

The Oregonian

Why is Portland Commissioner Steve Novick leaving town as debate on his street funding ideas continues?

*By Andrew Theen
September 05, 2014*

Steve Novick acknowledges a controversial proposal to ask Portlanders to pay more money for road maintenance and safety projects is the key moment of his political career so far.

So why did the first-term commissioner leave town Thursday for a three-week vacation, just as citizen working groups his transportation bureau created and called on for advice are continuing to chip away at his plan?

The quick answer is that Novick, 51, was married this summer, and he and his now-wife scheduled their honeymoon in Italy and Washington, D.C., back in February. Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales had hoped their monthly street fee proposal would be a done deal by now, but they tabled the plan on the eve of a scheduled vote in June.

Novick says it's not essential for him to be in town right now. He's been hands off, he said, taking a step back to let the work groups do their thing. But at the end of the day, Novick said, the work groups he and Hales created exist simply to present advice to City Council.

"We have to ultimately make our own decisions," Novick said.

Hales spokesman Dana Haynes echoed that sentiment. The mayor believes the city must either approve the street fee, or come up with something else. If the committees recommended doing nothing new to raise money for roads, he said, Hales and Novick would likely respond, "Thank you for your service, we appreciate it, but you're wrong."

The three volunteer committees have labored away on various incarnations of a street fee or other funding source all summer long, but there's still no concrete plan in place. Many business leaders involved in the process remain skeptical of any of the alternatives presented so far.

The City Council is expected to vote on a new plan in November.

Since postponing the council vote, Novick said, he intentionally stepped back from the discussion to let the committees work. He said he's chimed in occasionally or helped provide additional information when requested, but hasn't had much influence over the committees.

Novick returns from his honeymoon on Sept. 25, and he said he expects October to be a fairly exciting month as the final plans comes together.

Haynes said the mayor and Novick have been "quite involved" in the committee work so far. Key staffers, Haynes said, have sat in on all the meetings. "Josh reports back to the mayor constantly," Haynes said of Josh Alpert, director of strategic projects.

The targeted annual revenue expected from residents and business owners continues to fluctuate, as does the current funding flavor of the day.

A business work group is working through a proposal that would collect \$20 million per year from a flat fee on businesses.

A committee focused on low-income residents and nonprofits continues to work through a proposed income-tax proposal that could bring in \$20 million as well.

Novick said he's staked out his position clearly. "I've made no secret of the fact that I prefer something that is income-based."

Novick said the most important goal he helped the transportation bureau accomplish this summer was putting some "meat on the bones" and showing Portlanders what the city could reasonably expect to accomplish during a three or six year period.

"People want to see what we're going to do," he said.

He's also pleased PBOT assembled a "needs guide," which Novick helped promote during a tour of handpicked potential maintenance and safety projects in August.

Haynes said despite Novick's absence, the funding conversation remains a collaborative one. The mayor's spokesman said wouldn't be surprised if the transportation commissioner remained active despite being in Europe.

"If you know Steve Novick," Haynes said, "you can bet he'll be involved."

Portland has 'serious concerns' about over-budget, late paperless permitting system

*By Brad Schmidt
September 04, 2014*

Projected costs for Portland's paperless building permit system have increased by more than 40 percent while the timeline for the long-awaited technology project has slipped by about a year.

City officials now expect the Bureau of Development Services' new software system will cost \$11.8 million and won't be up and running until December 2015.

Under original assumptions from two years ago, officials projected costs at \$8.2 million and estimated that work would be complete by the end of 2014.

The paperless system, pitched under former Commissioner Randy Leonard and later Commissioner Dan Saltzman, is supposed to improve access by digitizing record keeping within the city's permitting bureau.

When complete, developers will be able to submit applications electronically instead of visiting the city's office; employees will be able to access documents from the field; and historical permits will be available at the click of a button.

"I'm confident the new system will provide efficiency and the changes necessary to assist the development community and customers and our employees to be more efficient and also result in a more cost-effective system," Paul Scarlett, the Bureau of Development Services director, told the City Council in 2012.

But like so many technology projects – from Portland's budget-busting finance and payroll software system to the state's failed health care exchange – things haven't worked out as planned.

According to a new report from the city's Technology Oversight Committee, formed in response to the city's payroll debacle, the permitting project is not only lagging behind schedule but committee members also have concerns about the accuracy of the current timeline.

The report, presented to the City Council on Wednesday, accused contractor Sierra Systems Inc. of applying "faulty assumptions" to the original formal project plan and schedule. The committee called that a "significant oversight" by the company.

As it stands, the project still lacks a revised project schedule for second and third phases, which represent the bulk of work. Within the project's overall costs, Portland's contract with Sierra Systems stands at not-to-exceed \$6.8 million.

Using a color-coded stoplight-based scoring system, the Technology Oversight Committee and an outside quality assurance company have flagged the timeline as red. The committee also labeled the overall cost and project scope yellow.

More delays appear inevitable.

"There is discussion about breaking some of the scope into different phases," the report reads. "The bureau is requiring the full original scope be implemented, but the timing could change."

The report also notes that on top of the \$11.8 million price tag, the city will be responsible for paying \$1 million for five years' of maintenance fees and \$800,000 for technology support once the system is finally up and running.

Ben Berry, Portland's chief technology officer, said Wednesday that 14 of 15 Sierra employees working on the project have been "turned over." He called that revolving-door employment an "ah ha!" moment for the oversight committee.

"This is obviously a big project. You've raised some serious concerns," Mayor Charlie Hales said in response. "There's a lot of potential financial risk here. I appreciate the oversight. That's why we do this – so that the Council has a chance to delve into it and get some questions answered."

Scarlett, the director of the Bureau of Development Services, said Wednesday that the project remains a priority, with Portlanders often lining up 150 deep to file papers each day in the permit center.

"The schedule and timeline is of concern," said Scarlett, who remained optimistic about the project.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who has overseen the Bureau of Development Services since June 2013, promised results.

"It will be on time, on budget, and it will work," she said. "I'm very confident of that."

The permitting effort – called the Information Technology Advancement Project, or ITAP – isn't Portland's only dealings with Sierra Systems.

Last year, Portland hired Sierra under a \$215,000 contract to assess the city's overall use of technology.

Mayor Charlie Hales pushing for body cameras on uniformed Portland police officers within a year

*By Maxine Bernstein
September 04, 2014*

Days after a federal judge reiterated his wish for Portland police to wear body cameras, the mayor wants the bureau to buy the new equipment and have most uniformed officers wearing the small cameras in less than a year.

"We're on his side on this one," said Dana Haynes, spokesman for Portland Mayor Charlie Hales, referring to U.S. District Court Judge Michael Simon.

Portland would join a growing number of police agencies across the nation that have decided to outfit officers with the cameras in an effort to promote greater accountability and transparency. The devices attach to an officer's uniform and record audio and video.

On Thursday, New York City's police commissioner, William Bratton, announced that the NYPD – the country's largest police force – will begin a pilot program to have 60 officers in high-crime precincts wear the cameras, calling it "the next wave."

Portland police recently concluded a "successful first piloting" of the cameras given mostly to traffic officers, Haynes said, and are continuing to examine the camera technology and associated costs.

But the mayor, who serves as police commissioner, is pushing to expand the program, Haynes said.

Hales was out of town on a business trip to Japan, but released this statement by e-mail: "We've long been proponents of body cameras but the technology wasn't good enough and they were expensive. The Bureau piloted a variation of clip-on cameras for the Traffic Division this summer to see if they live up to expectations. We have heard that the officers who used them like them."

The City Council had approved about \$800,000 for additional in-car video cameras, but police are considering using the money instead to supply body cameras to about 600 uniformed officers -- including patrol, school police, gang enforcement and traffic officers, said Sgt. Pete Simpson, bureau spokesman.

"That money is there, and that's one of the options we're looking at right now," Simpson said.

Judge Simon restated his support for the cameras, but stopped short of ordering them in his five-page ruling last Friday approving the city's settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice that calls for reforms to Portland police policies, training and oversight. The agreement follows federal findings that police here had a pattern of using excessive force against people with mental illnesses.

"The Court notes that as the technology in this area continues to improve and become more dependable and affordable, more city police departments in the United States are choosing to employ this technology in ways that protect both law enforcement officers and the public they serve," Simon wrote.

Simon earlier this year asked the parties in the case whether requiring the body cameras "would promote the objectives" of the agreement, and if so, why they weren't included.

Justice Department officials and federal prosecutors responded that even though the agreement didn't address the cameras, it wouldn't prohibit Portland police from using them.

"It is our understanding that the City is willing to engage in use of body cameras to the extent that the technology is dependable and that its use is affordable," the prosecutors wrote. "If the City utilizes body cameras, the City must carefully govern their use to protect the rights of subjects and bystanders, e.g. providing Miranda warnings when appropriate and respecting reasonable expectations of privacy."

Earlier this year, the federal Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center issued a report on the wearable cameras that found they help resolve citizen complaints against police more quickly and can be useful in police training, but that more research is needed to determine whether their presence alone results in improved encounters between police and civilians.

The report urged agencies to proceed cautiously and stressed the importance of training and policies governing their use, such as when to record and when not to, whether to announce that the encounter is being recorded, when supervisors can review video and video storage and management.

Portland police began testing the body cameras more than a year ago. Traffic officers and Central Precinct bike officers have used several different ones made by WatchGuard Video, Viewu and most recently, Taser.

"Early reviews from officers is that they like them," Simpson said.

Officers have found that agitated people approached by police wearing the cameras tend to calm down when they learn they're being recorded, Simpson said.

"The reviews have been pretty positive and encouraging," Simpson said. The bureau is still in the fact-finding stage, he said.

Dave Fidanque, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon, said the ACLU has had a change of heart in recent years and now lends it support to the cameras as long as there are strict guidelines about their use and video and audio retention. The policies must protect people's privacy rights, particularly when police are in a home and on private property, he said.

"From the public's point of view, it will provide a record that is going to be better than just an eyewitness account of the officer versus the person who was stopped," he said. "We think it'll be good for everyone concerned."

If police in Oregon start widely adopting the technology, the state's eavesdropping law should change, he said. The law requires anyone recording a conversation to inform all parties that the conversation is being recorded. An amendment was approved, providing exceptions for police dash cameras as long as an officer notifies people that they're being recorded. A similar amendment would be needed, he said, to allow audio recording by body cameras.

Portland to Hoyt Street Properties: Sell us your land for affordable housing

*By Brad Schmidt
September 04, 2014*

The Portland Housing Bureau flexed its contractual muscle this week by formally notifying one of the city's most prominent development companies that it will fight for more affordable housing in the Pearl District.

Under a 17-year-old deal between the city and Hoyt Street Properties, Portland could buy land from the company if Hoyt Street failed to ensure that 35 percent of new units built on its 34 acres were affordable to families or individuals of modest means.

Hoyt Street missed its target and, now, the city in a letter dated Wednesday officially said it wants to buy land to build more affordable units.

To date, only about 600 of the 2,000 units meet affordability standards, and the percentage is expected to dip to 28 percent when new projects are completed in coming years.

Traci Manning, the director for the Housing Bureau, recommended moving forward on the land purchase last week, a spokesman for the agency said Thursday. Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the bureau, gave Manning the go-ahead on Tuesday, the spokesman said.

The city had until Sept. 8 to formally notify Hoyt Street.

The company -- which includes prominent real estate figures Tiffany Sweitzer and Joe Weston -- has about six acres of vacant, available land remaining. Hoyt Street will select which piece of land, up to half a city block, it will sell to Portland at a discount.

Sweitzer, Hoyt Street's president, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Don't worry Hayden Island neighborhood, this is only a test: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Andrew Theen
September 04, 2014*

At 2 p.m. Thursday, Portland's emergency management bureau will send out a phone call and email blast to nearly 700 Hayden Island neighborhood residents and businesses.

It's just a drill, part of the city's annual test of a targeted emergency alert system that's been marred by problems in the past.

The system targets landline phone lines, plus any cell phone or emails that are submitted to the free Public Alerts notification system.

"This is an opportunity to raise awareness," said Dan Douthit, public information officer for the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management. The city is always looking to promote the public alerts system, because you have to actively sign up to receive notifications if you don't have a landline telephone.

The system currently has 21,000 cell phones and other devices (additional landlines, phones or emails) signed up. There are 364,000 landlines in the database, Douthit said.

If it seems like you've heard a lot about the public alerts system this year, you have.

Portland relied on the clunky system in two high-profile events to varying degrees of success.

In April, officials activated the system to notify residents of an armed and dangerous man on the loose in Southwest Portland. But many neighbors complained that they either received no notice of the deadly shooting during the early morning hours or received a phone call only after the man was arrested.

City officials called it a "failure" and quickly blamed the emergency notification contractor, FirstCall. The contractor fired back, saying the issues were strictly user error. But PBEM director Carmen Merlo said she had a "growing lack of confidence" in the contractor.

During the budget process in June, the City Council approved a \$100,000 request to help find a new company.

In May, the city issued a citywide boil water notice in the E. coli scare that drew national attention. When notifying the entire city, the system takes upwards of five hours to cycle through all the phone calls, long after the city issued a press release.

Douthit said PBEM conducts weekly tests of the alerts system in-house, and elects to send out public tests just once a year. "We want to avoid public fatigue of being over-messaged," he said.

PBEM is in the process of extending its contract with FirstCall, the contractor providing services to Multnomah County and city since 2010, until late 2015 to make sure there's no gap in service as the agency searches for a new company.

Emergency officials are still battling public confusion about how the system works and when it's deployed. Again, you have to actively sign up.

But PBEM does have the capability of sending out an alert that reaches all cell phone towers and nearby users in Multnomah County.

During February's icy storm that temporarily crippled the metro area, PBEM issued that countywide notice.

That event led to an increase in the number of signups to PublicAlerts.org.

The boil water alert in May led to 3,000 additional devices registering with the free system, Douthit said.

September is National Preparedness month, Douthit said. The bureau has free public classes about earthquake preparedness on Sept. 17 and 18 at the Oregon Convention Center. Here's a link to the registration page.

The Portland Business Journal

Hales taps broker for Portland's planning commission

*By Alli Pyrah
September 4, 2014*

A Windermere Stellar real estate pro is set to become the only broker on Portland's planning and sustainability commission.

Teresa St. Martin was appointed to the group by Mayor Charlie Hales. As such, she'll work with 10 other volunteer members on goals such as the stewardship, development and maintenance of the city's comprehensive plan, climate action plan and zoning code.

The planning and sustainability commission holds public hearings and develops recommendations for Portland's City Council.

"Teresa will provide the commission with a unique perspective into how the pulse of the local real estate market can affect Portland's sustainability efforts," said planning and sustainability commission chair Andre Baugh in a release. "Her dedication to sustainability shines through in her professional work and we are excited to bring that on board."

St. Martin is based out of Windermere Stellar's Northeast Portland office and has been a broker with the company for more than 14 years. She has become a leading sustainability advocate within the industry as a certified EcoBroker, an Earth Advantage broker, a LEED Green General associate.

She's also the first broker in Oregon to earn the GREEN designation from the National Association of Realtors, according to the city. St. Martin was the chief creative officer and founder of EasyVision prior to joining Windermere Stellar.

Hales has recently made several private-sector appointments or nominations to public-sector development boards. Earlier this year, he nominated Tom Kelly, the president of Portland building company Neil Kelly, and developer Mark Edlen of Gerdling Edlen to the five-person board of the Portland Development Commission.