

# Guest Opinion: City's sale of T1 is about creating jobs

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Portland faces two big challenges: persistent homelessness and a shrinking middle class. To address both, we need to grow our local economy and invest in family-wage jobs.

Recently, Homer Williams, a local developer, proposed the “Oregon Trail of Hope,” a big idea to address the homeless crisis. His vision, borrowed from San Antonio, Texas, is to build a campus with shelter, transitional housing, and services in one location. It’s a familiar model, echoing the one-stop concept of Bud Clark Commons. Williams has even offered to raise tens of millions of dollars to fund it. I believe his innovative proposal deserves serious consideration.

In the search for a possible home for the concept, some have suggested Terminal 1, 14 acres of prime industrial land located in the NW Industrial District. For a number of reasons, I think it is shortsighted to reduce our already scarce inventory of industrial acreage.

Terminal 1 was purchased by the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) in 2004 as part of the “Big Pipe” project. It was used as a staging area for the billion-dollar construction project, designed to divert stormwater run-off from our rivers. With the project completed, BES no longer needs the property.

Terminal 1 is identified in our just-adopted Comprehensive Plan as Prime Industrial land, and is a key part of our jobs forecast for the next 20 years. The existing zoning is very restrictive. The site is zoned Heavy Industrial with a Willamette Greenway River Industrial Overlay. It does not allow for shelters or schools, and requires river-dependent uses. According to the City’s Planning Bureau, it would be very difficult to change the zoning due to the shortfall of

Harbor Access Lands, the requirements of Oregon’s Statewide Planning Goal 9, and its designation by Metro as a Regionally Significant Industrial Area.

A year ago, at my request, City Council declared Terminal 1 “surplus property,” triggering a disposition process. No public agencies expressed an interest in purchasing this property, nor did anyone voice concerns about its sale.

BES hired Colliers International to serve as its commercial broker. Last week, they officially listed Terminal 1 for sale. Because of a shortage of industrial property, and a hot market, we expect to receive offers well above the assessed value of \$8.6 million.

The sale of Terminal 1 to a commercial buyer is clearly in the public interest.

First, it is good for our utility ratepayers. All proceeds from the sale will be placed in the BES Construction Fund, which will allow BES to delay future bond sales, stabilizing rates.

Second, it will add family-wage jobs to our community. As the Portland Business Alliance noted in their “Value of Jobs” report, river-dependent industries employ thousands of people, and indirectly support nearly half a million jobs in Oregon.

Finally, it will strengthen our tax base, helping us pay for the services and homes necessary to end homelessness.

Although I don’t believe Terminal 1 is the right location for the “Oregon Trail of Hope,” I applaud Homer Williams for stepping up with a bold vision to address the housing emergency, and for pledging to raise substantial private funds. Moving forward, the City should protect Terminal 1 for economic development, and partner with Williams on his proposal.

*Nick Fish is a member of the Portland City Council. He oversees the City’s public utilities (the Bureau of Environmental Services and the Portland Water Bureau) and is the Council liaison to Venture Portland.*