

The Oregonian

Portland City Council postpones vote on street fee charter amendment

By James Reddick

Mayor Charlie Hales once again postponed a vote to place a street fee charter amendment on November's ballot. The measure was scheduled for tomorrow's City Council meeting.

The mayor's office hasn't confirmed a new date for the vote, but spokesman Dana Haynes says it's likely it will be ready next week. "We decided we didn't need it this week," Haynes said. "The mayor has to err on the side of doing it right rather than doing it fast."

The original language of the charter amendment, which restricts how the street fee resources are allocated, requires that the "majority of funds" generated go toward transportation maintenance and safety improvements. Commissioner Amanda Fritz introduced a change last week that would send 80 percent of the fee revenues towards these areas.

According to Haynes, since a spirited five-hour open forum on the street fee two weeks ago, the city has received approximately 300 emails from members of the public expressing concern. "We haven't heard from anybody who says we don't need to fix our streets," he said. "But people are concerned about how the mechanism is going to work."

Although Haynes said the mayor is "going to slow things down" after accusations that the city hasn't involved the public, he confirmed that Hales' end goal is the same.

"By July 2015, there will be some sort of street fee that involves half residents, half businesses," Haynes said.

"He hasn't wavered one iota."

Bike sharing and backpedaling in Portland: Editorial Agenda 2014

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

Portland's vision for having its own bike-sharing system has always been rooted in fantasy. The city's recent decision to stop peddling this fantasy in pursuit of state funding is a partial nod to reality.

Yet the city still says it's vowing to launch the "right" bike-share system for Portland. If so, then city leaders should explain: How can the Portland City Council pursue vanity projects while trying to convince the public to support a large new fee for street maintenance and upkeep?

Call us crazy, but it might make more sense for the city to invest further in the essential transportation infrastructure – namely well-maintained streets and decent bike lanes – before turning to bike rentals and other amenities.

Bike-share systems allow people to rent bicycles for short trips from self-serve docking stations, paying through annual subscriptions or daily user fees. Portland is eager to launch its own system and avoid falling behind other bike-friendly cities. The city is so eager, in fact, that it used some wishful thinking last fall in a competitive grant application for state funding to cover "phase two" of a system that lacked a visible "phase one."

The city's application, signed Nov. 21 by Commissioner Steve Novick, claimed the city had access to \$5 million in committed private sponsorships. These funds were "secured and available before the initial

system launch in 2014," the application said: Novick explained to The Oregonian editorial board in December that the wording was based on the assumption that sponsors would soon formally and publicly commit.

Yet today, private sponsors are nowhere to be seen: They may have been scared away by the mounting financial challenges of bike-share systems in New York City and elsewhere. The city has withdrawn its application for state funding, the Portland Mercury reported this week. The Oregon Department of Transportation confirmed Tuesday that Portland is no longer trying to elbow in front of Tualatin, Medford, Prineville and other Oregon communities that have applied for limited state funds for their own bicycle or pedestrian projects.

"As we have stated earlier, at the time we made the grant application, we had sponsorship commitments at the highest level," Portland transportation spokesman Dylan Rivera said via email Tuesday. "We withdrew the Connect Oregon grant application recently because significant changes in the bike share industry have caused the City and sponsors to reconsider the project's timeline. We have had clear and frequent communication with ODOT staff throughout the process. We continue our due diligence and look forward to launching the right bike share system for Portland."

If Portland can find a viable strategy, bike sharing might be worth considering. Yet so far, the vision has been based on three fantasies: The system will be self-sustaining through sponsors and user fees (despite other cities' experiences); it won't use taxpayer dollars (despite a council decision in 2011 to earmark nearly \$2 million in federal funds for bike sharing); and it will spark a revolution in bicycling (though the main barriers to bike commuting in Portland include weather and inadequate routes).

The city can't do much about the rain. It can, however, double its efforts to set clear transportation priorities and invest in safe, well-maintained streets with better bike lanes. That's not as trendy as government-backed bike rentals, but it would get more people riding their own bikes – and maybe trusting City Hall more, too.

The Portland Tribune

Council vote on limited transportation fee ballot measure delayed

By Jim Redden

Mayor Charlie Hales has postponed the City Council vote on a ballot measure related to his proposed Transportation User Fee for a week.

The council had been scheduled to vote Wednesday on whether to place the measure on the ballot. Now, according to Hales' spokesman Dana Haynes, the vote will not take place until next Wednesday, June 18.

The council had previously been scheduled to vote on a proposal prepared by Hales and Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick to impose a fee on Portland households, businesses and nonprofit organization to help fund transportation projects. The vote on the fees has been postponed until Nov. 12 and the council has also agreed to consider other revenue sources, including a motor vehicle fee, a gas tax, a sales tax, a tax on business profits, or some combination of them all.

The proposed ballot measure would amend the City Charter to restrict the funds raised by the new revenue source or sources to transportation project, with most of the money to be spent on maintenance and safety projects.

The measure would not authorize the new revenue source. Hales wants to place it on the Nov. 4 General Election ballot.

No reason was given for the delay when Hales' office announced it Tuesday.

Willamette Week

Small Comfort

A housing advocate calls for creating neighborhoods of tiny houses to address homelessness.

By Cambria Roth

Michael Withey recalls how Occupy Portland's takeover of two downtown parks nearly three years ago was itself overrun by hundreds of homeless people.

Withey came to believe that the homeless who moved into Chapman and Lownsdale squares were sent by police, social-service agencies and even state-run mental institutions with one purpose: to disrupt the Occupy movement.

"The movement was ruined, and public opinion went against us," Withey says of the media attention that focused on the impromptu homeless camp that Occupy became during its 39-day hold on the two city parks.

"What I learned from the experience is that, rather than exploiting the homeless, someone should be trying to fix the problem. Nobody seems to be coming up with a plan to fix this problem."

Withey, 49, has worked as a homeless advocate ever since, often at odds with Mayor Charlie Hales. Withey, for example, protested Hales' homeless sweeps last year.

But Withey is set to be one of Hales' guests before the City Council on June 11 to present what he says is a big idea to halt homelessness in Portland: tiny houses.

The little shelters—often no more than 200 square feet—have become trendy niche housing in Portland, from backyard homes on wheels to a tiny house hotel just off Northeast Alberta Street.

Withey proposes a private development of as many as 25 tiny houses clustered on a single property, with rents ranging from \$250 to \$350 a month.

He says his idea could save millions in affordable housing costs. Three years ago, the city built the \$47 million Bud Clark Commons in Old Town, including 130 apartments that cost on average \$253,000 per unit to build.

Withey says to put 25 tiny house units on about half an acre would cost \$15,000 to \$35,000 a unit, including the cost of the land. The organization is currently looking at property near Northeast 146th Avenue and East Burnside Street, but Withey foresees more developments in the future.

"It's not sustainable," Withey says of the city's approach to affordable housing. "The government spends a lot of money for low-income housing in ways they shouldn't."

Withey says the development would operate independently of government subsidies. What it would need from the city, he says, are changes to zoning and inspection codes to allow the construction of tiny houses as permanent dwellings.

Still, city officials are reluctant to endorse tiny homes as a good way to address Portland's need for low-cost housing.

Brendan Finn, chief of staff for City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Housing Bureau, says the idea is one worth exploring.

"Dan will be listening with a keen ear at the presentation," Finn says. "We are very interested in learning what we can do to bring down the cost per unit."

Finn says the city's counts of homeless have found more women with children on the streets, so finding units for families is a priority. The tiny house units Withey is proposing can be remodeled to add rooms. "The fact they are expandable make them even more attractive," Finn says.

Withey formed his nonprofit, Micro Community Concepts, in May. He wants only low-income residents, those earning between \$7,000 and \$21,000 a year. But he doesn't want any government role, such as Section 8 federal housing support.

He says every resident would also have to undergo a criminal background check to keep out violent felons. (Withey himself has had a few minor scrapes with the law, mostly related to the Occupy protests in 2012 and 2013.)

"This is not a handout; we aren't building a shelter or rehabs," he says. "This is just for normal people that simply can't afford conventional housing."

Withey wants to buy the units from Techdwell, a Sherwood company that builds tiny houses.

Techdwell houses feature small front porches that lead into compact kitchens and rooms that fit twin-sized beds. Dave Carboneau, a partner at Techdwell, says the houses were designed for disaster relief in Haiti (so far, the company has sold two).

"With 200 square feet, you don't have a lot to work with, but we try to maximize the utilization of the house," Carboneau says.

Homeless communities like Opportunity Village in Eugene and Quixote Village in Olympia, Wash., have tiny houses, but they lack kitchens and bathrooms. The tiny houses in Withey's development would have them.

"It's not necessarily a homeless project we're proposing," Withey says. "It's a homeless prevention project."

People living near the site of Withey's proposed tiny-house cluster aren't thrilled with the idea. Laurie Cunningham lives a few houses down and says her home's value has depreciated from the influx of low-income housing in the area.

"When we bought our home, we didn't ask for any of this," Cunningham says. "We aren't happy, and it's not safe anymore. We've had to clear out drug addicts, and we've seen guns in trunks of cars right smack in front of our house."

Withey says his tiny-house neighborhood would be all about community.

"We want to provide safe, supportive and sustainable living for people that deserve it," he says.

For White Men Only

Mayor Charlie Hales is hiring outside help to teach diversity to white male managers.

By Aaron Mesh

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales is hiring an outside consultant to host a diversity seminar—for white men only.

When Hales ran for mayor in 2012, he questioned whether Portland needed an Office of Equity and Human Rights—a \$1.2 million department dedicated to ensuring fairness in race, gender and disability.

In less than two years, he's received plenty of lessons on how much the city has to learn about diversity.

Last summer, Hales' top police aide, Baruti Artharee, sexually harassed Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith at a dinner for Dante James, director of the city equity office. In January, an HIV-positive staffer in Hales' office filed a civil-rights complaint against chief of staff Gail Shibley for violating his privacy.

And in April, the city's former financial chief, Jack D. Graham, filed notice of his intent to sue the city for racial discrimination—describing a pervasive atmosphere of racism throughout Portland's bureaucracy.

Hales now believes the city needs training beyond what the Office of Equity and Human Rights provides. The mayor and his male staffers will attend a 3½-day seminar in July that a city document says is “designed to help white male personnel learn how to react to issues in a white male-dominated culture.”

Hales spokesman Dana Haynes says the \$56,000 training session was the mayor's idea.

“This just in: Much of the big leadership in this city is white guys,” Haynes says. “And the change needs to start at the top.”

Hales has also mandated the attendance of white male command staff at the Portland Police Bureau—which has long been troubled by charges of discrimination.

The mayor's office didn't have to look far to find a contractor providing this specific service: The company, White Men as Full Diversity Partners, is based in Portland.

Haynes says the company provides a targeted seminar that the city's own diversity trainers can't supply.

“This training is unique,” Haynes says. “It is sui generis. Nobody else is doing this training, that we've been able to find.”

City officials will be taking part in a program described in White Men as Full Diversity Partners' promotional materials as “innovative white male-only” sessions. A city contract says the seminar will “empower white males in leadership roles to be aware of their own culture and engage in critical dialogue on issues of inequity, ownership and responsibility for change.”

Bill Proudman, a Portland team-building coach, founded White Men as Full Diversity Partners in 1996. He says he was one of the first consultants to offer white male-only diversity workshops. He's grown used to skepticism.

“It's a joke—white men having a diversity session with other white men is an oxymoron,” he says. “All I can say is, my experience tells me: I have a race. It's white. And it has an impact on things in my life. And I'm often the last person in the room to realize that.”

Proudman's organization lists among its clients PepsiCo, Lockheed Martin and NASA.

He says white men need to understand their own culture to avoid hurting others.

“Because we're the dominant group in the U.S., we're like fish in water,” Proudman says. “We don't notice the water. Looking at our culture allows us to see how we impact other groups.”

One observer questions whether Portland needs more equity workshops.

“Wow,” says Dave Lister, who has served on several city advisory committees and ran for a seat on the City Council in 2006. “Why do they need additional training for white males only when there's hardly anything the city puts out that doesn't talk about diversity?”

But Equity Foundation executive director Karol Collymore, who criticized Hales for his handling of Artharee's remarks, says this is a positive step.

“Anything that helps people get to a place where they can have serious conversations,” she says, “is the right step to take.”

City Commissioner Steve Novick Asks Metro to Slow Down on MAX Tunnel Under OHSU

By Aaron Mesh

Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick has for weeks been besieged by outrage over his plan to create a street fee changing Portland households up to \$144 a year, as he tries to solve a road-paving backlog partly caused by big spending on capital projects.

Now he's warning regional government Metro to slow down on its biggest potential construction job: drilling a tunnel under Oregon Health & Sciences University to run a light-rail line to Tualatin.

Metro News first reported Monday that Novick and others asked a Metro committee to hold a discussion of the local costs of a new tunnel under OHSU and Hillsdale before including it in further studies.

Novick tells WW the cost of a tunnel could run as high as \$2 billion—with local governments footing half the bill.

"We should have a community conversation about the tab," Novick tells WW. "The decision shouldn't be based simply on having the service without a discussion of paying the costs."

WW has previously reported that Novick asked to dedicate \$650,000 in city funds to studying the environmental impacts of Southwest Corridor High Capacity Transit, a project led by Metro.

Mayor Charlie Hales has placed that money in his proposed city budget, even as he and Novick are trying to create a new fee to fund a \$1.3 billion backlog of transportation projects. Both officials argue that even though the city doesn't have enough money to keep up with road paving, it should continue to invest in long-term capital projects.

The Southwest Corridor line to Tualatin may feature bus rapid transit—an increase in bus service and lanes along Southwest Barbur Boulevard—or light rail.

Construction costs—not including tunnels—could exceed \$1.6 billion, according to Metro documents. Metro News reports that other residents and regional partners in the transit plan are pressing not just for a tunnel, but for a "long, deep tunnel" with at least four stops.

There was vocal support at Monday's meeting for a transit line in a tunnel.

"Hillsdale was made-to-order for the type of project you're talking about," said Rick Seifert, a Hillsdale resident. "We really are a transit center, so to link Hillsdale into your plans is essential. Please honor your own past planning by giving strong consideration to the route."

Floyd Smith, a board member of the Association of Oregon Rail Transit Advocates, was even more ambitious, saying a tunnel from PCC-Sylvania to downtown Portland should be studied.

"We believe that it needs to be studied, that it's proper, and will bring a storm of discontent if a long deep tunnel with stations at Hillsdale and the Barbur Transit Center, OHSU and PCC is not considered," he said.