in the West. They've been forced to seek alternatives for a new stadium site after their initial choice in Oakland, a plot of land near downtown, became unavailable when talks broke down between the A's and the Peralta Community College District.

The latest plan in Oakland involves the possibility of using an aerial tram as a mode of transportation from downtown Oakland into a new stadium on the waterfront.

Aerial tram?

Portland already has one of those, yeah?

Police Shooting Shows City Still Fails Those in Crisis: Editorial

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
April 13, 2018*

It bears repeating that a bystander's cell phone video of last Sunday's police shooting of an apparently suicidal man tells only part of the story. Other video, taken from inside the Southeast Portland homeless shelter where John Elifritz was killed in a barrage of bullets, may provide additional context about any danger he posed. Statements from Portland Police officers at the scene may explain what ultimately prompted them to open fire on Elifritz, who held a knife and previously threatened himself and others.

But it is also important not to discount what that minute-long video shows: a massive police presence; the confusing clamor of shouting officers and a barking police dog; and the quick progression from police entering the shelter to firing on Elifritz, who appeared to have nowhere to run. At the very least, it raises questions about how police actions in this case square with the promises Portland made as part of a 2014 settlement with the federal justice department that police would seek to de-escalate and curb the use of force against those believed to be mentally ill. But it also should prompt Mayor Ted Wheeler, the City Council and Police Chief Danielle Outlaw to recognize an increasingly unavoidable truth: While there have been improvements, the federal settlement has not been enough, and this city continues to fail those in crisis.

Certainly, Wheeler and Outlaw should release the results of the shooting investigation, along with any video, as soon as possible with an emphasis on explaining what happened, whether mistakes were made and what Portland Police can learn from this tragic event. The accounting should include assessments of police interactions with Elifritz earlier in the day as they responded to various 911 calls that documented his unraveling, as The Oregonian/OregonLive's Maxine Bernstein reported.

But city officials need to do more. As they prepare to update a federal judge on Portland's compliance with the police reforms settlement this week, they should ditch a proposed change that scales back community oversight of the settlement. Instead, city officials should look to go beyond the promises they have made and commit additional resources for mental health - not just police - personnel.

Wheeler and federal justice officials are expected to ask U.S. District Judge Michael Simon to authorize revising the 2014 settlement to swap out the Community Oversight Advisory Board with another community panel. The advisory board, which was tasked with independently assessing the city's implementation of police reforms, suffered from numerous conflicts and significant turnover in its short history. But the decision to vest it with such responsibility was a necessary show of faith to the community, acknowledging the value of its oversight.

Unfortunately, Wheeler's proposed replacement, the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing, is a poor substitute. Citizens who serve on the panel would solicit community feedback on police performance, offer recommendations to the police bureau for improvements and help develop a plan for engaging with the community - a far cry from the robust role originally envisioned in the settlement. The city should honor the commitment it made to the community and find a new way to revive the community oversight board.

Additionally, the city should look to lay the groundwork with the police union for allowing the city's Independent Police Review division to conduct administrative investigations - with the

ability to compel statements - into officer-involved shootings, a proposal long advocated by the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform. Currently, the Independent Police Review division, housed in the City Auditor's office, is limited in its oversight of cases in which officers use deadly force. A move to ensure greater independence in such an inquiry would build more credibility with a distrustful community that questions whether officers are ever held accountable.

And finally, Wheeler should back off his budget request to hire dozens more police officers and instead think more strategically of what public safety should mean. Police officers, many of whom don't have specialized mental health training, aren't the best first responders to those in the midst of such crises. Unfortunately, they are usually the ones who are dispatched. If the city is looking to invest significantly more funds in public safety matters, it should make targeted investments, preferably in cooperation with Multnomah County, to expand the number of mental health professionals who can accompany police officers on such calls and help de-escalate situations that can - and have - turned deadly. As Disability Rights Oregon executive director Bob Joondeph noted to The Oregonian/OregonLive Editorial Board, the city and county have already shown through its Joint Office of Homeless Services the benefit of cooperation on issues that cross the boundaries of traditional governmental responsibilities.

While the full circumstances of Saturday's shooting are not yet known, Portland's leaders can act on what is known: A persistent failing, an intense need - and a community's unyielding demand for true progress.

Willamette Week

Portland Mayor Tells Feds He Suspects His Fake Twitter Followers Are Russian Bots

*By Elise Herron
April 13, 2018*

“While most of the attention has focused on the Kremlin’s effort to influence the 2016 presidential election, I am concerned that foreign powers may be aiming their technological weapons at local politics as well.”

In a Tuesday letter to U.S. Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler requested an investigation into Russian meddling in local politics—saying he thinks the bots clogging his Twitter mentions might have been sent by the Kremlin.

Wheeler cited a February WW report which found that roughly 38 percent of followers on the Mayor's official Twitter page are fake. He says those 7,619 "bot" followers "are of dubious origin."

WW's report uncovered bot followings of varying sizes on almost all of the Twitter accounts of Oregon's top politicians. Approximately 65 percent of Gov. Brown's, 63 percent of Senator Wyden's and 10 percent of Rep. Greg Walden's Twitter followers are fake.

In February, Wheeler's spokesman Michael Cox said the mayor did not buy fake followers—and first hinted that the bots could be political sabotage.

"We do not use Twitter as a badge of popularity," Cox said. "The mayor has made no secret of his criticisms toward Donald Trump, and that seems to be a driver in attracting these followers. The mayor is a public official, so we can't block these people."

This week, Wheeler went further—telling the feds he believes that tactics similar to those used by the Russians in the 2016 presidential election were, and are, being used to "sow political discord into our local politics in Portland."

"While most of the attention has focused on the Kremlin's effort to influence the 2016 presidential election, I am concerned that foreign powers may be aiming their technological weapons at local politics as well," Wheeler wrote.

The mayor added that there has been a higher than usual amount of suspicious activity on official city Twitter and Facebook pages. He believes that the interference methods noted in Special Council Robert Mueller's indictment of the Internet Research Agency and Russian conspirators have been used in Portland.

Those tactics include: creating fake accounts of U.S. personas in order to stoke political friction, buying space on computer servers to mask Russian origin of activity, using online accounts to intensify debates among radical groups and urging people to vote in a particular way.

"Accordingly," Wheeler writes, "I respectfully request a federal investigation into foreign interference with our local political process in Portland, Oregon. I suspect this problem reaches far beyond our City, but Portland stands ready to lead the way to keep local politics free of foreign interference."

Wheeler's difficulties with dissident groups on the right and left are well documented—and in many cases, organic.

He spent much of his first year in office dogged by left-wing protesters of his homelessness and police policies, who interrupted City Council meetings with jeers and chanted outside his house—forcing him to spend at least one night in a hotel.

He also drew the ire of right-wing groups—and the American Civil Liberties Union—when he declared "hate speech is not protected" and tried to block alt-right protesters from rallying in the wake of a double slaying on public transit.

The Portland Tribune first reported Wheeler's letter this week.

The mayor's office did not immediately respond to WW's request for comment on the letter.

Five Keys Facts About the \$1.5 Million Donation That Brings Homer Williams Closer to Opening a Homeless Shelter

*By Rachel Monahan
April 15, 2018*

A few things that were notable at the press conference and about Williams' about-face.

Developer Homer Williams last week announced plans to open a shelter in the Pearl District with \$1.5 million in backing from Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle.

Williams has announced plans for shelters before. But not with anywhere near this kind of backing.

The donation, first reported by The Oregonian, marks a new level of engagement on homelessness from the private sector.

It represents an about-face for Williams, who had fought to keep Right 2 Dream Too, the homeless rest area, from locating near the very hotel where he held the press conference last Tuesday.

The new shelter is to be a "membrane" structure that can be built within two months, with aluminum supports and outer shell. The location will be public property owned currently by Prosper Portland.

A few things that were notable from the announcement.

Williams called the shelter a "navigation center"—which helps differentiate it from mass shelters he's pushed at other times. (This shelter will serve 100 to 120 people.) "Navigation center" was the term Mayor Charlie Hales used for a shelter he wanted to open not far from Revolution Hall on Portland Public Schools property—a plan he ultimately abandoned. The concept is drawn from San Francisco, where the idea is to make shelters more inviting by allowing people to bring their partners, pets and belongings to a central location where there's ready access to services. In the intervening two years since Hales first floated the idea, Multnomah County has also moved in the direction of creating lower-barrier shelters.

2. In the most authoritative and strongest terms yet, Portland's housing market was identified as a public health crisis: "The lack of affordable housing is the most important public health problem in our community," said Oregon David Bangsberg, dean of the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health. (Bangsberg was the subject of a profile in the Oregonian this weekend, which is worth reading, and not just for the analogies he uses to compare his work on housing to research on HIV and AIDS.)

"This is first and foremost an economic challenge," Bangsberg went on. "Since 2015, the median rental price has risen 20 times more than the median wage. While mental illness and substance use complicate homelessness, homelessness is more often the cause of de-compensated mental illness and substance use than the effect."

3. It comes at a time when the city-county Joint Office of Homeless Services has abandoned plans for a proposed shelter in Old Town. The joint office determined it would cost too much—roughly \$8 million—to open that location. That means that the private sector in this case may be providing a location in an area of the city the joint office had identified as ideal for a new shelter.

4. One question hanging over the proceedings is how much the public sector will need to pitch in. At the press conference, Mayor Ted Wheeler answered it like this: "I'm going to do nothing here today to take anybody's foot off the accelerator of the private sector stepping up," Wheeler said. "I think that's a good idea." With that, Wheeler patted Williams on the back. Williams responded "Uh-oh," but smiled as he did. Williams' group, Oregon Harbor for Hope, committed in a press release to at least raising another \$1.5 to \$2 million from private sources to open the shelter.

5. Williams failed to get a shot at opening another shelter this week. The county voted to sell Wapato Jail to another developer despite a much-reduced offer.

The Portland Mercury

Mayor Ted Wheeler's Campaign for More Police Officers Faces Pushback in City Hall

*By Rachel Monahan and Katie Shepherd
April 13, 2018*

The Portland Police Bureau has requested 93 officers. The City Budget Office has recommended 14. The swing vote in city hall is skeptical of both.

A WW item earlier this week asking City Council candidates to say if they support increasing the police budget included significant news for Mayor Ted Wheeler's push to add more police officers.

In a response to a question about whether he would support increasing the budget for the Portland Police Bureau to hire the 93 officers the bureau had requested for next year, City Commissioner Nick Fish, who is campaigning for reelection, said no.

Fish said he was even reluctant to support the 14 officers recommended by the City Budget Office, if the increase came at the expense of the city's parks.

"The independent budget office recommends hiring 14 new officers this year, but even that smaller number would mean tough cuts elsewhere," says Fish.

"I believe in community policing and creative strategies to keep our neighborhoods safe and livable. But as a former parks commissioner, I do not support cuts to parks programs our families, children and seniors depend on."

Fish was considered the swing vote at City Hall on this item and the prospect of voting to shut down community centers (Parks & Rec has offered that cut) to add police officers is not the easiest vote to take in the midst of a reelection campaign, even one that Fish is expected to win.

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman is expected to support an expansion of the police, though what number of officers is another question.

Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Chloe Eudaly are expected to vote against an expansion at the expense of other priorities.

Fritz was near-tears at a budget forum earlier this month over potential cuts to parks, the Oregonian City Hall reporter Tweeted.

The fact that he faces meaningful opposition in City Hall may also explain why he's beginning to make the argument in the strongest terms possible.

"Despite national trends, some crime stats are also increasing rapidly in our own community," Wheeler said yesterday.

"Person crimes – that includes things like assaults, homicides, sex offenses – they have increased and continue to increase at a faster rate than last year; property crimes have increased and they continue to increase at a faster rate than last year."

"It is irresponsible for any elected official to not respond to that reality," the mayor said.

Crime is up overall this year, according to data provided by the mayor's office. But the data the city has are from less than three years, and do not show a statistically significant trend.

The long-term trajectory of crime in the city remains down.

OPB

Ted Wheeler Describes Conflict Between Mayor, Police Commissioner Roles

*By Ericka Cruz Guevarra
April 13, 2018*

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, the sole possessor of bureau assignment powers on City Council, said Portland doesn't have a governance system where the mayor is in a position to hold a police commissioner accountable.

Wheeler, who is mayor and the Portland Police Bureau commissioner, said there are conflicts between his two jobs.

“With the officer involved shooting, people are out in front of my office with signs saying, ‘Why aren't you speaking out on this? Why aren't you telling us more?,’” Wheeler said, speaking at the second of two state of the city addresses Friday.

“And the answer is: I'm the police commissioner and I have an obligation to the integrity of those investigations as well as setting the vision for the city, so sometimes there is that conflict.”

In the Q&A formatted address, Wheeler offered an alternative to Portland's commissioner structure of government: “anything but,” he said.

They were the mayor's first unprepared remarks related to the Saturday shooting that left 48-year-old John Elifritz dead. Details about events leading up to the shooting show Elifritz appeared to exhibit suicidal tendencies before being shot at by seven Portland police officers and one Multnomah County Sheriff's Office deputy.

Wheeler said in his role as mayor and police commissioner, he has found himself in “awkward situations” because he has to speak simultaneously about police operations and a future vision for the bureau.

“And sometimes those things can be in conflict,” Wheeler said.

Portland's mayor has the power to appoint whomever they want to city commissions, including the police commissioner position.

In 2010, former-Mayor Sam Adams pulled Commissioner Dan Saltzman from his job as police commissioner.

According to the city, Portland has the last remaining commission form of government among large cities in the United States.

Wheeler also used his state of the city address to defend questions about accountability at the police bureau because of the Elifritz shooting.

“There is accountability,” Wheeler said. “There are now two investigations, plus a grand jury will be assembled. Yet already this week it's been suggested that I be shot, my life has been threatened, my family has been threatened, I have been protested.”

He said he hopes people will wait for all the facts in the case to surface before they jump to conclusions about it.