

The Oregonian

How Portland's neighborhood associations can mirror, reinforce power of city's geographic center on City Council

*By Brad Schmidt
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In a city that lacks geographic districts for City Council members, Portland's 95 neighborhood associations can play an outsize role as chief cheerleaders for issues closest to their respective homes.

Their influence often is proportionate to their financial resources.

For example, the Arlington Heights neighborhood association, now led by a U.S. patent agent, lobbied the City Council to prohibit all high-speed, downhill skateboarding in 2012. The City Council agreed to ban skateboards on certain streets of the West Hills neighborhood from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The Eastmoreland neighborhood, one of the city's most exclusive, appealed a developer's plan to tear down a ranch home and replace it with two new units. The developer agreed to sell the property to neighbors before the City Council could hear the appeal. But city officials are now proposing a plan that would decrease allowable density in the neighborhood.

Eastmoreland's neighborhood association also hires a summer intern, whose job this year was going to be flying a \$1,500 drone to monitor a nearby rail yard until aviation regulators pushed back. The neighborhood association president, who owns an energy consulting business, paid for the drone out of his own pocket.

Then there's Powellhurst-Gilbert, in east Portland. Compared to Arlington Heights with 700 residents and Eastmoreland with 5,000, Powellhurst-Gilbert is home to about 30,000 people.

Yet the neighborhood association has found no one to step in since its longtime president stepped down in November.

Among the people sharing the duties of president since then is Silas Covert-Keefe, a 22-year-old Portland State University graduate who until recently lived with his parents.

The neighborhood association recently opposed a plan to build another fast food restaurant in the area. Efforts seeking help from City Hall went nowhere.

"It is really difficult to get people to come," Covert-Keefe, the association vice president since 2012, said of neighborhood association meetings.

"In our area specifically, it's really diverse, and it's really low income. Some people just don't have time, straight up, because they have to work or they have other things. Sometimes it's a language barrier."

Covert-Keefe told board members in May that he had moved out of the neighborhood, renting his own place west of 82nd Avenue in the up-and-coming Montavilla neighborhood. He agreed to keep serving on the board nonetheless.

Only about a dozen people were present at the meeting to hear his news.

The Loo finds a new keeper, a good thing for Portland ratepayers: Editorial Agenda 2014

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
July 31, 2014*

The hullabaloo over the Loo is over: at last. Portland has spun off the marketing of the \$90,000 public potty to the private sector, and that's precisely where it belongs. Meanwhile, Portland can sit back and hope that cities nationwide purchase the potty through an independent vendor and collect royalties on

each sale. With luck, the estimated \$7,200 payment per Loo to Portland could make a dent, if not cover all, of the city's annual \$119,000 cost of maintaining the seven Loos now in place.

But the Loo had a rocky start. The brainchild of former city Commissioner Randy Leonard, the Loo became a sleek stainless steel monument to the city's runaway ambition at being a pioneer while subsidizing the dream with money from water and sewer ratepayers. In fairness, the Loo was and remains a great idea: Cheaper and more secure than an old-fashioned rest room building and cleaner than temporary, unsightly structures, the Loo continues to bring a civilized, easy-to-clean amenity to public spaces. In reality, it should never have been a part of city government. A Multnomah County judge this spring found that Portland had misspent \$618,000 from Water Bureau funds in developing the Loo. Like the Water House, the loo was among the so-called pet projects of Leonard that had little to do with core missions of the bureaus he oversaw.

City Commissioner Nick Fish last year assumed oversight of the Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services. On Thursday, in an interview with The Oregonian's editorial board, he was quick separate his efforts to offload the Loo, in which his staff initiated negotiations with Madden Fabrication last November, and the ratepayers lawsuit. Indeed, Fish earlier this year was in a hurry to sell the Water House, Leonard's demonstration project in water and waste efficiency, and did – for or less money than it took to build it. But no matter: These off-mission projects are finally moving away from the bureaus that spawned them. And that leaves Portland ratepayers with bureaus whose core services – furnishing clean water and delivering wastewater to a treatment plant – are plainly aligned with quarterly and monthly billing.

The city's profit per Loo will go down sharply in this new arrangement. The Oregonian's Brad Schmidt reported that Portland managed to sell Loos to four cities in Alaska and Canada, pocketing about \$23,000 per unit in three of those sales. But to do so, Portland had the responsibility of paying staff to manage its own creation: in marketing and deploying the manufacture, scaled to cost about \$60,000 per unit. The practical reality is that Portland responded to queries more than it created them.

City Hall simply does not have the DNA to cultivate a market and create desire for a nifty new product, and neither should it. Madden will likely have more success in actively finding clients for the Loo and told Schmidt it already had potential customers lined up in Texas with the hopes of hitting or exceeding \$2 million in Loo sales next year. If Madden succeeds, Portland's cut, at a negotiated 8 percent, would be \$160,000.

That's not chump change. In time, it might even accumulate to offset the city's original Loo investment. But there are a lot of ifs at the moment, and runaway commercial success, if it happens, should inspire no one to decide the city shows sufficient entrepreneurial chops to stray again from its core missions. Private vendors are always there for the asking, just as Madden is this time, and no new great idea need ever be ignored.

The Skanner

Portland, Oregon, flushes outdoor toilet business

*By The Associated Press
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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The city of Portland will quit marketing the solar-powered outdoor potties its workers developed and will settle instead for a cut of the business.

Six years ago, the city installed the first of the stainless steel public toilets dubbed the Portland Loo. It now has seven and hopes to install six more in parks.

The city also thought to make a business of marketing the toilets, at \$90,000 each. It has sold four, with five more orders in the works.

The toilets were initially placed in areas where homeless people congregate. They were open 24/7, and they featured slats that allowed police to detect illegal activity — such as more than one pair of feet at a time — but protect privacy.

Critics, though, said the Loo and other projects were outside the core mission of the city utilities and contributed to rising rates. A judge found the city misspent \$618,000 of Water Bureau funds on Loo efforts.

A ballot measure intended to wrest control of the utilities from the Council and give it to an independently elected board failed. But sentiment was widespread that the spending ought to be reined in.

The city has now agreed to allow the toilet's manufacturer to set the price and market the toilets, giving the city a royalty, The Oregonian (<http://bit.ly/UNZYfE>) reported.

The deal relieves the city of the expense of the business. It has spent at least \$60,000 a year on workers in the Loo effort.

It also caps the city's revenue prospects should sales take off.

For example, the city made about \$23,000 per unit on three of its sales. By contrast, the 8 percent royalty would fetch the city \$7,200 per Loo, assuming manufacturer Madden Fabrication gets \$90,000 per unit.

The Loo was the brainchild of Randy Leonard, a former City Council member who ran the Water Bureau under Portland's system of divvying municipal administrative duties among the five Council members.

The current head of the Water and Sewer bureaus, Councilmember Nick Fish, is intent on focusing their efforts on core responsibilities, a spokesman said.

"The commissioner felt that it was important that this business move over to the private sector in a deal which provides a royalty to the city," said Fish's policy director, Jim Blackwood.