

Willamette Week

Steve Novick Scraps with Portland Business Alliance Over Who Pays for Downtown Tourism Ads

By Aaron Mesh

A representative of the Portland Business Alliance has refused to sign off on City Commissioner Steve Novick's proposed budget for the Portland Bureau of Transportation—usually a formality in the city budget process.

What's the hangup? Novick wants to end a deal where PBOT pays for downtown marketing campaigns in exchange for higher rates on downtown parking meters.

Bernie Bottomly, the PBA's representative to the PBOT budget advisory committee, has joined with Corky Collier of the Columbia Corridor Association to issue their own splinter budget suggestion to City Council.

Their proposal would restore the "good faith" agreement for PBOT to give tourism group Travel Portland more than \$800,000 for advertising the virtues of visiting downtown Portland. (Under Novick's plan, Travel Portland would have to compete for highly-sought general-fund dollars.)

It's another case of a city official winding up at loggerheads with neighborhood leaders over parking—a political third rail that Novick began touching during his 2012 campaign.

In his budget letter, Novick says PBOT has already more than paid its debt to downtown by paying for the Portland Streetcar, which increases neighborhood property values.

"Our position is, in effect: 'Hey, we're already shelling out a chunk of money to market downtown by paying for the streetcar,'" Novick writes. "'Since the General Fund benefits from marketing downtown, can't it at least pick up this Travel Portland deal?'"

Bottomly and Collier argue back that Novick is renegeing on a deal: more money for PBOT from downtown meters means more money for downtown in advertising.

And they raise a veiled threat against Novick's big plan to find new taxes and fees for PBOT.

"These agreements were made in good faith and the community stakeholders have upheld their end of the bargain," they write. "If the city were to move away from those commitments it would undermine the trust and cooperation that will be needed to address the bureau's long-term funding needs."

Novick has been aggressive this budget cycle in hunting for more PBOT money. Yesterday, he announced a request for \$1 million for flashing beacons at crosswalks in East Portland—then suggested cutting the Mounted Patrol to pay for walking safety.

The Mercury

"Prosper Portland": A Good Preview of Coming Homeless Crackdowns

By Dirk Vanderhart

Portland in 2013 saw just 15 murders, and violent crime levels were down to late-60s levels.

But Police Chief Mike Reese and other top police brass this morning argued downtown Portland and the central eastside feel as unsafe as ever.

"I heard more complaints last year from everyday citizens feeling they were intimidated, they were afraid, they felt they were going to be the victim of crime," Assistant Chief Larry O'Dea told officials gathered for the monthly meeting of the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council Executive Committee. "Everyone's worried: Are they going to be the next person hit with a skateboard?"

O'Dea was referring to an incident last summer where one of the city's "street kids" struck an elderly employee of the Portland Outdoor Store in the head with a skateboard. That attack was an outlier, but has made an easy rallying cry for city, county and business leaders hoping to curb aggressive panhandling and overt homelessness in the city center. And it's no accident it arose this morning.

In a lengthy presentation, Reese unveiled "Prosper Portland," a new name for strategies the city and others have pursued for months and years, and a preview of what Portland's homelessness enforcement efforts will probably look like in coming months.

"A lot of the components we've been working on for sometimes years," the chief said. But it hasn't worked, according to Reese. "Last year we reached a tipping point... and it didn't feel safe."

(Last year, remember, was replete with controversial police crackdowns on downtown and eastside homeless encampments—including an effort to shoo away a years-old camping protest outside city hall.)

Reese's central message with Prosper Portland is that agencies—police, prosecutors, the Portland Business Alliance, the Portland Development Commission, city bureaus, county social services providers—need to coordinate better to address the issue. But he also floated a number of changes he said need to occur—soon— for Portland to have any success.

Among them:

-Increased foot patrols, which Reese acknowledged are expensive. "The mayor has talked about creating funding for overtime for us to have walking beats again," he said. "That's one option."

-A revamped sit-lie ordinance—or something like it. "Our ordinance is challenging for us. Our current sidewalks ordinance allows much of what you see to occur." It's possible for officers to enforce existing laws, Reese acknowledged, but he said that often involves an arrest or citation that will only further clog the jail and courts system.

But it seems the chief will have to wait for substantive change in that department. Mayor Charlie Hales decided earlier this year not to pursue changes in Salem during the 2014 legislative session. In the mean time, Reese said, the police bureau may work with the district attorney's office on new enforcement strategies.

-Use of a "clean-up contractor" that would disassemble the homeless structures police break up.

-Bolstered use of the "specialty courts" aimed at steering addicted offenders toward treatment. Reese said it's possible Transition Projects, which hosts a targeted community court at the Bud Clark Commons every week, could take in certain defendants prior to their court dates.

-Consistency between different agencies in the way panhandling and homelessness are enforced. Reese frequently points to Skidmore Fountain as an example of a problem area—the fountain is technically park

land, the nearby MAX tracks are owned by TriMet and the roads fall under Portland Bureau of Transportation authority. "Different landowners have different enforcement strategies," he said.

To help measure the success of all this, local software firm Thetus Corporation has offered to develop a tracking and assessment tool for free. (Upshot for Thetus: If Portland lands on a workable system, that software can then be peddled to other communities facing the same issues.) But it's still too early to tell where funding will come from for other aspects of the proposal, and how viable all of it is. Officials gathered around the table at this morning's meeting were universally supportive.

Still, one crucial aspect of all this wasn't much addressed: Where the homeless will go once they're roused in greater numbers.

Reese pointed out a daily duty of downtown patrol officers is to wake up people sleeping in doorways.

"We know if we don't wake them up and ask them to go to Portland Rescue Mission or seek other services, that when a business owner pulls up there's a potential for conflict," he said. "What's really difficult for officers is when a person says 'You're waking me up, where can I go?' to have good options for them."