

The Oregonian

Portland wins presidential award for climate change work

*By Kelly House
December 03, 2014*

Portland, a city known for its environmentalist mindset, has won a presidential award for its efforts to combat climate change.

As one of 16 Climate Action Champions announced Wednesday, Portland's city government gets White House recognition for its work, as well as a prize.

The federal government will appoint a coordinator to Portland to help city officials work with federal agencies and private partners to raise money and awareness.

In addition, Portland's local leaders will get access to data on the area's climate outlook, Federal Emergency Management Agency training to help them plan for extreme weather events and other dangers, renewable energy experts to help them expand solar energy and other resources.

Mayor Charlie Hales said city officials are "honored" to win recognition for its efforts, adding "it just means the pressure is on to work harder, and to think smarter, to demand more of ourselves."

Portland's Climate Action Plan, which commits the city to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent from 1990 levels by 2050, impressed the federal Department of Energy officials who picked award winners from a pool of 60 applicants this fall.

John Podesta, counselor to President Barack Obama, spoke to reporters about the awards via conference call Wednesday. Podesta said the 16 winners have "been on the front lines" of addressing climate change.

"We think that kind of leadership deserves to be recognized," Podesta said.

The White House prize is Portland's second major award this year for its work to lessen the city's negative impact on the environment. In September, Portland was one of 10 cities worldwide to win a City Climate Leadership Award from the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group.

Hales noted that while the city, county and Metro share the credit for promoting alternative forms of transportation and creating "livable" communities, work is still needed to make those options accessible to lower-income residents.

"The things we love about Portland, we want all Portlanders to share," Hales said. "Today, they don't."

Susan Anderson, director of Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said since Portland first launched its climate plan, the city's emissions have declined by 11 percent compared to 1990 levels. Per-capita, the reduction is closer to 30 percent.

"It doesn't happen with one action," Anderson said. "It's a thousand different actions every day," from businesses converting to clean power, to residents upgrading their home's insulation system, to workers choosing to commute by bicycle or bus.

Other winners include Seattle, San Francisco, Salt Lake City and Minneapolis, as well as several other local governments and two Native American tribes.

"They're taking actions to fight climate change and to prepare their communities for the impacts we can't avoid," Podesta said.

The announcement of the local awards comes just one month after Obama's announcement that, along with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he would set targets to reduce carbon emissions. Obama's plan calls for reducing nationwide carbon emissions by up to 28 percent below 2005 levels within the next decade.

"Development really takes place not at the national level, but at the local level," Podesta said. "So getting cities organized, coordinated, and metropolitan areas coordinated to carry out these activities is a very important part of our strategy."

In or out? Mayor Charlie Hales says Portland must decide Joint Terrorism Task Force involvement

*By Brad Schmidt
December 02, 2014*

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said Tuesday that it's time -- again -- for the City Council to consider ending police involvement with the FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Force.

The city's on-again, off-again relationship with the task force has sparked public debate and concern from local politicians for more than a decade.

But Hales said the City Council's most recent 2011 decision authorizing "as-needed" involvement, coupled with vague annual reports from the police chief, is "pretty unsatisfactory."

"We're sort of half in," Hales said. "We get a report that no one's satisfied with. And no one's happy."

Federal law enforcement officials on Tuesday said Portland withdrawing officers wouldn't make a significant difference. Federal officials would still work with Portland cops if a threat emerges.

"They're not all the way in now," said Gregory T. Bretzing, the special agent in charge of Oregon's FBI office. "At the end of the day, it's not going to change what we do."

The City Council will consider the idea Dec. 18. Although the agenda is titled "Withdrawal from JTTF Involvement," Hales said he has yet to make up his mind.

"I'm still open," Hales said. "I think this is one where I'm going to keep my own counsel for a little while."

If he does decide he wants to end the partnership, though, Hales, a longtime skeptic of the setup, may have the political support to do it. Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Steve Novick have questioned involvement and criticized the skimpy annual reports.

In our out?

The Joint Terrorism Task Force investigates domestic and international terrorism threats such as bombings. The Washington County Sheriff's Office, Oregon State Police and the Port of Portland have assigned full-time officers, while eight cities, including Portland, work with the task force part time.

While involvement in most cities has generally been considered a ho-hum affair, Portland's participation has ignited concerns about the potential for civil liberties violations.

Portland police first joined the task force in 1997. The City Council, under then-Mayor Vera Katz, affirmed the relationship in 2000. The following year, just after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, then-Commissioner Hales cast the only "no" vote against involvement.

"I'm concerned the Joint Terrorism Task Force is one more case of specialized assignments dealing with the threat of the month, rather than dealing with the consistent issue of community policing," Hales said at the time.

In 2005, after Tom Potter was elected mayor, the City Council voted 4-1 to withdraw from the task force. Potter, a former police chief, wanted security clearance to monitor the task force and shared community concerns about the potential for civil liberties violations. Commissioner Dan Saltzman voted against withdrawal.

Portland stayed at arm's-length until 2010, when 19-year-old Mohamed Osman Mohamud was arrested -- and later convicted -- of trying to detonate a bomb in Pioneer Courthouse Square during the annual tree-lighting ceremony. The bomb was fake, part of a terrorism sting organized by the FBI.

In response to the bomb threat, Saltzman called for Portland police to rejoin the task force. In 2011, under then-Mayor Sam Adams and Dwight Holton, Oregon's U.S. Attorney at the time, the City Council voted to allow police involvement on an "as-needed basis."

Adams' ability to secure a unanimous vote from a divided City Council -- and gain support from the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon -- marked a major political victory. But the arrangement hasn't been as collaborative as some envisioned.

"The city is not in the JTTF, so there's really nothing to pull out of," Oregon U.S. Attorney Amanda Marshall said Tuesday.

No 'Secret' clearance

Portland's 2011 agreement hasn't provided the transparency some expected, either.

The City Council now receives annual updates from Police Chief Mike Reese. But after Hales and Novick took office in 2013, they and other officials have expressed growing concern about the level of detail provided – and the need for Portland to assign officers to the task force.

In his 2013 report, for instance, Reese said he "committed a very limited amount of Bureau resources to JTTF work, so disclosure of the number of cases or hours worked may compromise ongoing investigations and reveal the operational tempo of our work on terrorism."

Hales provided more details about Portland's involvement Tuesday.

If Portland were committed full time, he said, two officers out of a sworn force of 944 would be assigned. But under the current arrangement, he said, involvement is less.

"It's small fractions of people, as they're required," Hales said, adding that involvement is tied to actual case-work.

Bretzing said he understands that Portland residents want more specifics. But the FBI can't reveal details about ongoing investigations, he said, particularly involving national security.

"The FBI can't operate differently in every city we're stationed in," he said.

As part of the city's agreement with federal officials, Hales also applied for "Secret" clearance in 2013 but was turned down.

Hales said he can't get clearance because the FBI won't grant it to local politicians. Hales said Bretzing has done a good job keeping him in the loop on issues.

"I don't believe that's as important now as I believed it was then. I didn't have that set of relationships with the FBI that I have now," Hales said. "I think in retrospect, that was sort of a superficial approach to the issue."

In the days ahead, Hales said he expects passionate debate. Dozens turned out three years ago for the City Council's vote, with the meeting stretching nearly four hours.

This time around, the decision may not be so harmonious.

Saltzman still wants to maintain police involvement, his chief of staff said. Commissioner Nick Fish has a history of supporting involvement, but an aide said it's not yet clear what Hales will ultimately propose.

Novick is still gathering information and hasn't made up his mind, his chief of staff said Tuesday. Fritz, through an aide, did not respond to a request for comment.

Hales said he expects the City Council to vote, on way or the other, at its 2 p.m. meeting Dec. 18.

"This is one where we just put it out there," Hales said, "and let the Council make a decision."

Portland City Council to consider withdrawing from Joint Terrorism Task Force

*By Brad Schmidt
December 02, 2014*

The Portland City Council, led by Mayor Charlie Hales, is considering withdrawing city police officers from the federal Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Hales on Monday scheduled a Dec. 18 meeting where the City Council will consider "withdrawal from JTTF involvement." The 2 p.m. meeting is scheduled to run 90 minutes.

The move from Hales, a long-time skeptic of task force involvement, may have the political support in City Hall to dissolve the Police Bureau's hazy relationship with the group. Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Steve Novick have questioned involvement and have criticized the city's skimpy annual reports about the partnership.

Neither Dana Haynes nor Sara Hottman, spokespeople for Hales, immediately responded to a request for comment Tuesday morning.

For more than a decade, Portland's involvement with the FBI-led anti-terrorism task force has proven controversial. The city's on-again, off-again relationship with the group has sparked public debate and concern from local politicians.

The Joint Terrorism Task Force investigates domestic and international terrorism threats such as bombings. The Washington County Sheriff's Office, Oregon State Police and the Port of Portland have all assigned full-time officers, while eight other municipalities -- including Portland -- work with the task force on a part-time basis.

Portland police first joined the local task force in 1997 and the City Council, under then-Mayor Vera Katz, formalized its relationship in 2000. The following year, just after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, then-Commissioner Hales cast the only "no" vote against involvement.

"I'm concerned the Joint Terrorism Task Force is one more case of specialized assignments dealing with the threat of the month, rather than dealing with the consistent issue of community policing," Hales said at the time.

In 2005, after Tom Potter was elected mayor, the City Council voted 4-1 to withdraw police from the task force. A former police chief, Potter wanted security clearance to monitor police involvement and shared community concerns about the potential for civil liberties violations. Commissioner Dan Saltzman voted against withdrawal.

"I don't think whether we stay in or out of the JTTF will determine the safety of Portland citizens," Potter said at the time. "I think what will determine the safety of Portland citizens is when we work together, when we watch out for each and care for each other, that our society is safer."

Portland stayed at arms-length of the task force until 2010, when 19-year-old Mohamed Osman Mohamud was arrested – and later convicted – of attempting to detonate a bomb in Pioneer Courthouse Square during the annual tree-lighting ceremony. But the bomb was a fake, part of a terrorism sting.

In response to the bomb threat, Saltzman called for Portland police to rejoin the task force. In 2011, under then-Mayor Sam Adams, the City Council voted unanimously to allow police involvement on an "as-needed basis."

As part of that agreement, the City Council receives annual updates from Police Chief Mike Reese. But after Hales and Novick took office in 2013, there has been growing concern about the level of detail provided – and the need for Portland to assign officers to the task force.

Hales last year said he was denied "Secret" clearance. Reese's report was vague, writing that he had "committed a very limited amount of Bureau resources to JTTF work, so disclosure of the number of cases or hours worked may compromise ongoing investigations and reveal the operational tempo of our work on terrorism."

The City Council voted to accept the report 3-2, with Novick and Fritz opposed. At the time, Hales said he wasn't satisfied with the relationship but still wanted to cooperate with federal authorities in some capacity.

"How do we do that," Hales said at the time, "and do that in a way that people will accept and have confidence in?"

The Portland Tribune

Final street fee vote delayed until Dec. 17

*By Jim Redden
December 3, 2014*

The final vote on the proposed street fee is being delayed again, from Dec. 10 to 17.

Commissioner Steve Novick announced the delay at the start of Wednesday's hearing before the City Council on amendments to the proposal. Under council rules, consideration of the amendments had already required a one-week delay in the vote, pushing it from Dec. 3 to 10.

Commissioner Nick Fish expressed some frustration with the changing schedule, and pressed Novick on when the final vote will take place. Novick assured him and the rest of the council it will now occur on Nov. 17.

One amendment considered Wednesday is a sunset clause that would end the fee in six years unless it is renewed by the council. The other would ensure any new maintenance revenue would be in addition to the amount the city is currently spending, \$11.3 million in the 2014-2015 budget.

Novick said a number of new amendments are being prepared. One would prevent the owners of very small businesses from being taxed twice, once as residents and again as business owners. Another would direct the Revenue Bureau to study whether the city can tax non-residents who work in Portland.

Commissioner Nick Fish said he is also interested in exempting small businesses from the fee in the first year.

"Some will say it's a moving target, but what we are doing is responding to public comments in a very transparent manner," said Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

Some of those who testified expressive amazement the proposal was continuing to change, however.

"I had to throw out my prepared remarks because they're out of date," said Eric Fruits, a local economist and street fee critic.

The fee was first proposed by Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales in May. It has been heavily revised since then and is now divided into two ordinances. One creating a progressive income tax for city residents the other creating a sliding scale for businesses, government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Hales and Novick are opposed to placing the proposal on the ballot for vote approval. opponents have promised to launch a petition drive to refer the ordinances to the ballot if the council does not do so.

Opponents would 30 days since the ordinances are approved to collect signatures from 20,897 registered Portland voters for each one of them — a total of 41,794 valid signatures. If enough valid signatures are collected and submitted to city elections officials, the proposal will not take effect unless it is approved by the voters.

Willamette Week

Don't Be Dense

Portland's apartment fights are headed for the suburbs. Next stop: West Linn.

*By Aaron Mesh
December 3, 2014*

Portland's clash over density from the condos and apartment blocks lining Southeast Division Street and North Williams Avenue is spilling into the suburbs.

The next focal point: a stretch of prime Willamette River waterfront in West Linn. Today, a paper mill, a gas station and ramshackle wooden apartments anchor the site, a 30-minute drive south of Portland.

West Linn is Portland's second-wealthiest suburb, trailing only nearby Lake Oswego in income per capita. But its downtown looks forlorn compared to the thriving main street of working-class Oregon City, on the far bluff across the Willamette.

"Right now, it's sort of a wasteland," says Bob Kirkendall, an architect who lives with his wife, Peggy, less than a mile from West Linn's waterfront.

West Linn has big hopes for the site. Metro, the regional government, gave the city \$220,000 to create a master plan for its downtown and the nearby Bolton neighborhood.

West Linn agreed to turn those areas into a "town center"—meaning the housing density in some of those areas could double to 20 residents per acre. (Metro recommends 40 people per acre.)

Metro, which is about as popular as Ebola in much of Clackamas County, can't impose such density on cities without their agreement. And Metro officials say they are not putting any pressure on West Linn to do anything different from what city officials already want.

But there's growing opposition to West Linn's plans from residents who worry that Metro's planning agenda will turn their leafy bedroom communities into condo bunkers like those that now tower over many Portland neighborhoods.

"All we heard is that the city got the grant," Peggy Kirkendall says. "And we said, 'How nice.' Until we read it."

City officials say Metro has enforced no density requirements on the project, and the plan won't wreck existing neighborhoods.

"We want to make it so that when you come into West Linn, you know you've arrived somewhere," says West Linn community development director Chris Kerr. "There's always going to be NIMBYism, and there's always going to be an anti-growth component."

The squabble at first might not seem significant outside this suburb of 25,992 residents. But it represents the latest dispute with the power Metro wields when the cities ringing Portland decide whether to join in the region's growth.

Arguments over density have been increasing in Forest Grove in Washington County and Wilsonville and Damascus in Clackamas County. In recent years, debates over density and planning have roiled the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners and the Lake Oswego City Council, with races for both becoming test votes over support for Metro.

"Suburban cities define their own futures in our region," says Metro spokesman Jim Middaugh. "The places that don't want taller buildings don't have to have them. The focus really needs to be on how we welcome 600,000 new residents and protect our quality of life. The alternative is sprawl."

The problem is, Portland is making space for new residents, often by building upward. The suburbs aren't keeping pace with new housing, and planners say they need to do so without putting more pressure on the urban growth boundary, Metro's line against development's spread into open land.

An October report by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis found that the Portland area needs to build 12,000 new housing units a year to keep pace with the rising population. Last year, developers built 11,500 units—and most of those were part of Portland's apartment boom, not in the suburbs.

Metro has said the suburbs need to start absorbing much of this housing growth. Its blueprint is called the "2040 Growth Concept," which labels certain areas—including the center of West Linn—"town centers," with higher densities of shopping, townhouses and apartments.

In April 2013, West Linn applied for a \$220,000 Metro planning grant, volunteering in its application that the "area is designated as a Metro town center" and "the City Council supports the Metro Council's established regional development goals and outcomes."

The concept produced with Metro's money shows a market square surrounded by six-story condo buildings, a terraced park above an underground parking garage, and an 80-room hotel overlooking Willamette Falls. The city doesn't yet have a developer.

West Linn city officials are moving toward a Dec. 15 vote to approve the plan. “People always complain that West Linn doesn’t have a town center,” says City Councilor Jody Carson. “Where’s our downtown? Well, here it is. We’re creating that.”

Debate over the plan has been raging in the pages of the West Linn Tidings. A neighborhood association has called for a delay. Peggy Kirkendall has formed a new citizens’ group, West Linn Neighbors, to protest the plan.

“There’s a real pattern, especially in the western part of the United States, where we take perfectly livable places and grow them to death,” says David Dodds, a former West Linn mayor. “If you like the character of where you live, then you’re likely to not want to see it changed to something else. Otherwise you wouldn’t have moved there to begin with.”

Kerr, the West Linn planner, says skepticism will fade. “That’s the knee-jerk reaction: ‘Over my dead body, I don’t want any more density,’” he says. “We’re really talking about reinvigorating this area into something we can all appreciate.”

Portland City Hall Preparing to Compel Airbnb Safety Inspections

*By Aaron Mesh
December 3, 2014*

Portland city officials say they will finally crack down on Airbnb hosts who don’t get safety inspections.

WW reported last month that only 4 percent of Airbnb hosts in Portland had bothered to seek a city permit to operate. Getting a permit requires paying a \$180 fee, agreeing to operate under new city rules and passing a safety inspection.

Portland Revenue Bureau director Thomas Lannom has drafted an ordinance that would penalize Airbnb and other online rental marketplaces \$500 each time they don’t display a host’s city permit number on their website.

Mayor Charlie Hales said last month he was content to let Airbnb hosts seek permits at their own pace. Since WW’s story, however, Hales asked for the enforcement ordinance.

The City Council will consider it Dec. 18.

With the new rule, says City Commissioner Nick Fish, who pushed for the change, “We’re insisting that the booking agents not advertise rogue hosts.”

The Daily Journal of Commerce

‘One shot’ to increase affordability

*By Shelby King
December 2, 2014*

Traci Manning, director of the Portland Housing Bureau, said she has watched decreasing residential vacancy rates in and around the city cause rents to get “so high, so fast.”

But while approximately 10,000 to 12,000 new apartment units are predicted to come online in the Portland area by the end of 2015, the PHB since 2013 has approved only about 300 new affordable housing units for construction.

“It feels like a moment of really big change in the Portland multifamily market,” Manning said. “We have 120,000 new households coming to Portland in the next 20 years. We can’t do this the old-fashioned way. We need new partners and better, cheaper ways to do it.”

As Portland continues to experience a multifamily development boom, efforts are under way to identify possible ways to encourage the inclusion of more affordable units.

One way could be a change to Portland zoning. Manning said the city has hired a consultant who, over the next several months, will assess the viability of adding to city code a type of incentive zoning that would increase the floor area ratio allowed in new construction if the developer agrees to include a certain percentage of low-income housing.

Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman said he's looking at other ways to make construction of affordable housing more attractive to developers.

"We need to address head-on the affordability problem in the Portland rental market," he said. "We need to take a look at the bonuses that are on the books and decide which ones are no longer necessary or effective."

One bonus offered by Portland is the Multiple-Unit Limited Tax Exemption. It allows developers to forgo paying property taxes for 10 years if they reserve 20 percent of the units within a newly constructed multifamily building as affordable.

In 2012, following a policy review by the "Big Look" committee of regional stakeholders, the PHB tightened the MULTE program by capping annual forgone revenue at \$1 million and making the annual selection process competitive.

"We do have people proposing affordable housing developments to receive the exemption, but they're not beating down our door," Manning said. "When we changed the program it was a different real estate market. Nothing was getting built and we saw this as a way to incentivize development."

Saltzman said he'd like to increase the amount of forgone revenue the city allows through its MULTE program, but acknowledged that some people oppose that because they perceive it as money lost from other programs.

"We only have one shot at this rental boom," he said. "If we don't catch the wave now it's going to be ironic when we're moaning about the lack of affordable housing but missed the opportunity to create it."

Saltzman pointed to Seattle, where there is no cap on the amount of forgone revenue it can grant developers via tax exemptions. As of mid-2014, Seattle's Multifamily Tax Exemption had contributed to development of 148 projects that included affordable housing. He hypothesized that increased development could offset any forgone revenue.

"Intuitively it strikes me as making sense," he said. "They're putting properties on their rolls that wouldn't otherwise be there."

Saltzman said he's approached developers in the Portland area to see which incentives would encourage them to incorporate affordable housing in new projects. He said Jeff Pickhardt with Hood River-based Key Development Corp. was responsive to his ideas. Saltzman said he also has reached out to Wade Lange, vice president and regional manager for American Assets Trust's Portland office, though they haven't spoken yet.

Lange said that although his company's current projects – the Hassalo on Eighth superblock and the proposed Oregon Square superblock developments – were conceived with only market-rate units, he recognizes the need for affordable housing in the Portland area and plans to discuss ideas with Saltzman.

In the meantime, local governments are looking to the public for ideas on how to increase housing affordability in the metro area. Last week, the PHB announced that Multnomah County and the cities of Portland and Gresham "will invest millions (of dollars) over the next fiscal year to help address the community's need for affordable housing and community economic development."

The three entities on Dec. 11, at 6 p.m., will host a Community Need Meeting at Gresham City Hall, 1333 N.W. Eastman Parkway. Officials want to gather input from community members on the best way to address the shortage of affordable housing.

"If you've got an idea, we want to know what the question is we need to be asking that we're not asking," Manning said. "We are the government and we don't have all the answers. We screwed this up."