The Oregonian

Charlie Hales: Portland mayor's passion for planning city's future, concerns about livability and more (full interview transcript)

By Andrew Theen

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales touched on a wide-range of topics during a more than hour interview in his City Hall office last month.

Crunching that interview, and an entire year, into one story, can be a challenge.

What keeps him up at night (turns out personnel decisions, traffic fatalities and other issues).

What, specifically, did the mayor say about the Central Eastside Industrial area, you ask?

"Let's get real specific," Hales said when asked about the central eastside. "Look at the corner of 12[th]and Powell. The city owns four acres there. There's a fire truck maintenance facility and a storage building where we keep our earthquake supplies that's not seismically safe. Is that the highest and best use for that property? And meanwhile, we've been wondering where we should build a Southeast Community Center. Hmm. It seems to me there's some possibilities there," Hales said.

He continued: "Let's make something wonderful here. It doesn't have to be a community center. But come on - we own the land, it's on the light rail station, the light rail opens in 18 months, let's make something wonderful happen there. That's our job."

Hales didn't touch on everything that may be coming down the pipeline in 2014 (he's mentioned in other interviews and to The Oregonian that he plans to tackle the Willamette River Superfund cleanup, for instance).

But there's a lot here.

The Portland Tribune

City has more money to spend

By Jim Redden

The City Council will have more money to spend in coming years, according to the most recent Portland General Fund Financial Forecast.

The forecast, prepared by the Office of management and Finance, says the council will have an additional $5.9 million in ongoing revenue to spend, plus $3.3 million for next year's budget.

According to the forecast, the additional funds are the result of an improving economy and the council's decision to reduce some of the city's debt with surplus funds.

The full forecast is available at www.portlandoregon.gov/cbo/article/474105.

Innovators scrap for city's cash

By Steve Law

Mayor hopes fund idea saves city money, improves services

Imagine a smartphone app that alerts Portlanders trained in CPR that someone just had a heart attack nearby and needs their help.

Or a way to save time filing your city arts tax form, or city and county business taxes, while delivering a few million dollars in new revenue each year to city and county coffers.

Those are some of the more intriguing ideas proposed for Mayor Charlie Hales' new Innovation Fund, a $1 million experiment aimed at fostering better, money-saving approaches for the city.

Hales' Innovation Fund idea gets its first test run this month, when a task force evaluates 24 proposals to spend some of the $1 million cash set aside by the mayor in his inaugural city budget.

Some of the proposals could save the city money, like the Portland Revenue Bureau's $295,000 plan to create a tax information exchange agreement with the IRS. That would make it easier for Portlanders to file local tax forms each April, and enable the Revenue Bureau to catch people who failed to file their taxes or filed incorrect data.

"The bureau conservatively estimates a compliance increase of 1 to 3 percent for business income taxes and up to 5 percent for the Arts Tax, translating into millions of dollars of increased annual revenue for Portland and Multnomah County general funds, and the Arts Tax Fund," according to the Revenue Bureau's proposal for Innovation Fund money.

The Revenue Bureau estimates it could net the city general fund $780,000 to $2.3 million in added tax dollars each year, plus $540,000 for the Arts Tax, and another $577,000 to $1.7 million a year to Multnomah County.

If the five-person Innovation Fund Task Force is more thrilled by the idea of saving lives than saving money, there's Portland Fire & Rescue's proposal to spend $108,000 to introduce the PulsePoint smartphone app here. The city would expand its CPR training and outreach to recruit volunteers who want to help save lives. They would then get the PulsePoint app to alert them when someone nearby suffers a cardiac arrest, and also let them know where the nearest defibrillator is.

Some of the 24 proposals sound rather, ahem ... bureaucratic, like the Portland Police Bureau's $197,000 request for a "UDAP to SAP Interface."

Others don't sound that innovative, and more like ideas that failed to make the cut in past budget requests. Many of the proposals submitted by bureau managers freely admit they don't have clear ideas of how much money they'd save the general fund — if any — though that's one of Hales' stated goals for the Innovation Fund.

Some are rather unsexy, but seemingly sound ideas to save money.

City bureaus, for example, print more than 9 million pages of documents a year with laser printers, and shifting to cheaper printers could pay for itself in little more than a year.

Portland Parks & Recreation wants $217,000 to replace 40-year-old boilers that heat the water at swimming pools. Those would cut carbon emissions and pay the city's money back in 3.5 years.

The city will work closely with professors and grad students at Portland State University's Center for Public Service, led by former Secretary of State Phil Keisling, to implement the fund and advise the task force.

The Innovation Fund Task Force is made up of:

• Beverly Stein, program director of Oregon Solutions, and former Multnomah County chairwoman

• Kayse Jama, executive director of the Center for Intercultural Organizing

• Pamela Weatherspoon, community relations coordinator for Legacy Health

• Larry Wallack, dean of PSU's College of Urban and Public Affairs

• Tom Simpson, director of government and regulatory affairs for Standard Insurance Co.

Innovation Fund projects proposed by city bureaus:

1. Auditor's Office

Produce a series of 30-minute online training modules, including follow-up testing, for City Councilors, managers and employers about public records laws and electronic records management.

Cost: $62,100

2. Auditor's Office

Do makeover of one bureau's electronic records management practices. Auditor says city records retention practices differ from agency to agency and even within bureaus, and good practices are "spotty across the city."

Cost: Not specified

3. Auditor's Office

Locate all intergovernmental and informal agreements made by city and its bureaus with other bureaus and outside agencies, and create central repository.

Cost: $105,000

4. City Budget Office

Work with PSU's Center for Public Service to help launch Innovation Fund and advise the Task Force over first year.

Cost: $100,000

5. Bureau of Emergency Communications

Phase 2 of three-phase plan to implement a 311 system, a toll-free number providing a one-stop call center for citizen access to local nonemergency government services.

Cost: $200,000

6. Portland Fire & Rescue:

Develop pilot program to use Portland firefighters to deliver safety, health and fitness education to students in third to sixth grades in after-school programs.

Cost: $120,000

7. Portland Fire & Rescue

Train citizens in CPR and buy PulsePoint, a smartphone app that notifies citizen volunteers that a cardiac arrest has occurred near them, and alerts them to the nearest defibrillator.

Cost: $108,000

8. Portland Fire & Rescue:

Purchase iPads for fire stations and engines, to expand use of telemedicine, and other patient care and treatment options, and quickly send confidential patient information to health care providers. Add Wi-Fi equipment to 27 of the 30 fire stations that don't have it now.

Cost: $115,646

9. Portland Housing Bureau

Figure out how to transfer Rent Well, a 15-hour training program that helps low-income tenants attain rental housing, to a nonprofit. This could save the city $70,000 annually in program administration.

Cost: $32,000

10. Portland Housing Bureau

Develop XML software to share data such as income eligibility and demographics between bureau and housing providers.

Cost: $48,000

11. Office of Management and Finance

Create a new-employee orientation and integration process that uses city's new eLearning system.

Cost: $150,000

12. Office of Management and Finance

Replace 25 laser printers with dry toner printers. City staff now make 7.5 million black and white copies a year on laser printers, costing 2.7 cents apiece, and 1.8 million color prints, costing 10.1 cents apiece.

Dry toners would cost three-quarters of a penny per black and white copies and 4 cents for color copies, saving the city $62,175 a year.

Cost: $75,000

13. Revenue Bureau

Enable direct exchange of taxpayer information with the IRS, making it easier to file Portland Business License Tax, Multnomah County Business Income Tax and the new Arts Tax forms.

Could increase annual city general fund revenues by $780,000 to $2.3 million; plus $577,000 to $1.7 million for Multnomah County and up to $540,000 for the Arts Tax, by identifying taxpayers who should have filed taxes or filed them incorrectly.

Cost: $295,000, but the county would be asked to chip in some of that money.

14. Portland Parks and Recreation

Replace 1970s-era boilers at park pools that heat the pool water, saving $55,000 a year in energy bills. Use savings for scholarships for summer swim lessons for low-income youths.

Budget: $217,000

15. Portland Parks and Recreation

Replace 1980s-era control systems for heating, ventilating and air conditioning at community and art centers, starting with the Matt Dishman Community Center as pilot.

Cost: $100,000 loan, to be paid back with savings in 10 years.

16. Portland Police Bureau

Buy a Versaterm Computer Aided Dispatch license and hire a temporary crime analyst for new Hot Spots Policing pilot test.

Cost: $72,504

17. Portland Police Bureau

Develop way to connect the Uniform Daily Assignment Roster, used to schedule officers, with the SAP accounting software used for payroll.

Cost: $197,000

18. Portland Police Bureau

Implement a Stratified Model of Problem Solving, Analysis and Accountability, a hybrid policing model and crime analysis system tested by 10 police departments around the world.

Cost: about $50,000

19. Portland Development Commission

Create an Early Adopter program, so city bureaus can be a "living laboratory" and early adopter of locally created tech products and services.

Cost: $80,000 matched by equal amount from the PDC

20. Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Produce detailed maps of landslide risks in the city, using 2004, 2005 and 2007 Light Detecting and Ranging (LiDAR) data, an airplane-based sensor using infrared laser light.

Cost: $100,928

21. Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Get newer LiDAR data via new airplane flights in 2014.

Cost: $90,000 to $150,000

22. Portland Bureau of Transportation

Get web-based app to track and map all city agencies' capital improvement and maintenance plans.

Cost: $250,000 to $750,000, plus $50,000 to $100,000 a year for technology maintenance.

23. Portland Bureau of Transportation

Develop plan for paid parking in South Waterfront, using variable data-driven pricing.

Cost: $35,000

24. Portland Bureau of Transportation

Upgrade historic ornamental street lights in Old Town/Chinatown to LEDs with dimming controls, add a public Wi-Fi system in neighborhood, and an electric vehicle charging station. Energy savings would pay for cost of project in 20 years.

Cost: $300,000