

The Oregonian

Portland's roads: Mayor Charlie Hales, Commissioner Steve Novick and transportation leaders return to town hall circuit

By Andrew Theen

Last week, Portland Commissioner Steve Novick said he would "probably" support an \$8 or \$12 street fee for households in the Rose City. This week, Novick takes the monthly street fee pitch on the road.

Novick, Mayor Charlie Hales, and Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat return to schools, nonprofits and community sites across the city in the next few weeks for more transportation town halls.

The first event is Wednesday in East Portland.

The trio held town halls in February to talk and listen to residents' concerns about the city's transportation network.

This go around, the town halls will also focus on how to pay for all the necessary road, sidewalk, and bicycle transportation improvements.

Last week, Novick held a press conference releasing the results of the latest poll from DHM Research. The poll showed lukewarm support for a monthly road fee, but that option was much more palatable for respondents than an income or sales tax.

An \$8 per month street fee would raise as much as \$34 million per year, and a \$12 fee option could bring up to \$52 million in revenue annually, according to PBOT officials. An audit last year said the city would need to redirect as much as \$70 million per year for a decade to make sure streets are up to standards.

Where are these town halls?

- Wednesday, April 16: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, 10301 N.E. Glisan St.
- Thursday, April 17: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N. Interstate Ave.
- Thursday, April 24: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Multnomah Arts Center, 7688 S.W. Capitol Hwy
- Thursday, May 1: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Woodstock School, 5601 S.E. 50th Ave.

What might Portland do with an \$8 or \$12 street fee? Portland City Hall Roundup

By Andrew Theen

The Portland City Council hasn't formally adopted a street fee yet, but transportation officials are offering glimpses of what a new revenue source would mean to residents and business owners.

At two transportation town halls last week, Portland Bureau of Transportation officials presented a PowerPoint that drills down into where revenue from both an \$8 and \$12 residential street fee might be allocated.

Commissioner Steve Novick met with business owners at Venture Portland last week to present conceptual costs for business owners, too.

PBOT says the presentation and costs are projections at this point. But a sit-down restaurant could owe more than \$201 per month under the \$12 fee proposal, a figure that's based on the number of daily trips and the restaurant's square footage.

Under the \$8 fee, the city could see \$34 million in revenue, while the \$12 monthly fee for residents could yield up to \$53 million. Novick said in recent weeks that he would most likely support a street fee. Mayor Charlie Hales also said he preferred enacting a revenue option rather than going to the voters.

So what could the city do with the street fee money? Here's what PBOT is saying:

\$8 fee

- 150-225 miles of pavement preservation
- 30-40 signalized intersections rehabilitated
- 2-5 bridges receiving major maintenance
- 60-76 intersections with safer crossings
- 200-201 blocks of new sidewalks
- faster response to 503-823-SAFE (the city's transportation safety and neighborhood livability line)

\$12 fee

- 190-285 miles of pavement preservation
- 50-60 signalized intersections rehabilitated
- 5-10 bridges receiving major maintenance
- 100-115 intersections with safer crossings
- 400-420 blocks of new sidewalks
- faster response to 503-823-SAFE (the city's transportation safety and neighborhood livability line)

Another transportation town hall is scheduled for Thursday at the Multnomah Arts Center from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Here's the full PowerPoint PBOT officials show at the town halls if you're interested.

Mayor Charlie Hales will take on Last Thursday again, possibly proposing fees, early closure

By Casey Parks

Mayor Charlie Hales will begin talking about the future of Last Thursday again. Hales' policy assistant Chad Stover will meet with Northeast Portland residents Monday night to float some of the mayor's ideas about reining in this year's arts festival. The festival begins again May 29.

A group of Northeast Alberta Street artists created Last Thursday in 1997 as an alternative to The Pearl's tonier First Thursday. Neighbors say the festival, which brings between 15,000 and 20,000 visitors a month to the Northeast neighborhood, has become unruly in recent years.

The art walk became an all-night party spilling from Alberta, a busy commercial strip, into quieter residential streets. Neighbors said they often found people urinating or defecating in their yards and cars double parked or blocking driveways. They begged city leaders for help.

Hales stepped in last year, hoping to balance competing demands from neighbors, artists and businesses. City staff had some successes -- they ended the party earlier and cut down on garbage left behind -- but volunteers still charted about 200 "livability incidents."

"Last year, taxpayers footed the bill," said mayor spokesman Dana Haynes. "Other street fairs don't get that level of taxpayer support. It's an equity thing."

Hales does not have a concrete proposal for this year's Last Thursday yet, Haynes said, but he is considering charging vendors a fee. Haynes said the mayor's office hasn't figured out the "sweet spot" of how much such a fee would cost or which types of vendors would have to pay. Stover's visit to the Northeast Coalition of Neighbors meeting will be the beginning of those talks.

The mayor and his staff will continue taking about changes in May and June, with an eye toward possible implementation in July, Haynes said.

"But that is not set in stone," Haynes said.

Five city bureaus worked on Last Thursday last year. Stover said then that the city can't funnel so much time and money into any single street fair, no matter its prominence.

Haynes said the mayor also thinks "it's probably a good idea to close Last Thursday a little earlier."

Hales last year suggested closing the event, which begins at 6 p.m., at 9 p.m. Some people balked, and the festival wound up wrapping up closer to 10 p.m. most months.

Monday night's meeting begins at 6:30 pm, at the NECN offices, 4815 N.E. Seventh Ave.

Willamette Week

"No Clear Answers" About How City Property Would End Up in a Water District's Hands, Internal City Hall Memo Says

By Aaron Mesh

As Portland City Hall braces itself for a May vote that could strip its authority over its water and sewer bureaus, the city's lawyers are scrambling to understand what the ballot measure could mean for Portland property and finances.

The short answer: If Ballot Measure 26-156 passes, the rest of 2014 will be spent divvying up ownership of property and employees between the city and a new public water district.

An April 3 memo from the City Attorney's Office to Mayor Charlie Hales, released in response to a records request from WW and The Oregonian, shows the far-reaching effects—and uncertainty—created by changing the government that oversees public utilities.

"In numerous instances," the memo says, "the measure's language raises questions to which there are no clear answers."

The memo confirms previous reporting by WW that as much as \$43 million in city funds could be jeopardized by the new board.

That money is paid by the water and sewer bureaus to other parts of city government—paying for legal advice, mechanics repairing bureau vans, payroll costs and other shared overhead.

A few other highlights from the memo:

If the measure passes May 20, the City Council will have less than a month to draw the seven geographic zones for the new elected board. "City Council must 'divide the district' into seven zones by July 15, 2014," the two attorneys write. The first board election would be this November, and the utility board would begin running the water and sewer bureaus starting Jan. 1, 2015.

Like a couple getting a divorce, the city and its new water district would have to split up stuff. "If an asphalt truck is used to repair potholes in a street one day," the memo says, "and to pave over a [Bureau of Environmental Services] trenching job the next, it would need to be determined whether that truck is an asset that is to be transferred to the district."

The City Council and the new utility wouldn't just divide up property, but workers. That process could take years. "The city's most recent experience in transferring employees between PDC and the Housing Bureau (including fewer than 100 PDC staff) took approximately a year to process," the attorneys write. "The transfer to the [water] district would involve significantly more employees."

Measure 26-156 co-petitioner Kent Craford says the City Attorney's Office is wrong in stating property will have to be divided between the city and the water district.

"The City Hall minions working to protect the status quo have made a basic error here," Craford tells WW. "What is property of the city today will remain property of the city tomorrow. To suggest otherwise is either ignorant, or an intentional attempt to mislead the voters."

Hales' office declined comment.