

The Oregonian

Developer Mark Edlen lauded by Portland City Council, appointed to urban renewal board

*By Andrew Theen
October 01, 2014*

Portland developer Mark Edlen is officially the newest addition to the urban renewal board, after the City Council voted Wednesday to confirm his appointment.

Mayor Charlie Hales' decision to appoint Edlen was first reported by The Oregonian in August.

City Commissioners and Hales heaped praise on Edlen, CEO of development giant Gerding Edlen, for his development achievements throughout decades of work in Portland.

His appointment places one of the most prominent names in Portland at an important position on the Portland Development Commission's board. His Portland projects — from the Brewery Blocks, to Wieden + Kennedy's Pearl District headquarters to the PDC-backed hub for wind company Vestas — are scattered throughout the central city and beyond.

"The number of projects that they've been involved in is just amazing when you look at it," said Hales.

Edlen said he thinks the city needs to think more creatively and "be brave" in pursuing projects big and small.

He is no stranger to working with the PDC. Jordan Schnitzer, a fellow developer and president of Harsch Investments, called Edlen by far the most active local developer in pursuing projects with the PDC during the past 15 years.

Just last month, he bought a \$2.6 million property in Old Town Chinatown from PDC. A Gerding/Edlen affiliate owes more than \$8 million in loans to the PDC from the Vestas redevelopment project.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman praised Edlen for his contributions to "our city's greatness." Commissioner Nick Fish said his appointment is going to be a sacrifice, because Edlen may have to say no to development work with the city out of a conflict of interest. Fish said that Edlen will be "under a different kind of microscope."

"We're asking a lot of you," he added.

Hales said it's important to have someone with Edlen's particularly sophisticated level of understanding of how deals come to fruition on PDC's board. "His ability to do projects here will be somewhat limited," Hales said, "due to his participation on the board." He said Edlen has already expanded his development portfolio to other cities as well.

Edlen said he was "very flattered and honored" by the appointment and excited to get started. When asked by Commissioner Steve Novick what he viewed as the appropriate role of PDC, Edlen said "place-making and jobs."

Novick asked Edlen what he viewed as the biggest opportunity facing Portland, and he cited the U.S. Post Office building in Northwest Portland. "I think it's got huge opportunity for the city in terms of creating jobs in a true mixed-use environment."

Novick also asked what Edlen thinks should be done with the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, but Edlen declined to answer that question. Hales chimed in, "I'll answer: something."

Commissioner Amanda Fritz attended the entire morning session Wednesday but stepped out for the Edlen discussion and vote.

Prior to his vote, Hales read a lengthy series of buzzwords from Gerding Edlen's company literature titled "Principles of Place."

"Build community, create inviting spaces, minimize carbon footprint and energy dependence connect people and buildings to nature, encourage transportation alternatives, craft the first 30 feet, inspire communities with art, make 20 minute living real, integrate schools and neighborhoods, preserve symbols that matter."

"If we can plagiarize that and call it the Portland Development Commission mission statement," Hales said, "I think we'd be in good shape, because I think those principles are shared values."

The PDC Board meets next week, but Edlen isn't expected to appear until an Oct. 29 meeting.

The Portland Tribune

City angles for parking's 'sweet spot'

*By Steve Law
October 7, 2014*

When developer Aaron Jones started building the 74-unit Division Street Lofts on Southeast Division Street and 48th Avenue months ago, it was yet another multi-family project on Division with no attached tenant parking.

Jones figured he was doing the right thing; he wanted to keep rents below \$1,100 to \$1,200, and couldn't do that if he had to include tenant parking.

But many residents and merchants are angry about the spate of apartments built without parking 10 to 15 blocks to the west, making it harder for residents and customers to park. And some neighbors complained to Jones that he would cause the same problem up the street, in what he calls "Upper Division."

So when Jones acquired a transmission shop a block away, he decided to stripe 28 parking spaces inside the building and offer them to his new tenants. Nearly a month ago, he sent them notices they could land one of the indoor spots for \$85 a month. But he was surprised by the response. Only one tenant was interested.

Other tenants told him there was ample free parking still in Upper Division, so why should they pay him to park?

"The reality is we can't force people to pay for it," Jones says.

His experience, and the dilemma he faces for his next project on Division, offer a valuable case study on how the city's new parking requirements for apartments are working — or not working.

In response to a backlash from residents on Division and other main streets where Portland has been allowing apartments without any tenant parking, the City Council stepped in last year and ordered a temporary fix. In a compromise that City Commissioner Nick Fish says he helped craft, proposed multifamily projects with more than 30 units on streets served by transit must have at least one parking space for each three to five units.

That's still below the old requirement of one parking space per unit, but it helped ease criticism from neighbors who complain they have to walk far to their homes carrying grocery bags, among other inconveniences, which they blame on new renters in their neighborhoods who own cars but have no dedicated parking stalls.

After the City Council ordered a stopgap change in its parking policies, Jones managed to acquire property near Division Street Lofts, which includes the transmission business and the popular Taqueria Los Gorditos food stand on Division and 50th.

So now Jones is looking at building another 100 to 110 more units, but this time he says he must include 35 to 40 parking stalls.

"There doesn't seem to be any demand for those," Jones says.

He recognizes the situation may be different in five years, as Upper Division continues to redevelop. By then, he figures, there may be more demand for the paid parking.

But Jones' conclusion is a sobering one for city officials and planners wrestling with parking requirements. You can't solve it with zoning regulations, he says.

Ben Schonberger, an affordable housing advocate for the Portland nonprofit Housing Land Advocates, says the lesson of Jones' experience is to let the market determine parking needs, not government rules.

"Right now, the market price (in Upper Division) is zero, or close to zero," Schonberger figures. Requiring parking adds to the price of rental housing, he says, so he likes the city policy that still requires no parking for projects with less than 30 units. He'd just as soon let developers, and the market, make such calls on all apartments.

Fish says when he put forth the compromise policy last year requiring some parking at larger apartment projects, the City Council heard from some neighbors that they didn't go far enough, and from developers that said they went too far. "We concluded that we had hit the 'sweet spot,' at least for now," Fish says.

The new city policy was designed as an interim rule, he stresses, until city planners can thoroughly evaluate parking mandates as they redo the city's comprehensive land use plan. That process has begun, and is slated to wind up next year.

The quandary faced by Jones at his new project is "precisely the debate we want to have when we're doing the comp plan," Fish says.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

City preparing to decommission Mount Tabor Park reservoirs

*By Inka Bajandas
October 6, 2014*

Portland Water Bureau officials, in an effort to comply with federal regulations, are moving ahead with a project to disconnect the three open reservoirs at Mount Tabor Park by the end of next year.

Late last month, the bureau submitted a land use review application for the project to the Bureau of Development Services. The process will include reviews of historic resources and environmental impacts as well as a public comment period and hearing.

Construction at the Southeast Portland park, scheduled to start in early 2015, will separate the reservoirs from the city's water system. This includes building a new pipeline that will circumvent the reservoirs to deliver drinking water for distribution to homes. Three non-historic vaults will be removed and replaced with new underground vaults elsewhere.

The next step will be to figure out what to do with the decommissioned reservoirs, which will be taken over by Portland Parks & Recreation, Water Bureau spokeswoman Jaymee Cuti said. City Commissioner Amanda Fritz is leading an effort to gather ideas from the public on the next use for the historic drinking water reservoirs. Some initial suggestions from the public include converting them into a park water feature, a pool or a skate park, Cuti said.