

The Oregonian

Portland street fee: Have thoughts on how to improve the proposed street fee? Town halls coming

By Andrew Theen

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick have two more transportation town halls scheduled next week for residents and business owners to weigh in on how to improve the duo's controversial street fee proposal.

Hales and Novick announced plans to put the brakes on the street fee proposal on June 3. The politicians, who've been talking for months about ways to raise new money to direct toward road maintenance and safety projects, pledged to return with a final funding plan in November.

According to a press release, the two newly scheduled meetings are the start of another public comment period that will stretch through October.

"If someone has a way to improve the transportation user fee and still raise \$50 million a year, let's hear it," Hales said in a press release.

Late last week, the city also rolled out a new version of the online calculator that allows residents to estimate their monthly fees. The new calculator includes the latest version of the proposal, which phases in rates for residences starting at \$6 per month the first year, eventually reaching \$12 per month in the third year. There are also discounts for low-income and multi-family housing units.

The business portion of the calculator is easier to navigate, too, with more specific categories for business owners to select in order to estimate their monthly bills.

Novick has said publicly and on his personal blog that he's open to exploring other ways to raise money for streets (an income or sales tax or combination of several options). "I understand that some business owners want to adjust the transportation fee to better protect small businesses," Novick said in a release. "If we can't find a way to improve it, Mayor Hales and I are prepared to move forward this fall with the proposal open the table."

Transportation bureau officials started hosting town halls to discuss what to do about the poor condition of Portland's roads in February. They first solicited opinions on how the city should prioritize projects (i.e. sidewalks, safe crossings, pavement maintenance, etc.). They've commissioned a phone poll asking residents about various funding options, posted online surveys and held meetings around town.

Opposition to the street fee came to a head at a nearly six-hour public hearing last month.

Here are the details for the two new town hall meetings (starting next Tuesday)

- Town Hall on Business and Non-Residential Fee: 8 to 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, June 24, at Venture Portland, 1125 SE Madison St., Suite 112.
- Town Hall on Residential Fee: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 25, at Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N Interstate Ave.

The Portland Tribune

Vote set again on street fee charter change

By Jim Redden

After a one week delay, the City Council is scheduled to vote Wednesday on submitting a measure to the Nov. 4 general election ballot to restrict funds raised by a new Transportation User Fee to transportation projects.

The council had been scheduled to consider the proposal City Charter change last Wednesday, June 11. Mayor Charlie Hales delayed the vote after council members received a letter from four business organizations with questions about the fee and council schedule. The council is not expected to consider the fee until Nov. 12, a little more than a week after the vote on the proposed measure.

"The backlog of maintenance and safety [projects] for the city's transportation system is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. We are willing to engage in a conversation about the future of the city's transportation maintenance and safety needs and opportunities to specifically define both the funding sources and spending priorities, but do not support referring charter amendments in advance of that important public dialogue," reads the letter, which came from the heads of the Portland Business Alliance, the Oregon Petroleum Association, the NW Grocery Association and the Oregon Neighborhood Store Association.

Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick, who is developing the fee with Hales, says he wants the four associations would work with neighborhood business leaders on a proposal for the council to consider that would raise at least \$53 million a year, the amount in his and Hales' first fee proposal. That did not happen over the past week, however.

Novick says he hopes the concerns of the business organizations can be addressed by a work group to be appointed to consider fee alternatives, including monthly fees on residences and businesses, a motor vehicle fee, a gas tax, a sales tax, a tax on business profits, or some combination of them.

In the meantime, the vote is still scheduled for June 18, with consideration of the fee to happen approximately five months later.

The staggered vote schedule is the result of a series of last-minute changes made by Hales and Novick. They had originally agreed to have the council vote on a three-part package on June 4 — the ballot measure, a residential street fee, and a fee on businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations, including schools and churches.

But after hearing from many Portlanders either puzzled or opposed to the proposal at the first public hearing on May 29, Hales postponed the vote on the business, government and nonprofit fee. He then postponed the vote on the residential fee at the June 4 hearing.

Hales and Novick do not want to submit the revenue measure to voters. Commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman have so far said they believe Portlanders should be asked to approve it. Commissioner Amanda Fritz has not yet said where she stands on that question.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Advocating for reduction of construction waste

By Lee Fehrenbacher

Every year, Americans throw away enough steel to rebuild Manhattan, enough aluminum to rebuild the nation's entire commercial air fleet four times over, and enough wood to heat 50 million homes for 20 years, according to Edward Humes in his 2012 book "Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair With Trash."

Locally, officials at city and regional levels say developers and builders aren't recycling half as much as they think they are. Portland requires that at least 75 percent of materials from construction projects valued over \$50,000 be recycled. But that isn't preventing a lot of items from landing in landfills.

"The big, shocking component is ... around 20 to 25 percent of our landfill material is related to construction and demolition activities," said Shawn Wood, construction waste specialist for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. "It's even more in some areas. In some areas it's as much as half related to it."

Wood said people's false notions about sustainability are helping to build that mountain of waste. For instance, Portland's 75 percent requirement allows builders to dump various materials into the same bin.

Some people might think that when all project materials go into one recycling bin, all are being recycled – but they aren't.

After being twisted, compacted and crunched into recycle bins, those “recyclables” go to a material recovery facility – or MRF – and are dumped onto a conveyor belt and sorted by line workers. By the time they get through the jumbled mess, Wood said, they're typically able to save only about 25 to 40 percent. The rest goes to a landfill.

Some MRFs claim to recycle 80 percent of the materials they receive, but Wood said that's because they're counting the residual stuff pulverized in the demolition and delivery process, and used instead of soil for landfill cover. Omit that “alternative daily cover” material and their recycling rates are closer to 25 to 40 percent.

“Recycling is almost at the bottom of the waste hierarchy pyramid,” Wood said. “It's ‘reduce, re-use, recycle,’ and recycle is at the end of the list for a reason. Other than it going straight to the landfill, it's the least desirable outcome.”

That is unless contractors separate the waste by material, in which case the amount recycled jumps to 95 to 100 percent. An even more sustainable option is deconstruction – methodically dismantling buildings in the reverse order they were built, and then reusing the materials.

DeConstruction Services – a contracting arm of the ReBuilding Center on North Mississippi Avenue – can typically salvage 85 percent of a building's major components for reuse. The rest gets recycled.

“Someone was quoted from a construction company saying, ‘That's great if you want to pay 15 times the amount (of demolition),’” ReBuilding Center Executive Director Shane Endicott said. “But we (cost) barely more than the demo.”

Deconstruction can actually be more cost-effective than demolition in some situations, he said. As a general rule, deconstruction of an average house costs about 15 percent more, but that's not taking into account tax subsidies that the federal government offers for donating building materials.

“When you take in tax subsidies, we have clients that come out way on top,” Endicott said.

For instance, DeConstruction Services once gutted a Northwest Portland house for \$5,000. The value of the resulting tax write-off was more than \$20,000.

Another benefit of deconstruction, Endicott said, is that because of overhead-related costs, it can support eight jobs while demolition may rely on one excavator. He believes this presents an opportunity for excavation companies to grow, and said he would speak with anybody interested to learn more.

Deconstruction was actually commonplace in the first half of the 20th century, but fell out of favor in the 1970s, according to Endicott. He said that's a shame because there's a huge market for used building materials. Today, the ReBuilding Center moves an average of eight tons of materials per day. People from all over the world buy its materials; a few weeks ago, a man from Japan purchased 150 light fixtures.

In the past, companies paid the ReBuilding Center to take their large timber beams. Now the nonprofit can't buy them because they're in such high demand.

“By simply changing our relationship with (waste) and getting it into reuse, (the ReBuilding Center has) been able to change that same material into an asset that's benefited the community – socially, economically and throughout the whole spectrum of sustainability,” he said.

The ReBuilding Center sells those used materials for 25 cents on the dollar, and since 1998 has saved customers approximately \$75 million, according to Endicott. The self-sustaining nonprofit has totaled approximately \$25 million in sales in that time, providing full benefits to roughly 35 employees off of what the community formerly was paying to throw away, he said.

Some ReBuilding Center employees have left to create their own for-profit models, and Endicott said that if others want to do the same he'll gladly share his business plan.

Other than tax subsidies or resale of materials, however, local municipalities don't have a lot of carrots they can dangle in front of developers to convince them to choose deconstruction, Wood said. But there is one more benefit. As demolition activity grows in Portland, so does neighborhood opposition. Wood said deconstruction can be a powerful olive branch.

“It’s like capital punishment – we care how things die,” he said. “Standing in front of 20 rifles is different than injection, and it’s kind of the same thing with deconstruction.”

Demolition and waste

According to data compiled by Shawn Wood, construction waste specialist for the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, the city in 2013 received 273 applications for single-family home demolitions. That is up from 209 in 2012 and just 140 in 2011. Through June 3, the city received 135 applications, so this year’s total is on track to exceed 300 (not counting remodels, which Wood says account for 85 percent of construction waste).

An average Portland home is approximately 1,119 square feet, and every square foot produces close to 115 pounds of waste, according to Wood. So, if all 273 of those demolitions planned last year were to move forward, they would produce roughly 17,565 tons of waste – with at least 10,539 tons going into landfills (assuming a 40 percent recycle rate).