

The Oregonian

Portland planners release video, let residents know they live in a growing and 'great American city'

*By Andrew Theen
July 22, 2014*

Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability is gearing up for months of public meetings on its draft plan for handling and shaping the city's expected population boom throughout the next 20 years.

The city released its draft land use and transportation plan in an interactive map this week. The blueprint shows what Portland's comprehensive plan could dictate stretching out to the year 2035.

As a companion piece to the map, city officials posted a video Tuesday that breaks down the map into very simple language.

In case you've missed the memo, or the explosion of housing throughout the central city, Portland is indeed a growing metropolitan area. The video also explains what a city is, for those unsure of the premise.

"Cities give us options for how to get around and where to live," the video says. You may live in a city, raise a family here, do business, get around, etc. These are probably things you do on a daily basis if you live in Portland.

Portland, the video says, is a "great American city," and a growing one.

The Comprehensive Plan, that road map for the next 20 years, outlines where public investments may be made, and what kind of transportation improvements could be in the Rose City's future.

Planners already have some assumptions of what future Portland looks like: more dense, more urban, more diverse, with more people living by themselves. According to the city, more than half of Portland residents will live by themselves in 2035.

More of us will live in apartments. Currently, 65 percent of new construction citywide is multifamily housing, and by 2035 that number is expected to be 80 percent.

"We know where the deficiencies are. we know the neighborhoods that don't have a complete sidewalk network. We know the parts of the city that don't have enough employment," Mayor Charlie Hales said in the video. The comprehensive plan allows city leaders to focus resources on those areas to address deficiencies or build on existing strengths.

On Wednesday, planning officials are meeting with members of the media to discuss the draft comprehensive plan.

If you have questions, leave them in the comment section below.

We'll keep pulling out nuggets of information from the map to share with readers.

In the meantime, here are some future dates to keep in mind.

The city's Planning and Sustainability Commission will hold public meetings on the comprehensive plan starting this fall:

- September 23, 2014 at 5 p.m. (Focus on Goals and Policies), 1900 S.W. 4th Avenue, Room 2500A
- October 14, 2014 at 5 p.m. (Focus on Maps) Community location TBD, see www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/pdxcompplan
- October 28, 2014 at 5 p.m. (Focus on Maps) Community location TBD, see www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/pdxcompplan
- November 4, 2014 at 4 p.m. (Focus on Citywide Systems Plan and Transportation System Plan) 1900 S.W. 4th Avenue, Room 2500A

The commission is expected to make a recommendation to the City Council on the comprehensive plan in Spring 2015.

How Uber ride-sharing sneaked into Vancouver -- and why it can't enter Portland

*By Joseph Rose
July 23, 2014*

Six years ago, Vancouver was home to a pretty strict city code prohibiting people from turning their family car into a DIY taxi service.

But then the Great Recession throttled the city budget.

Vancouver officials decided they didn't have the money for inspectors to enforce everything in the code book. So they weeded out the ride-sharing provision and dozens of other rules.

After all, no one at City Hall could remember the last time someone tried to play weekend cabbie without a permit. Who would bother?

There was no way to know it at the time, but that exercise in bureaucracy-trimming paved the way for ride-sharing service Uber to roll into Portland's largest neighbor without notice last week. The controversial-but-cutting-edge San Francisco tech startup didn't need to ask for permission – and it didn't.

"We didn't even know they were operating here," said Chad Eiken, the city's community and economic development director. "We found out when we started getting angry emails from cab drivers in the city."

Uber uses smartphone apps to connect riders to drivers using their personal vehicles as de facto taxis.

If Uber can't operate in Portland, with its strict ordinances designed to protect the taxi industry from competition, the company apparently wants city officials to feel like an army of \$1.65-per-mile drivers are amassing on the border.

On Friday, Uber drivers crossed the Columbia River and cruised into enemy territory, delivering free ice cream bars to any Portland resident who requested them using the company's smartphone app. (Playing the ice cream man isn't illegal under the city's taxi code.)

In the past month, the company has been actively recruiting drivers with hundreds of "Make \$1,000/week driving for Uber!" Craigslist ads in Vancouver, Salem and Eugene.

Brooke Steger, general manager of Uber's Washington operations, said the company --recently valued at \$17 billion -- is simply expanding by moving into markets where it knows it won't receive strong regulatory resistance. "But I think this obviously drums up more interest in Portland," she said.

"Antiquated regulations"

The service's price options including luxury, SUV and uberX, the lower-cost service.

Drivers use their own cars as de facto cabs. Riders hail rides with the tap of Uber's app that stores credit card information. Both drivers and customers have the ability to use a five-star system to rate each other.

Sure, Portlanders are free to download the app. But when they attempt to summon a ride, the program alerts users that "antiquated regulations make Uber in Portland impossible."

The pop-up message promises that the company is working to change that.

"We're seeing thousands of people in Portland opening up the app every week," Steger said. "It's not uncommon for cities to have antiquated regulations. But there has to be a catalyst for them to be updated."

That catalyst for Portland, she said, should be the fear of a hip, growing city being left behind in the fast-moving sharing economy.

The sharing economy has caught on so quickly that regulators in most cities -- and police -- are scrambling to make sense of its possible implications to local culture and economies. In Denver, a police officer is under investigation for pulling over an Uber car carrying a fare last week and insisting the service was illegal. (Colorado was actually the first state to explicitly legalize ride-sharing.)

Responding to pressure from consumers, the Seattle City council earlier this month approve legislation creating a new regulatory framework for Uber and competitors such as Lyft to operate as "transportation network companies."

But so far, Portland officials have refused to budge to end what amounts to the taxi industry's monopoly, even as they have developed a cordial relationship with home-sharing service Airbnb.

The heavily influential Private for-Hire Transportation Board of Review, which includes representatives from the Portland's taxi and town-car companies, appears dead set against relinquishing any of the city's 460 taxi permits to Uber drivers.

Non-taxi services such as town cars in Portland are also required to charge a premium price over traditional cabs, negating one of the main reasons people choose Uber in other major cities – cheaper rides.

Portland city code also says that town cars must charge more than taxis for similar trips, and -- the biggest obstacle to services like Uber's upscale "Uber Black" service -- an hour must elapse between a call for service and putting a behind in a seat. (Uber cars typically show up in 10 minutes or less.)

In PBOT's hands

Earlier this month, "the Uber issue" shifted from the Office of Financial Management to the Portland Bureau of Transportation and Steve Novick, the city commissioner who oversees transportation policy.

Uber says thousands of people have attempted to hail a ride with the company's app in Portland. Instead of a car, the app sends them a message that takes a shot at the city's strict taxi regulations.

"It's odd to have an industry where there is an absolute cap on the number of people in it and which allocates slots to specific businesses," Novick said. "But there's also a value to having a regulatory structure which ensures that there is 24-hour service and service for the disabled."

Novick said he has yet to take a hard look at the issue, and needs to have a detailed discussion with staff, but he has some preliminary thoughts.

Instead of requiring individual companies to guarantee around-the-clock pickup of people with disabilities, he said there may be a way to tax all operators, including Uber, to fund those services for the public.

"Of course," Novick said, "the over-riding issue is whether the regulations should be changed."

Driving scared

There's no doubt that Uber has the taxi industry driving scared everywhere it operates.

In an email recently sent to Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt, the operations manager for Vancouver Cab Co., Shannon Stewart, insisted that the city put the brakes on Uber.

"Their illegal operations are stealing lawful and legal drivers' livelihood, who struggled to pay for the privilege to drive and operate in Vancouver," Stewart wrote. "We struggle to get new drivers given the city's cost, and this will make it virtually impossible for us to get and keep safe legal drivers."

It may not be a fair fight, but Eiken said the city doesn't believe Uber is violating the law in Vancouver.

"We're not looking to track them down and fine (the drivers)," he said. "But they were up front with Seattle and other cities that have allowed them. We would like to hear from them and to get a better understanding of what they're all about."

"Rick"

As of Monday afternoon, UberX driver Rick Strubel, a lanky, talkative 42-year-old life-insurance salesman who is trying make some extra money to buy his kids school clothes, had picked up 25 riders in six days.

Steering his Cerulean blue Chevy Aveo along State Route 14, an iPhone keeping track of the fare mounted on the inside of the windshield, Strubel said he was a bit disappointed; he had expected more business.

One fare had been waiting for a cab at the Vancouver Hilton hotel for half an hour when she decided to download the Uber app and set up an account. "She requested a ride and I was there in less than five minutes," Strubel said.

Of course, she wanted to go to Portland International Airport to catch a flight. As soon as Strubel's Aveo crossed the Columbia River in Portland, the iPhone warned him that he had entered a no-fare zone, he said.

"Man," Strubel said. "I can't wait until we're allowed into Portland."

With boost from Portland Arts Tax collection drive, teachers' salaries now funded for next year

*By James Reddick
July 22, 2014*

Portland's revenue bureau is at the end of the first wave of a collection drive for the Portland Arts Education and Access Fund, and the effort seems to be paying off.

The city estimates around 350,000 residents are required to pay the tax, which was due April 15. But tax collectors received just 155,400 payments as of May 1.

Since then, the revenue bureau has sent out nearly 150,000 letters to taxpayers who owed money for the 2013 tax year that ended Dec. 31. Now the city is on track to collect an additional \$2.63 million by the end of the July, said Thomas Lannom, the revenue bureau director.

An estimated 63 percent of taxpayers have paid up for tax year 2013 and 70 percent for tax year 2012.

Revenues this year remained 10 percent below the city's projections as of the end of June.

But the city has taken in \$7.6 million for tax year 2013, or enough revenue to cover salaries of art and music teachers next school year in six school districts: Portland, Centennial, David Douglas, Parkrose, Riverdale and Reynolds. The funds are only distributed to elementary schools in which students living in Portland are enrolled.

The rest of the money will go to the Regional Arts and Culture Council, which provides grants to individual artists and nonprofit arts organizations.

Collection efforts for tax year 2012 were undermined by a series of hiccups during the tax's rollout. In April 2013, Mayor Charlie Hales instituted a last-minute \$1,000 minimum income threshold for adults living in households above the poverty line.

The next month, city officials realized they were illegally taxing Social Security income. Instead of going after residents who hadn't paid the \$35 tax, revenue bureau officials found themselves issuing refunds and pushing back the due date.

They have been playing catch-up ever since.

Of the 150,000 collection letters sent since May, about 59,000 went to taxpayers who still owed money from April 15, 2013 as well as from this past April.

Although the letters indicate a late fee will be imposed, taxpayers have a grace period of 30 days in which all penalties are waived. For example, notice warns an individual who owes \$70 (\$35 for the 2012 tax year, plus \$35 for 2013) that he owes \$120. But he'll only have to hand over \$70 if he pays within 30 days of receipt of the collection notice.

So what will happen to the remaining holdouts? That's still up in the air. Lannom says the bureau will send out another wave of notices, after which the city is weighing its options.

"There are a great many accounts still to look at," he said. "I'm not going to sit here today and say what our next step is. There's a plan, but it's not appropriate for me to say exactly what it is yet."

Portland is already planning for legal marijuana as Mayor Charlie Hales assembles internal advisory committee

*By Andrew Theen
July 22, 2014*

Election Day is months away, but Portland Mayor Charlie Hales doesn't want to be caught napping.

Hales quietly assembled an internal advisory committee in recent weeks to explore how Portland can prepare for what the first term mayor sees as a likely scenario: Oregonians legalizing the sale and possession of recreational marijuana.

Voters will decide in November whether to approve a ballot measure that would legalize, tax and regulate the sale of marijuana across the state. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission would oversee the industry. Adults 21 and older could possess and grow as much as eight ounces of marijuana.

The state could begin issuing licenses to retailers in 2016, according to the proposed ballot measure pushed by the group New Approach Oregon, but Hales isn't waiting for voters to have their say before examining Portland's options.

"We want to look at how other city and states are dealing with the side effects, if I can use a bad pun," Hales said in an interview with The Oregonian Editorial Board this month.

The mayor's marijuana committee includes five members from the Police Bureau, transportation staffers, revenue officials, permitting experts, representatives from the Office of Neighborhood Involvement and employees of Hales' office. The group of roughly 20 city employees meets twice a month for an hour and a half and is on its fourth meeting, according to Hales' spokesman Dana Haynes.

Hales said the committee is analyzing the extent of Portland's authority in shaping how and where marijuana stores operate.

Hales said of the city's relationship with state liquor regulators who will control the distribution of legal weed: "Are we the kid in the backseat with the plastic steering wheel, or do we have some ability to steer the outcomes of where outlets are, and how they relate to the neighborhood?"

Portland doesn't have to search far for practical examples.

Hales drove across the Columbia River last week to meet with Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt, in part, to talk about that city's recreational marijuana rollout. To Hales' surprise, he learned that Vancouver's experience is largely one of a collective community yawn.

A scarce supply of marijuana proved to be the biggest issue facing Vancouver in the first two weeks of legal pot sales. Leavitt said he's heard of "no law enforcement issues" and no reports or complaints from nearby businesses.

"My suspicion is, it will become old hat," Leavitt said.

Vancouver, the fourth-largest city in Washington, didn't take any systematic measures to prepare, according to Leavitt. Washington voters approved a ballot measure legalizing pot in 2012, but the first retail stores opened across the state this month.

Leavitt said the city needed to address some minor permitting regulations and tighten city code to ensure Vancouver wouldn't be home to strip malls of marijuana retailers. But many of the regulations, such as mandatory distances from schools, were already codified in the state marijuana law's language.

Leavitt said Hales asked in their meeting about Vancouver's expected annual revenue from the newly imposed marijuana taxes. Leavitt said he expects roughly \$180,000 in annual revenue from the six licensed outlets. "It's not a big financial windfall for the city," he added.

Haynes, the Portland mayor's spokesman, said the advisory committee's last scheduled meeting is September 15. The group will likely return to City Council with recommendations on potential added regulations this fall, Haynes said in an email.

Here's a roster of committee members:

Josh Alpert, Mayor's Office

Betsy Ames, OMF
Rachel Andrew, Police Bureau
Amy Archer, ONI
Alex Bejarano, PBOT
Elizabeth Edwards, Govt. Relations
Samantha Freeman, ONI Crime Prevention
Jill Grenda, BDS
Celia Heron, OMF
Kevin Hogan, Police Bureau
David Jackson, Police Bureau
Joe Zehnder, Planning Bureau
Scott Karter, Revenue
Richard Kepler, Police Bureau
Mike Liefeld, BDS
Theresa Marchetti, ONI
Mitchell Orellana, Police Bureau
Stephanie Reynolds, ONI
Andy Smith, Govt. Relations
Ben Walters, City Attorney

The Portland Tribune

City releases draft Comp Plan

*By Jim Redden
July 22, 2014*

Portlanders can now review the draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan updated that will guide future growth after it has been approved by the City Council.

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability released the draft Comp Plan — as it is commonly called — on its website on Tuesday. A page devoted to the draft includes background information, links to various sections, and an online Map App to access an interactive map of proposed changes throughout the city.

“As a major opportunity to implement the Portland Plan, the 2035 Comprehensive Plan gives us a detailed roadmap to the future,” says Bureau of Planning and Sustainability Director Susan Anderson. “We invite you to review the draft 2035 Plan and give us your feedback. Your comments are critical for helping to create a healthier, more resilient and prosperous city for us and future generations.”

The page is www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/pdxcompplan.

According to BPS, while most of Portland land area will not be directly affected by the land use or zone changes, the draft includes four major proposals:

- Complete Neighborhoods – Most new growth will be focused in designated Centers and along major transportation Corridors, which include clusters of shops, restaurants, offices and housing. This approach promotes convenience, walkability and access to services. Development will be scaled to the size and character of Portland’s various centers and corridors.
- Jobs – The draft 2035 Plan includes areas where a variety of new jobs can be created, including campuses for colleges and hospitals, as well as policies to support more efficient uses of industrial land.
- Risks and Service Gaps – Proposed changes will help protect public health and safety, avoid exacerbating natural hazard risks, and acknowledge limited infrastructure or services. This includes changes to slow the pace and scale of development in East Portland, while maintaining a strong commitment to continued investment in essential infrastructure.
- Neighborhoods, Parks and Open Space – Changes to some residential densities and updates to open space designations will better reflect existing neighborhood character and acknowledge recent park land acquisitions.

As mandated by state land use planning laws, the draft plan will be presented to the City's Planning and Sustainability Commission, a volunteer advisory group responsible for advising City Council on long-range planning decisions. The PSC will hold the following public hearings where Portlanders can testify in person, starting in late September:

- Focus on Goals and Policies, Sept 23, 5 p.m., 1900 SW 4th Avenue, Room 2500A.
- Focus on Maps, Oct. 14, 5 p.m., location to be posted on webpage.
- Focus on Maps, Oct. 28, 5 p.m., location to be posted on webpage.
- Focus on Citywide Systems Plan and Transportation System, Nov. 4, 4 p.m., 1900 SW 4th Avenue, Room 2500A.

Portlanders may also submit feedback on the Proposed Draft of the 2035 Plan online through the Map App or in writing to the PSC. After considering testimony and revising the Proposed Draft, the commission will submit a Recommended Plan to City Council in spring of 2015.

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability has set up a helpline to answer questions from the public. The line is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Mondays until 8 p.m. It is 503-823-0195. Check the webpage for other contact opportunities.

Novick poll: Tax the rich to repair streets

*By Jim Redden
July 22, 2014*

Commissioner Steve Novick has finally found a street fee that most Portlanders support — one that only the rich pay.

Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales have struggled for months to find a new source of revenue for funding street maintenance and safety improvement projects. They started by proposing a transportation user fee that assessed a flat monthly fee on households and a fee based on vehicle trips on nonresidential properties. Outraged reactions from residents, business owners and nonprofit organizations forced them to pull their proposal back for more work, however.

Now Novick has released a new poll that shows 60 percent of Portlanders supporting taxing those who earn more than \$125,000 to pay for maintenance and safety projects. Only 37 percent oppose the idea of a 1 percent tax on incomes above \$125,000, a 2 percent tax on incomes about \$250,000 and a 3 percent tax on incomes above \$500,000.

That's the highest level of support of any new revenue source measured by the poll. Portlanders are evenly split on a smaller income tax that begins at \$100,000 and an increase in the city's tax on business profits. And they oppose a combined business profits tax and sales tax.

Significantly, the majority of those who responded to the poll would not pay anything under the funding proposal they support. Seventy-six percent reported earning less than \$100,000 a year. Only 12 percent said they earn more than \$100,000 a year and 13 percent refused to disclose their income.

Hales and Novick are running into a hard political reality: a lot of people are not willing to pay more money for the things they want from government. Polls have consistently shown that most Portlanders believe street maintenance and safety projects are a top priority.

Hales and Novick want the City Council to approve a street fee in November that raises approximately \$53 million a year, evenly divided between residential and non-residential properties. The poll of 300 voters was conducted June 19 through 22 by DHM Research. It cost \$16,500 and was paid for by Novick's office. He is in charge of the Portland Bureau of Transportation.

City Council to consider sending parks measure to ballot

*By Jim Redden
July 21, 2014*

Commissioner Amanda Fritz will ask the City Council at its Thursday, July 24, meeting to refer a parks bond measure to the Nov. 4 general election ballot.

Fritz is proposing a measure authorizing a property tax backed-bond to raise up to \$68 million for maintenance projects. It is intended to fund the most critical of the \$365 million worth of deferred maintenance projects identified by Portland Parks & Recreation.

Fritz has filed a list with the council of the first projects the bond money would fund. It includes playground replacements, trail and bridge repairs, restroom repairs, swimming pool repairs and upgrades, park worker safety improvements, and accessibility projects.

“This list represents the most urgent needs — the things that are breaking or are already broken,” Commissioner Fritz says.

The remaining projects will be determined with public input if the measure passes.

If approved by the voters, it would take effect on July 1, 2015, just as the existing park levy expires — meaning its passage would not raise property tax rates.

In a recent meeting with the Portland Tribune editorial board, Fritz said she was confident the council will vote to place the measure on the ballot. She said the campaign to pass it will be led by the Portland Parks Foundation, a nonprofit organization that can legally engage in a limited amount of political work.

The resolution to be considered by the council and some supporting documents can be found at <http://www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=50265&a=497310>. Additional information can be found at <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/65128>.

Willamette Week

Gang Mentality

Police say gang violence is exploding. A landmark report shows just the opposite.

*By Aaron Mesh
July 23, 2014*

Turn on the TV news and you'd have reason to believe Portland's gang violence is out of control.

Terse warnings from police and fallout from three recent high-profile shootings have prompted alarming reports in the media of a recent surge in gang activity.

“Gang violence rises sharply in first half of 2014,” KGW-TV declared June 6. On July 9, KOIN-TV reported gang-related violent crime is the highest it has been in 13 years. And as The Oregonian put it in a headline that same day, “Portland's gang enforcement team struggling to respond to increased violence.”

The claims stem from Portland police statistics that show an increase in what cops define as “gang-related violent crimes”—75 so far this year compared to 53 for the same period in 2013.

Portland police have followed these reports with concerns they lack the resources to fight the problem of gangs. And elected officials haven't challenged that narrative.

Amid the rhetoric and media heat, however, documents show the story is far more complicated:

- The biggest-ever report on gang activity in Multnomah County, released in late June, found no evidence that gang violence is growing worse. Just the opposite: All the indicators used by law enforcement to track gang violence show steep decreases over the past 10 years.

- The report found police have no comprehensive way to measure the number of gang members in Multnomah County or the violence they cause.
- The Police Bureau—while decrying the increase in gang violence—didn't ask for increased funding this year to combat the problem. Instead, budget documents show, police brass sought more money to enforce traffic laws, to hire an equity manager, and to cover higher compensation costs for command staff.

To be sure, even one shooting is one too many. So is one gang. And nobody would deny that parts of Portland and Multnomah County endure more violence and need immediate attention.

"This is real," says Deanna Wesson-Mitchell, police liaison for Mayor Charlie Hales. "It's scary when you go to sleep at night wondering if a bullet is going to come through your window."

But when pressed, City Hall officials, while concerned by the recent shootings, remain unconvinced the problem is as serious as police claim.

"I don't know whether we have a reason to believe that's a big trend or just a blip," says City Commissioner Steve Novick. "The broader question is, have we adjusted the police force to the changing reality of crime? That's not really a discussion we've had."

Violent gangs have worried police and threatened neighborhoods since the 1980s, when the Bloods and Crips first showed up in Portland. But the most recent attention to gangs came in June, as the City Council put the finishing touches on Portland's \$515 million general fund budget.

That budget didn't restore positions to the Police Bureau that were cut a year earlier. Hales did away with positions for 50 sworn officers, the biggest staffing cut in the bureau's recent history.

In the middle of this year's budget debate, the Police Bureau released numbers showing gang-related Measure 11 crimes had spiked by 48 percent since 2013.

The bureau's announcement gained greater currency June 30, a Monday, when Andrew Leon Coggins Jr., 24, was shot dead near McCoy Park in North Portland's Portsmouth neighborhood. Police say he was the victim of a gang-related drive-by shooting.

Then, early on the morning of July 5, 26-year-old Hahrahcio Roy Branch was shot and killed in the parking lot of Soobies Bar & Grill at Southeast 122nd Avenue and Oak Street. Four other people were injured.

Three days later, a 5-year-old boy was shot in the left leg while playing outside an apartment complex in Southeast Portland's Powellhurst-Gilbert neighborhood. Police suspect it was a gang shooting gone awry.

Portland police saw their 24-member gang unit lose two officers in budget cuts handed down by City Hall last year.

The Police Bureau's gang enforcement supervisor, Sgt. Don Livingston, told The Oregonian on July 9 he didn't have enough officers to put gang members in jail.

"When we don't have adequate officers working the street, we end up solving less cases," Livingston said.

The sudden explosion of violence might have distracted the news media from the landmark report on gang activity.

The 1,045-page report by the Multnomah County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council is the first of its kind in Oregon. The council, a collection of 10 agencies, cost \$50,225 and took six months to complete.

Its conclusions created a dissonance with the rising media noise around the recent shootings.

The report says Multnomah County law enforcement agencies lack a reliable way to measure the scope of gang activity.

“[P]ublic safety agencies have lacked a centralized method for identifying and tracking gang-related events and individuals,” the report says, detailing its key findings.

“Questions that currently remain unanswered include how many gang-involved individuals are active in Multnomah County, how many gangs consist primarily of youth versus adults, what crimes are being committed by gangs, and when and where gang crimes are being committed.”

What’s more, the public safety council’s report says that every standard indicator of gang activity has gone down dramatically in the past decade. (See chart at left.)

The report notes that these crimes have moved east in recent years, away from North and Northeast Portland toward Gresham. As a result, some specific areas have seen increases in gang activity—such as the Rockwood area of Gresham—but overall the problem is far less serious than it once was.

(Unlike most other media, Oregon Public Broadcasting stood out by highlighting the study’s key findings about trends in gang activity.)

“It’s important to point out that we’re down hugely on gang shootings,” says Lane Borg, executive director of Metropolitan Public Defenders. “When you look at it 10 years ago compared to now, it’s really significantly down.”

Borg says the report’s message—while commissioned and produced by a council made up in part by police agencies—is inconvenient for law enforcement.

“I don’t know that we can say we have solved the problem,” Borg says. “If you want to keep focus on something, the last thing you need is a report that says things are getting better.”

Livingston, of the Portland Police Bureau’s gang enforcement team, says he’s well aware that statistics show crime is down overall. But he says his agency’s statistics better reflect reality.

“Countywide, things are getting better, but in this world, it’s getting worse,” Livingston says.

Portland’s gang unit in 2004 responded to 44 reports of violent crimes suspected of being gang-related, according to bureau statistics. By 2013, that number had nearly tripled to 118.

“We’re spending all our time responding to shootings primarily,” Livingston says. “The difference between a homicide and an assault is usually just a few inches. Better aim, and someone is going to die.”

But experts say they don’t trust those numbers in isolation when compared to broader trends. “I don’t put a lot of stock in police gang statistics,” says Clay Mosher, a professor of sociology at Washington State University-Vancouver and author of a similar gang assessment report for Clark County law enforcement agencies in 2012.

Mosher says agencies label gang-related crime differently—and often liberally. “They have a lot of latitude in how they define things,” he said. “Most crimes committed by gang members are not committed for the gang. But they can get coded as a gang-related crime.”

Portland’s elected officials acknowledge that many crimes associated with gangs have been dropping, but they have been cautious when challenging the account of a worsening gang problem.

“It’s a little hard to celebrate going from, say, 100 people shot to 10 people shot,” says Hales spokesman Dana Haynes. “The families of those 10 people will hear you celebrating. This mayor is not satisfied with where the levels of gang violence are. Yay, they’re down. Boo, they’re not down enough.”

GANG REPORT FINDINGS

Police agencies in Multnomah County have no consistent or reliable way to measure gang activity. Instead, they look at what law enforcement officials call “proxy” statistics—reports of “shots fired” and aggravated assaults. A new report—one largely ignored by the news media—shows those indicators are way down. Here are the rates, calculated on a per-capita basis:

“SHOTS FIRED.”

Calls that indicate witnesses may have heard gunshots; these reports do not mean shots were actually fired.



AGGRAVATED ASSAULTS.

These reports do not include domestic-violence calls.



HOMICIDES.

The new report also notes the sharp decline in violent crime overall. That includes homicides.



"This time of year, we talk a lot about gangs and shootings," adds City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversaw the Police Bureau in 2009 and 2010. "I would argue that there's a lot of other crimes being committed against children and spouses that go on year-round."

Novick, a frequent critic of the Police Bureau, says there has not been a serious debate about how to change police operations.

"I don't hear a coherent response to the question, 'How do you adjust the police force in an era when there's less crime?'" Novick says. "There's times when talking to the Police Bureau is like talking to the Pentagon after the Cold War ended."

City Hall's decision to trim police staffing has not left Portland Police Chief Mike Reese without options: He has the authority to shift positions to the gang unit. He hasn't done so.

"The discussion is ongoing," says Portland police spokesman Sgt. Peter Simpson. "Moving two bodies over temporarily often means leaving something else empty that needs attention also."

In February, the Police Bureau's budget documents cited the need for restoring officers to the gang unit. But when it came to seeking more money, Reese instead chose to ask the City Council for \$287,671 for four more traffic-safety officers on the night shift, \$152,208 for an equity program manager, and \$68,783 to cover compensation increases for commanding officers as called for in their latest bargaining agreement. (The cost to restore the two gang enforcement officers: \$150,662.)

Reese was out of town and unavailable for comment on the budget decisions and the public safety council's report on gang violence, which was posted on the Web on June 30. Simpson says "the bureau has not been presented with the report yet, so it would be inappropriate to address any issues related with it at this time."

Simpson says Reese is committed to fighting gangs. He says the extra traffic cops would help save lives, and the other requests reflected either City Hall priorities or contractual obligations. (City Council did fund the equity officer.)

As for staffing, Simpson says top brass has been "brainstorming and discussing the issues and resources surrounding gang crime and how the bureau responds."

After that, he says, the bureau can "develop a thoughtful, sustainable plan. Not just throw resources at it."

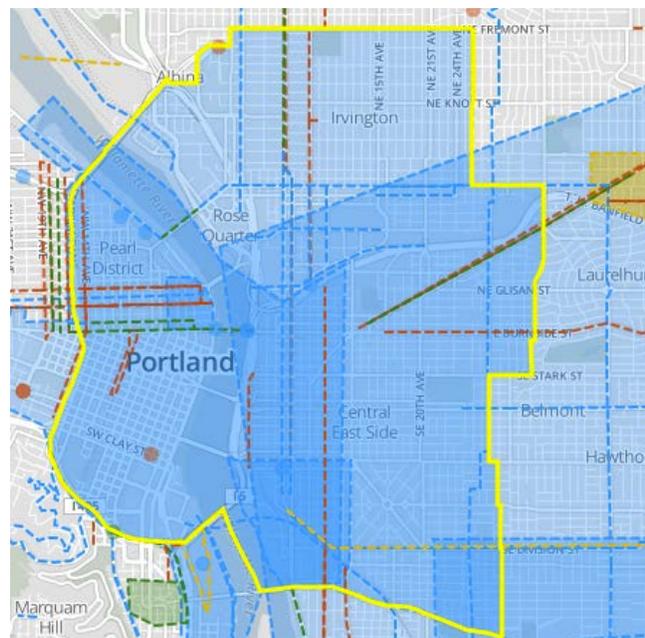
The Mercury

Portland 2035: The Theoretical Map

*By Dirk VanderHart
July 22, 2014*

As the Oregonian pointed out Monday evening, the city's released a new interactive map containing all potential projects that might make the cut as part of the seemingly never-ending process of creating a new Comprehensive Plan.

The map has tabs for transportation, zoning and infrastructure projects put forth by various city bureaus, and it'd be pointless trying to summarize them—or even using the map to try and get a good enough handle on them all that you could summarize. But click around, and you'll find plenty of interesting possibilities.



For instance:

Would the city really pull the trigger—in the next 20 years—on new car-free bridges over I-84? The city's bike lobby has been hoping so for a while now.

Less expensive and just as hotly coveted: The first winding segment of a multimodal trail along the railroad tracks of Sullivan's Gulch that could give cyclists, pedestrians, and Razor scooterers a breezy east-west commute.

Also, here are the initial outer limits PBOT has apparently designated for Portland's long awaited, twice-delayed bikeshare system:

We've always known the first phase of the system—if/when it arrives—would be focused on the city's relatively prosperous center, with potential subsequent expansions moving share-bikes closer to populations that might need them more (though those areas aren't necessarily magnets for the tourists that can make or break a bike share system). I'm not sure I'd seen the system so starkly limned, though. It's clear there's demand for bike share outside those boundaries.

Anyway, have at it. See what's maybe coming to your neighborhood. Go NIMBY.

KOIN Films Steve Novick Attending a Meeting of People Trying to Recall Steve Novick

*By Denis C. Theriault
July 21, 2014*

Last week's best bit of political theater waited all the way until Saturday. Commissioner Steve Novick, making his weekend rounds, actually dropped in for a planning meeting of the very nascent recall campaign trying to boot him (and Mayor Charlie Hales) from office later this fall.

The meeting—attended by some of the people angry over Novick and Hales' attempt to pass a street fee without a public vote—was up at Tabor Space. And it worked out that KOIN was already there with a TV camera—putting the station in the perfect position to capture some of the resulting back-and-forth.

Novick tells the Mercury he'd been sitting in the back of the room with his fiancée for a little more than half an hour when some of the other attendees finally noticed and bade him come forward and explain himself. Novick says recall organizer Ray Horton had been aware he was in the room the whole time. The meeting was mostly spent discussing technical issues involving signature gathering, Novick says, nothing terribly sensitive.

"They asked me to come up and explain why I was there," Novick says. "I wanted to hear why people thought anything the mayor or I have done was more worthy of a recall than anything else the city has done over the past 10 years."

He brought up the Portland Bureau of Transportation's switch to using "fog-sealing" spray on roads, a preventive maintenance measure that extends the life of pavement.

He also answered, again, for his infamous statement during the street fee rollout press conference that angry voters could boot him from office in 2016 if they didn't like it.

"That wasn't meant as a challenge," Novick insists. "It was meant as a discussion of civics. People elect people to make decisions. And then, at the end of their term, if you like more of those decisions than you dislike, you might re-elect them. If you dislike more than you like, you might throw them out."

The video shows Novick sparring gently with some participants, before the room decides it'd be best if he returned to his seat. There's also some discussion about the KOIN reporter, who rebuffs a woman asking if he had permission to film there. Horton suggested the next meeting wouldn't be so public. (Saturday's was posted in the Tribune, which is how Novick says he got wind of it.)

By the end, Novick says, a few people thanked him for showing up.

"It was actually kind of pleasant," he says.