



**Commissioner Nick Fish**  
City of Portland

December 31, 2019

A Message to the Community from Commissioner Nick Fish:

Last month, I shared that my illness had become more complicated and that I would be taking a few weeks over the holidays to be with my family and to learn more about what changes in my health mean for my public service.

Since then, I have been talking to my team of care providers and adjusting to my new reality.

I have always brought energy and enthusiasm to my job as Commissioner. Serving on the Council has been the great honor of my life. Based on the demands of my illness, however, I no longer believe that I can do this work at the high level our community deserves and I expect of myself.

I cannot escape the very sad fact that I will be unable to serve out the remainder of my term. I trust my Council colleagues to determine the most appropriate date for an election to select my successor, minimizing disruption and cost to the City. My resignation will become effective upon the election of my successor as Commissioner #2.

Over the next few months, I will be working with Mayor Wheeler and my City Hall team to prepare for a transition. Such a transition has precedent; in fact, it's the way I myself got the chance to run and get elected to the Council in 2008.

We will continue to steward the work of building a sustainable future for Portland Parks & Recreation. We will continue to lead the clean-up of the Willamette River Superfund site. My team will remain responsive to constituents and stay engaged with our everyday responsibilities as well as prepare to set the next Council member up for success.

Portlanders have inspired me every day since I was sworn in in June of 2008, and I am so proud of what we've accomplished together.

For the past 11 years in office, I've worn many hats. I was honored to serve initially as Commissioner of one of the city's oldest bureaus, Portland Fire & Rescue and, with Mayor Adams, I helped create and lead a brand new one in 2009, the Portland Housing Bureau. Then I led our two utilities, Water and Environmental Services, and Portland Parks & Recreation – twice.

I ran on a platform in support of affordable housing and ending homelessness. In my years as Housing Commissioner, we focused on serving our most vulnerable neighbors – the poorest people in our community. Even during the worst recession of my lifetime, we made important progress. At times, the only construction cranes in the air were the ones building affordable housing. We built new homes, saved hundreds of affordable apartments for older adults and people with disabilities, and helped hundreds of homeless veterans find stable, affordable homes. We worked closely with our partners at Multnomah County, in the non-profit community, and at the State to align our dollars and our priorities – and we made a lasting difference. Bud Clark Commons, Gray's Landing, and the new Riverplace Parcel are testament to what Portland can do when we work in partnership.

Supportive housing is a proven, efficient tool to serve our most vulnerable citizens and I have worked hard to ensure that Council has maintained this priority. I threw myself into the recent bond measures sponsored by the city and by Metro that are now bringing hundreds of affordable new homes to our community. Later this year, I hope our region passes a new measure to fund the services that allow people to remain successfully housed. And I am gratified that we are ahead of schedule on our goal to add 2,000 new units of supportive housing – affordable homes with wraparound services – by 2028. We must never lose sight of the neediest in our community, those whose voice is often lost in policy debates.

Back in 2013, Mayor Hales assigned me the two city utilities – the Bureau of Environmental Services and Portland Water Bureau. At the time, the bureaus were a source of frustration to citizens due to rate increases and accountability issues. I was excited by the opportunity to restore public trust, increase transparency, and improve the alignment of priorities. Five years of patient listening and rebuilding paid off. We brought rate increases down

and sharpened our focus on mission-critical work, like water quality. We also won a major lawsuit challenging City spending of utility dollars. We did it together.

My time leading the women and men of the Fire Bureau was brief, but my respect for their service is deep and enduring. Every day, firefighters do whatever it takes to keep their fellow Portlanders safe. At times, they make the ultimate sacrifice. It is my fervent hope that our community will rally to build a new memorial to fallen firefighters. The planned David Campbell Memorial, named for an early Fire Chief whose service cost him his life, will provide a peaceful refuge that commemorates those we have lost and honors those who serve today.

Portlanders love their parks and so do I. Last year, almost everyone in our community visited a park or natural area. These green places draw new residents and visitors to Portland, and time and again citizens name parks as a top priority. I served as Parks Commissioner from 2009 through mid-2013, and again since November of 2018. Both eras brought unique challenges. In 2009, when the recession limited City resources, we focused on meaningful investments that would matter to Portlanders. Public-private partnerships brought us innovations like Harper's Playground and the Summer Free-For-All program, gems of inclusivity, beauty, and fun. We added 1,000 new community garden plots to our city-wide inventory. We passed new protections for our urban tree canopy. And we laid plans for new park development, so that when resources became available we'd be ready to move forward with fresh ideas.

A decade later, Parks faces a different challenge. A structural problem in the way Parks is funded has meant that the bureau continually loses ground. Equipment, facilities, and fields deteriorate because we can't maintain them. The old fee-driven business model cannot sustain the system we have, much less improve it. Without new funding, Portland will never be able to conserve and develop a healthy, safe parks system or to close the inequities around access. Our parks must serve all Portlanders. The bureau has begun the hard work of crafting a more efficient, equitable funding model, exploring what a better, more sustainable future will look like. We cherish our green and open places and by working together, we can responsibly steward them for future generations.

Care and stewardship of the environment are global as well as local issues. We are in a climate crisis and Portland must remain a leader and innovator. In my time on the Council, the city has begun to decisively reduce our impact on the environment. A raft of new initiatives are moving us in the right direction: limits on single-use plastics, shifting our automotive fleet off gas fuel, composting food waste, converting methane at our sewage treatment plant to renewable natural gas, and maximizing our use of nature rather than pipes to manage Portland's plentiful rainwater. These initiatives provide momentum that must grow. Cities will continue to be laboratories for innovation in climate protection, and I know that Portland can continue to be a leader.

I have always believed that government can be society's greatest force for good, and that together we can do amazing things. As a member of the Council, I have insisted that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts, and I have focused on partnership, collaboration, and shared success.

Across the country, the last decade has seen a stark decline in civility. Portland has not been immune to the national weakening of civil discourse. And, as we grapple with the future of our country and our planet, we are becoming a big city, with our own growing pains. We can rise to this occasion and embrace inclusivity, sustainability, and shared prosperity for all. We must unite around these values and make them real through collective effort. City Council can do its part by fostering diverse rather than divergent priorities. It is our obligation to find the common ground in order to advance the common good. I have seen the power of partnership, and I trust our community's leaders to see that the people of Portland deserve our best.

I am grateful for the support and love my family and I have felt over the last two and a half years that I have fought against cancer. And I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the community I love for the past decade.

Thank you for allowing me this honor, and for all that you do to make Portland special. The future is bright.

Nick