

The Oregonian

Portland anti-Walmart rally leads toward dead end: Editorial Agenda 2014

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

Portland Commissioner Steve Novick took time out Thursday from other duties, like devising ways to repair decaying streets, to participate in an anti-Walmart rally in front of City Hall.

Novick, as you might remember, led the crusade to get the city to adopt a social- investment policy and to make Walmart the first target – before the policy was even completed. A committee is still working on the details of how to implement the policy. Meanwhile, \$9 million worth of the city's \$36 million in Walmart bonds have matured. The City Council unanimously agreed in October that it would not buy any more Walmart bonds once existing holdings expire. (The city cannot invest in stocks.)

Technically, the City Hall event was billed as a press conference, but the atmosphere was a cross between a political rally and a pep assembly. To start the festivities, Bob Marshall, an organizer with the United Food and Commercial Workers, led participants in a cheer: "Walmart, Walmart. Always Low Morals." Yvette Brown, a former Walmart worker who's active in the union-backed OUR Walmart campaign to force the retailer to treat employees better, came up from California to participate. Pastor Tara Wilkins from Bridgeport United Church of Christ was there to help the group claim the moral high ground.

Throw in sunshine with the temperature at about 80 degrees and it felt every bit like a pep rally before an early-fall football game. "Walmart, Walmart. Always a handy villain when you want to score political points."

As entertaining as the theater was, Tuesday's event and Portland's investment policy will have about as much effect on Walmart as a pregame pep rally has on the performance of a football team. Novick said he hopes other cities will follow Portland's lead and apply a rigorous socially responsible screen to their investments.

The problem with Novick's goal can be illustrated on one of those blue-and-red political maps. Portland agreed in the fall to screen companies for their effect on health and the environment, corporate ethics, labor practices, extreme tax avoidance and abuse of market power. How many of those criteria would Dallas use? Or Phoenix? Not even all blue-state cities think alike. Anyone expect Detroit to include carbon emissions in a social-investing policy? Or would St. Louis, in Sam Walton's home state of Missouri, target Walmart? Even in Portland, not everyone will agree with future disinvestment targets.

Economic divestiture has been used successfully in the past. Most notably, it played a role in ending apartheid in South Africa. But the strategy works best when focused on a single issue that has broad support across political and geographic lines. It's hard to find any issue that cuts across those lines in the United States today. And Portland simply doesn't invest enough money to have any meaningful impact by itself.

All of this raises the question of what Novick's social-investment campaign can accomplish other than stoke the anti-corporation flames that already burn brightly in Portland. Time would be better spent on an issue with the potential to unite instead of divide, like fixing Portland's roads.

Portland city employee accused of official misconduct scheduled to plead guilty Friday

By Maxine Bernstein

A Portland city employee accused last month of tipping off an unauthorized tow truck driver to cars marked abandoned in Portland and accepting cash kickbacks in return is scheduled to change her plea Friday, according to her lawyer and prosecutors.

Barbara Lorraine Peterson, 54, is expected to plead guilty to one count of official misconduct and three counts of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle.

Her lawyer, William A. Meyer, had approached the deputy district attorney handling the case to seek a quick resolution. Meyer said Thursday he didn't want to waste taxpayers' time and negotiated a plea deal.

Peterson is expected to face an 18-month prison sentence. Her formal sentencing is not expected Friday.

Peterson, who worked in the city's abandoned autos section within the Portland Bureau of Transportation, is scheduled to appear before Multnomah County Circuit Judge Gregory S. Silver at 3:30 p.m.

Peterson initially had been accused of seven counts of official misconduct, three counts of unauthorized use of a vehicle and four counts of conspiracy to commit unauthorized use of a vehicle.

Portland police detectives arrested Peterson when she arrived at work April 23. Managers in the abandoned autos section, at police request, summoned her to the Portland Building, where she was taken into custody and walked to the Justice Center.

Peterson had worked in the field as a parking code enforcement officer, placing green warning tags on abandoned cars in Portland. The tags alert vehicle owners that their cars must be moved within 72 hours or they'll be towed by a contract tow company.

Instead, Peterson allegedly would alert an independent tow truck driver to tagged cars, police said. The driver would then steal the cars and haul them to West Coast Car Crushing on North Columbia Boulevard, where they would be crushed and sold as scrap metal, police said.

Peterson worked for the city for 23 years. Her annual salary was about \$45,000.

Her arrest followed a months-long auto theft investigation that led to the April 8 raids of two North Portland auto businesses, West Coast Car Crushing and A-1 Light Truck and Van Parts on North Columbia Boulevard.

Portland detectives are continuing to investigate allegations that the businesses were buying stolen and abandoned vehicles, crushing them and reselling their scrap metal without obtaining the required titles or ownership documents.

The tow truck driver told police that Peterson tipped him off to 30 to 40 vehicles, and he paid her \$10,000 since last summer, according to court records.

After her arrest, Peterson told police of her contact with the tow truck driver, "First of all, it was incredibly stupid to get involved with him. But I thought it was an easy way to make a few bucks. ... It was easy money," according to a probable cause affidavit filed in court.

The Portland Tribune

Firefighters raise concerns about mayor's budget

By KOIN News 6

At least 100 firefighters filled City Hall in Portland Thursday evening to raise their concerns about the mayor's new budget, which does not include funding for 26 firefighter positions.

Abby Quarterman was one of the people who packed city hall Thursday but it wasn't because she is a firefighter but rather a fire victim.

"I never thought a house fire would happen to me and then I woke up in the morning and it was happening," said Quarterman.

Quarterman woke up to a five-alarm fire on the morning of August 8, 2013 at her home on NE Martin Luther King Boulevard.

On behalf of the firefighters who saved her life that day, Quarterman said she signed up to speak before the city council.

"I think there could have been some loss of life or harm to people," said Quarterman. "I felt like it was my duty to come forward and say that the mayor's budget is unacceptable."

Quarterman was among at least 100 firefighters who filled into council chambers to protest the mayor's proposed budget.

Twenty-six of the firefighters in attendance, including Chris Durkin, said they received pink slips last year because of cuts during the previous cycle but were saved by a temporary \$2.6 million federal grant.

Durkin said funding for 13 of those positions with the \$9 million of new funding for the city would help secure the future for public safety.

"We were told by the fire commissioner that he was going to secure funding for the safer grant," said Durkin.

However, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' spokesperson Dana Haynes said the mayor's budget proposals stand.

"There were no layoffs. There will be no layoffs this year. There will be no layoffs into half the budget for next year and that's because of the federal grant," said Haynes.

Haynes said the budget this year is about stabilizing the entire city budget.

Willamette Week

Portland Street Fee Would Create Big Bills for Other Local Governments

UPDATE: Mayor Charlie Hales says city won't collect fee until July 2015

By Aaron Mesh

Local government agencies are discovering the City of Portland plans to charge them what could be hundreds of thousands of dollars a year under Mayor Charlie Hales' proposed "street fee" plan.

Hales and City Commissioner Steve Novick have for months been showing citizens the structure of the fee, which would charge households up to \$12 a month and businesses much more.

They've been less vocal about who else would be taxed under the proposal: other local governments. Sources say some agencies have been blindsided by this news. A Portland Public Schools official tells WW the school district has been told it would be charged between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a year.

The proposal is unusual because government agencies often can't levy taxes against each other. But the Portland Bureau of Transportation confirms that it plans to charge the fee to governments.

"Yes, the street fee proposal would apply to all road users," says Portland Bureau of Transportation spokeswoman Diane Dulken, "and that includes other governments, school districts and universities." Portland transportation officials this week began meeting with those governments—some of which had no idea they'd be paying a new fee.

Among the public agencies now being told: Oregon Health & Sciences University, Portland State University and the Port of Portland.

Novick and PBOT director Leah Treat met this morning with officials from the Port of Portland, the agency that runs marine terminals and the Portland International Airport.

Port officials say they have been discussing the fee for some time with city staff, but they don't yet know how much they would have to pay.

"We are not opposed to the concept but we need to examine some legal questions and other details before we could say we are supportive," says Curtis Robinhold, the Port's deputy executive director. "We will want to make sure the money is dedicated specifically for transportation and not used for other purposes."

Under the current street fee proposal, the Port and other governments would be charged on the same scale as private businesses—using a metric that multiplies the square footage of their property with the number of car visits it produces.

One Portland Public Schools official tells WW that the city informed the district it would be charged between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a year. The official says PPS wasn't told how that figure was calculated, and it came as a surprise to the district.

Hales and Novick have said they're willing to pass the street fee without a public vote, because the need for road maintenance and traffic-safety improvements is so urgent.

WW examined those claims earlier this month.

UPDATE, 3:30 pm: Mayor Charlie Hales tells WW he has personally spoken to leaders at Portland Public Schools, Oregon Health & Sciences University, Portland State University and the Port of Portland about the city's plans to levy the fee.

"I informed them that, if we do go through with this, we won't collect the fee before July 1, 2015," Hales says. "We would give citizens, businesses and public agencies plenty of time to adjust their budgets."

The Mercury

A Month and a Half In, City "Clean-Up Contractors" Have Only Responded to a False Alarm

By Dirk VanderHart

Halfway through a three-month contract to clean up illegal homeless camps on city property, local security firm Pacific Patrol Services hasn't been sent to a single actual campsite.

As of Monday, PPS had only actually been dispatched once, on April 29, to what city records show was a false alarm. Cops had received a tip someone was camping in a small park in a traffic circle at NE 102nd and Weidler. It looks like this:

When clean-up staff got to the traffic circle, it only found run-of-the-mill rubbish. "Just empty bottles and food containers," according to Abby Coppock, a spokeswoman for the city's Office of Management and Finance, which oversees the PPS contract. "There was no personal property collected."

It's not clear what the city paid for the service, which documents indicate involved an hour of work. Portland's contract with PPS says the contractor will receive \$703.24 per day of work, and does not appear to account for smaller units. (We're still waiting to hear back on cost).

Mayor Charlie Hales' office announced the campsite clean-up contract in early April. The mayor's office has emphasized enforcement of Portland's camping ban since last year. But clean-up of those sites fell to city bureaus who owned the land, and they often had more-pressing tasks on their plates. And there wasn't a formal, centralized system by which roused campers could retrieve their belongings. Hales' office says the PPS contract could change that.

But the plan drew concern from some homeless advocates, who fear the city's homeless are already leery of private security guards that patrol properties throughout downtown. So the city held off on dispatching clean-up contractors until, it says, they'd been properly trained.

Under the contract—which expires in June, and can't exceed \$35,000—PPS will respond to campsites on city land once alerted by a bureau. In order to legally dismantle a site, officials need to post warning at least 24 hours in advance. The clean-up must be completed within seven days of that posting, Gibson said. The city's goal is within 48 hours.

PPS is also required to document thoroughly all items it confiscates and throws away, and to submit pictures of campsites before cleaning them up. If the site's resident is on hand, workers must give them an hour to take their possessions before work commences. And PPS will maintain a repository—on a site the city provides—where homeless people can arrange to pick up their belongings.

The Portland Business Journal

Portland jettisons Walmart investments from city portfolio

By Andy Giegerich

The city of Portland is eschewing any future investments in the retailing giant Walmart.

Portland officials said Thursday that the city will purchase no more Walmart holdings as five bonds in the city's current portfolio mature.

Commissioner Steve Novick has led the drive to eliminate the retailer from city treasury holdings. The Portland City Council adopted socially responsible investment principles last October.

The final Walmart bond among the five the city currently holds will expire in April 2016. At that point, the city will have eliminated \$36 million worth of investments in the company, according to a release.

Union members and Pastor Tara Wilkins from the Bridgeport United Church of Christ appeared with Novick at a Thursday rally announcing the move.

The move comes as the city seeks to evaluate holdings that may spur "health and environmental concerns, abusive labor practices, and corrupt corporate ethic and governance."

The City of Portland's entire investment portfolio ranges between \$940 million and \$1.29 billion. It generated about \$4.3 million in earnings during the last fiscal year.

Wal-Mart holdings had, until Thursday, comprised about 2.9 percent of the city's investment portfolio.