

## The Oregonian

### Portland City Council's SDC subsidy gamble: Editorial Agenda 2014

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board  
July 24, 2014*

The city of Portland is accustomed to waiving system development charges in order to subsidize rental housing for low-income people. Because subsidy creep happens, City Council has been wrangling for weeks over a plan that would expand the use of SDC waivers, transforming a tool used to help people into one used to revitalize a seedy neighborhood. To that end, the city's Old Town/Chinatown action plan would waive SDCs for rental units serving people who earn up to 100 percent of median family income, which this year is \$55,520 for a couple.

There is a compelling logic to the proposal, which for a period of five years would waive SDCs on up to 500 units. It is supported most vocally by Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick, who explained via email Thursday, "if the plan is a complete failure and there is no development, we lost nothing." However, "if development picks up steam in Old Town and keeps going, past the 500 units, we eventually get SDCs we may never have gotten otherwise."

But there are risks, including the understandable resentment of Portlanders saddled with housing costs driven upward by SDCs for which they received no break. It's one thing for the city to dish out such inequitable treatment in order to provide shelter for poor people. It's another thing entirely, however, to do it for the purpose of sprucing up a neighborhood.

And then there's the timing. Assuming the plan worked, the city would lose about \$7 million in SDCs, which would have been used to pay for parks (\$3 million), streets (\$1.2 million) and water and sewer (\$2.8 million combined). As parks director Mike Abbate pointed out in a July 8 email to commissioners and other city officials, "The only funding tool we have that is fully operational for new construction is the Parks SDC program. And to address badly needed repair and replacement, Commissioner (Amanda) Fritz is advocating a bond measure in November." By approving this plan, the City Council would signal its willingness to subsidize Old Town/Chinatown revitalization with park funds even as it's asking taxpayers to shell out more taxes for parks.

In similar fashion, the Council would be approving the use of road money to subsidize Old Town/Chinatown even as it seeks new revenue to maintain roads driven to disrepair, in part, by past Council decisions to spend road funds on other things.

Finally, Portland residents were so incensed by the Council's questionable use of utility funds that only months ago they considered pulling sewer and water services from city control. Yet this plan would use sewer and water funds as seed money for a neighborhood turn-around project. It shouldn't surprise anyone that the plan worries Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the city's water and sewer bureaus, and Commissioner Fritz, who oversees parks.

For all we know, the plan might work, and we certainly won't fault Novick's logic. But sending the embedded message about the city's priorities would be a particularly risky thing to do now, and commissioners shouldn't be surprised if taxpayers respond accordingly. If paying for parks and roads isn't really such a high priority for the Council, why should Portlanders agree to pay more for these things?

The questions don't end there. SDCs, which can be substantial, are a necessary evil that drives up housing costs for everyone. Waiving them should be done reluctantly, narrowly and only for reasons that can be defended to people who resent being taxed inequitably. Obviously, Novick and Hales consider the use of SDC waivers to spark development in Old Town/Chinatown justified, and it's possible that most of their constituents will agree with them. But that's a bold assumption, and this wouldn't be the first time the commissioners have misread their constituents.

## Portland parks bond: City Council refers \$68 million spending plan to Nov. 4 election

*By Brad Schmidt  
July 24, 2014*

### Correction appended

Portland voters on Nov. 4 will be asked to approve a \$68 million bond measure to repair and improve city parks.

On Thursday, Portland City Council voted unanimously to refer the bond measure to the ballot, capping a feisty few months where city leaders have been squabbling over competing and conflicting funding priorities, including a controversial street fee and subsidies for Old Town Chinatown development.

But when it came to parks financing, City Hall had a kumbaya moment of sorts Thursday – with one group breaking out in song ("These parks were made for you and me") to support the measure.

"It was really great," Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees Portland Parks & Recreation, said of the harmonic support for parks funding.

If approved by voters, the parks bond measure would extend for 20 years a property tax first authorized by voters in 1994. At just under 9 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, first-year costs would hit about \$13 for a \$150,000 home or about \$17 for a \$200,000 home.

Parks officials have already identified about \$40 million worth of projects that would be covered by the first round of bond funding, with a public process slated for 2017 to determine how the rest of the money would be spent.

Officials say the parks bond would pay to improve 10 to 20 playgrounds, upgrade three swimming pools, improve several trails and bridges, and provide up to \$10 million to repair Pioneer Courthouse Square and up to \$10 million to renovate or replace two aging facilities where parks employees work.

With bond money, plus grants and major maintenance funds from the city's annual budget, officials estimate that they'll have about \$107 million over the decade to cover big repairs. That's some \$200 million short of projected needs.

"The parks replacement bond is not the full answer, but it is, indeed, a strong start," said Mike Abbate, director of the Parks Bureau.

Polling by the city in May found that voters are supportive of the bond measure. Parks advocates turned out in force Thursday, with one group rewriting the lyrics to "This Land is Your Land" to offer a Portland-style rendition of support from "the Lovejoy Fountain to Pittock Mansion."

"When the parks flourish, the city flourishes," said Dion Jordan, a member of the Portland Parks Board, whose late father, Charles Jordan, served as a city commissioner and parks director.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales, who as a city commissioner championed the 1994 bond measure that Fritz now wants to extend, spoke optimistically about the measure's chances with voters.

"This really is the right move at the right time," he said. "I think the community is with us."

Before Thursday, tensions had been running high in City Hall as members of the City Council attempted to balance funding priorities.

Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick, who oversees the Bureau of Transportation, pushed hard on the City Council in May and June to approve a controversial street fee to raise millions of dollars for road repairs, without sending the plan to the public for a vote.

That didn't happen.

The City Council is now expected to vote on the street fee after the parks bond vote, a timeline that Novick said was not deliberate. But Novick said a related street fee charter amendment, originally slated for the November election, was scrapped in part because of the parks bond.

At the same time, Hales has been pushing to waive an estimated \$7 million in development fees to jumpstart construction of 500 new apartments in Old Town Chinatown. Without waivers, development fees would be allocated for parks, roads, sewers and water.

Two weeks ago, Abbate in an email told the City Council he was "quite concerned about sending mixed messages to the very citizens we will need to help support a bond measure."

"Saying we need to continue taxing private property homeowners with a new bond measure for capital repairs and replacements while offering fee reductions to Old Town developers seems to shift responsibility from one sector of our economy to another," Abbate wrote in a July 8 email, obtained through a public records request.

A vote on the Old Town Chinatown subsidies has been delayed until August.

Novick, on the receiving end of criticism for the street fee, said he wasn't surprised when Thursday's parks vote sailed through. Any property tax measure must be approved by voters.

"It does make things easier when you're able to just continue an existing bond as opposed to do(ing) something new," he said. "I think that's largely what it's about."

Fritz agreed that the parks bond is a far easier sell than the street fee.

But, she cautioned, it's not that easy.

"It's going to be a heavy lift, still," she said. "It's by no means a done deal. People are still very distrustful of government, very weary from the recession. So it's going to be a lot of hard work between now and November."

-- Brad Schmidt

**Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that a City Council street fee vote had been purposely scheduled after the Nov. 4 election, when voters will decide the parks bond. Rather, a related street fee charter amendment slated for the November election was scrapped in part because of the parks bond.**

## **Portland teams with Metro to update region's aerial map, image database as part of \$864,000 project**

*By Andrew Theen  
July 24, 2014*

Portland is partnering with more than two dozen other cities and public agencies to gather a uniform and up-to-date aerial map and image database for the metro region.

The data have wide implications for city planners and are used to help map landslide risk areas, track the amount of vacant land in the city, provide 3D modeling for buildings and identify earthquake faults. Portland hasn't performed an aerial survey since 2007.

The regional partners, led by Metro and Portland, are contracting with Oregon's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries to gather the aerial photos and data. DOGAMI uses Quantum Spatial, a geo-mapping company with a Portland office, to gather the data.

The company uses LiDAR, which stands for light detection and ranging, to collect precise aerial data points. LiDAR collects data by firing infrared laser light pulses in rapid succession from a low-flying airplane. The light bounces back to a sensor on the airplane, tracking the highest and lowest hit objects. The technology allows for extremely precise maps and data sets. LiDAR can penetrate through trees and vegetation to the ground.

Portland was one of the first cities in the nation to use LiDAR a decade ago. But according to city documents, Portland's current LiDAR data sets are from three non-overlapping flights spread across various years. The data are "of varying quality and therefore varying utility," city documents said.

"The updated data will both capture current development conditions, which have changed substantially since 2004, and provide much higher quality information," city planners wrote.

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council approved the city's \$280,000 share of the project, which costs \$864,000 overall. The group of public agencies pools its resources to pay for the data collection, and then each partner has access to the entire data set.

DOGAMI officials said the project is one of its largest and a top priority for the agency.

For the past 40 years, the city's transportation bureau tracked Portland's landslides, recording 1,300 since that time. On average, there are roughly 34 landslides per year. New landslide maps would help city bureaus plan new construction projects, coordinate responses to emergencies, issue permits on private development and mitigate natural hazards.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales earmarked money for the LiDAR project in his Innovation Fund Challenge, the \$1 million incentive pitched to city bureaus late last year to inspire creativity in government.

Hales awarded the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability \$90,000 for its share of the LiDAR project through the innovation challenge. The Water Bureau is chipping in \$105,000 and the Bureau of Environmental Services will contribute \$50,000 while the Bureau of Technology Services pays \$35,000. Water officials said the LiDAR map of the Bull Run Watershed helps the bureau map for landslide risks.

Aerial mapping and photo gathering is already underway. The data will become available to the public in roughly a year, according to Metro officials.

DOGAMI has an online map of older data that is available to the public.

Here's a map of where DOGAMI's contractor will perform its LiDAR surveying.

The Regional Photo Consortium includes Washington, Clackamas and Multnomah counties, TriMet, the Port of Portland, Hillsboro and other cities. Here's a full list:

Metro

City of Portland

City of Tigard

City of Hillsboro

Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue

City of Beaverton

City of Tualatin

City of Lake Oswego

Washington County

City of Forest Grove

City of Cornelius  
Clean Water Services  
Multnomah County  
Clackamas County  
TriMet  
Port of Portland  
City of Gresham  
City of Oregon City  
Tualatin Valley Water District  
City of West Linn  
City of Wilsonville  
City of Milwaukie  
City of Troutdale  
City of Sherwood  
Oak Lodge Sanitary District  
Oak Lodge Water District  
City of Damascus  
City of Fairview  
The U.S. Geological Survey  
The Oregon Department of Administrative Services  
The Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Council sends parks bond to November ballot**

*By KOIN 6 News  
July 24, 2014*

The Portland City Council voted unanimously on Thursday to put a bond to renovate Portland parks on the November ballot.

The \$68 million bond would replace one set to expire next June and would be used to make improvements to parks around the city.

Some of the projects would include the reopening of play areas, repairing trails and bridges in Forest Park and upgrading several community pools. A partial list of the kinds of projects to be funded is posted at [www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/65128](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/65128).

If approved by voters, Portlanders will continue to pay nearly nine cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, which is about \$17.50 for a home assessed at \$200,000.

During a recent Town Hall meeting on the measure, many said they favored it. Some had questions about specific projects, however, including the replacement of the failing water-proof membrane under the bricks in Pioneer Courthouse Square, saying the square's board of directors should raise the money for it.

## **Willamette Week**

### **Commissioner Steve Novick Says Uber is "a Tricky Issue" for Portland**

*By Aaron Mesh  
July 25, 2014*

Uber has Portland surrounded.

The San Francisco-based ride-sharing startup is now operating in Vancouver, Wash., Eugene and Salem, even as it lobbies to break into the Portland cab market.

Uber enlists drivers to use their own cars as de facto taxis, with customers summoning rides with the tap of a phone app. As WW reported last week, Portland remains the largest city on the West Coast where Uber isn't operating. Both Uber and its biggest competitor, Lyft, are lobbying City Council for a rule change.

They'll have to convince Commissioner Steve Novick, who this month began overseeing the city's Private For-Hire Transportation Board of Review.

Novick talked to WW in June about how he'd handle Uber and Lyft's demands to enter the city.

"Uber is a tricky issue," Novick said. "I think it's worth having a broader conversation about how we actually regulate the taxi cab business overall—and maybe come up with a whole new structure in which, if they're willing, Uber can operate."

But he isn't making Uber any promises. "We impose regulations on a taxi business," Novick said. "Uber says, 'We want to act like one but we don't want to be subject to any of those regulations.'"

## **The Mercury**

### **One More Email in City Hall's Dispute Over Old Town Redevelopment**

*By Denis C. Theriault  
July 24, 2014*

Yesterday's post revealing some of city hall's internal deliberations over Mayor Charlie Hales' push to revivify Old Town and Chinatown—by investing urban renewal money, but also by waiving development fees on new market-rate housing—was full of unusually frank and wonkish discussions among city commissioners and their staffs.

Let's recap briefly!

Parks Director Mike Abbaté, in an email to the entire city council, pretty brazenly told the elected officials who run the city that taking even potential future revenue from the parks bureau at the same time as they gear up for a serious parks bond renewal campaign this fall amounted to terrible optics. (The O's editorial board printed an excerpt from that email just this afternoon. It's not mentioned where they got it from—though I do know that their city hall reporters had also been asking for emails.)

Abbaté's message had been preceded by a spirited back-and-forth among Abbaté, his boss, Commissioner Amanda Fritz, and waiver supporter Commissioner Steve Novick. And it was followed by a dagger of an email from Hales himself, who set about trying to poke some holes in Abbaté's rhetoric with pointed questions—but only after he started the thing with an extremely curt, "Really."

From there, the fallout included a tentative offer from Hales' office to Fritz's office, to buy her support or just mollify her ire, of future urban renewal money to help fund a park, some day. And we learned that parks has committed more money to projects over the next few years than it actually has on hand.

But one requested email didn't show up until this afternoon. Fritz, writing after the mayor's email to Abbaté, chimed in from her overseas vacation to complain about how the whole debate was going to go public while she was away. Which it did, last week—although a vote won't come, after some tweaks, until August 6.

That was just one of many fine points.

She started to sound the alarm that all the hubbub between her office, Hales' office, and Novick's office came close to a violation of the city's open meeting rules. Three commissioners, after all, is a quorum. And she offered some details about parks bureau negotiations over fees and facilities tied to pair of sweet development opportunities outside Old Town, the Zidell land on the Willamette that Nike had eyeballed, and the major Slabtown project on the Conway land in Northwest. And she worried, like Abbaté of the politics of offering potential parks money at a time when she'll be asking voters for more. (An effort, she writes, that Hales told her to lead.)