

Murmurs: Airbnb Recruits Its Hosts to Lobby Against Portland Tax

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In other news: City regulators let real-estate developers use fake names.



(Walker Stockly)

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Airbnb Recruits Lobbying Against Tax: Short-term rental website Airbnb has organized its hosts to lobby Portland City Hall against taxes on the company and its clients. Emails sent by the company to hosts ask for "passionate members of the home sharing community" to "tell PDX policymakers to oppose the new Airbnb taxes." City officials confirm they've received pushback, but aren't changing course. A first hearing on the lodging taxes will go forward June 13. "Over the past two weeks, we have received nearly 100 emails with near-identical language (though they are not branded as coming from any particular organization)," says Mayor Ted Wheeler's spokesman Michael Cox. The new tax would charge Airbnb and other short-term rental companies \$4 a room per night, with an additional charge on hosts to fund tourism promotion. The two taxes combined would yield upward of \$1.8 million a year.

City Regulators Let Developers Use Fake Names: In an unusually pointed criticism, Portland's city ombudswoman last week accused the Bureau of Development Services of failing to make any effort to stop real estate developers from disguising the ownership of single-family homes in order to make it easier to demolish them. In a letter to City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, who oversees BDS, Margie Sollinger described a recent example in which she says Renaissance Homes, a prolific homebuilder, disguised its ownership of a home in the Roseway neighborhood: "I concluded the appropriate remedy in this instance is for the bureau to issue a stop-work order, revoke the permit, require Renaissance Homes to apply for the demolition permit and restart the delay clock....The bureau has declined to accept my office's recommendation." Eudaly's chief of staff, Marshall Runkel, says that wasn't possible, but "BDS is tightening up its forms and processes to stop applicants from subverting the process in the future."

Officers Say They Feared Another MAX Stabbing: The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office released transcripts June 11 of grand jury testimony by eight police officers who shot and killed a man wielding a knife in a Portland homeless shelter in April. One noteworthy pattern: Several officers said they feared John Elifritz would repeat the slaughter seen on a Portland MAX train last summer, when Jeremy Christian stabbed three men, killing two. "My major concern was I was going to have a TriMet incident here," Portland Police Sgt. Roger Axthelm testified. Multnomah County Sheriff's Deputy Aaron Sieczkowski recalled a similar thought: "I saw all the videos in that [stabbing]. And, God, it's horrific what a knife can do in a close situation like that."

Officials Narrow Causes of Scrapyard Fire: A March 12 fire at a Northeast Portland auto scrapyard that forced mandatory overnight evacuations in the Cully neighborhood was started either on purpose or by discarded cigarettes, Portland Fire & Rescue officials say. Investigators found evidence of homeless camps near the scrapyard NW Metals but no evidence of camping on the property, given that there was no sign of "candle use or warming fires." One of the scrapyard owners, Moyata Anotta, told KOIN-TV in March the business had experienced problems with homeless people in the past.