

The Oregonian

Record rainfall triggered Portland's second sewage spill of winter: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Brad Schmidt
January 19, 2015*

The Portland Bureau of Environmental Services won't know until Tuesday exactly how much sewage spilled this weekend into the Willamette River, a spokesman said Monday.

Record-setting rain flooded Portland's combined sewer and stormwater system Saturday, sending untreated sewage into the Willamette for the second time this winter.

Portland recorded nearly 1.8 inches of rain Saturday. Total rainfall easily surpassed 2.1 inches in a 24-hour period, the standard by which Portland's sewer agency is judged for environmental compliance.

Overflows were reported system wide, from Cathedral Park in North Portland to the Sellwood Bridge near the city's southern border.

Officials generally recommend staying out of the Willamette for 48 hours after an overflow. But because rains continued through Sunday, a city spokesman extended that recommendation through Tuesday afternoon.

Portland spent about \$1.4 billion on its Big Pipe project to limit sewage overflows into the Willamette.

Before the project, Portland averaged about 50 spills each year. Now, officials expect no more than four overflows between Nov. 1 and April 30, and one every third summer.

With the latest storm, Portland has now recorded 11 overflows since November 2011. The most recent spill occurred Dec. 4. Portland's system also experienced an overflow Oct. 22.

Thank you, Salem, for derailing Portland's street-fee advisory vote: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
January 18, 2015*

It's rare that lawmakers in Salem deliver good news to Portland before they've done anything. But that's what happened late last week, when state leaders persuaded Mayor Charlie Hales to derail the city's plan to poll citizens on what they thought of several funding options to help underwrite local road repairs.

It turns out the Legislature will undertake a major transportation package this year that would require a bump upward in the state's gasoline tax – an effort that could compete with Portland's plans but which could furnish more street-repair money to Portland. While getting Portland to temporarily stand down would simplify things in the statehouse, the real winner is the city that has made street maintenance funding an operatic tragicomedy.

Hales, who along with Commissioner Steve Novick has played a leading role, chose another metaphor. He told The Oregonian's Brad Schmidt that all the slipping and sliding by the City Council on the street fee has been worth it and, by inference, the hard but necessary part of government: "If people want to watch the sausage being made, they will perhaps be amused, perhaps be appalled, perhaps be engaged. But one way or another, we've got to actually make the sausage and solve the problem.... I think that the fact that we've had this big loud debate in Portland has helped elevate the debate statewide."

Okayyyyyy. Everybody gets to stand down. But no one needs it more now than the Portland voter, subjected to a year of whiplash by a City Council whose first reflex in the face of need was to turn to residents and businesses and say: More money, please. The street repair money would come from a tax, a fee, a bond – whatever – but it would be raised as new revenue rather than carved from existing resources. Yet the city, as Schmidt separately showed in a report last weekend, had for years dodged its own responsibility to adequately maintain its streets, engaging in a form of neglect that multiplies the cost of repair. When you get around to it, that is.

As recently as two months ago, Hales, with the council's backing, had the happy challenge of deciding where to spend \$11.1 million in unanticipated, unspent city revenues. He adjusted the budget to funnel

the money to several areas: \$890,000 to the Bureau of Transportation for bridge and structure repairs and another \$890,000 for signals and street lights but nothing for street repair. Exactly \$600,000 would go to the Regional Arts and Culture Council, however, to which the city already had dedicated more than \$4 million in general fund money in 2014 – and that's before RACC-designed revenues from the city's arts tax had exceeded \$400,000 in the same year. Hales dedicated \$350,000, meanwhile, to the creation of six analyst positions to help the city implement police reforms and, wisely, nearly \$2 million to repair the roof of an older Bureau of Emergency Communications building. You get the picture: The roads could wait until Portlanders pay more.

There's a second bit of good news beyond the slowdown, however. The city enters budget-making season with a forecast of extra money: more than \$14 million in one-time funds and more than \$4 million in ongoing revenue. This presents a real opportunity for street fee sausage-making to become palatable: The City Council should dedicate a hefty chunk of the surplus to street repair. Doing so would signal residents and businesses that Portland's elected leaders strive to live within the city's means, helping to restore trust. Doing so would be taken as a good-faith action remembered by taxpayers who surely will be asked to close the gap between available resources, potentially newfound state gas-tax money and the full price of street repair.

As for an advisory vote, Hales got this one right: It's unnecessary. By summer, when the Legislature's out, Portlanders will know how much of the burden of street repair might reasonably fall to them and be able to judge whether the council's next best approach seems fair.

The Portland Tribune

Protest of Uber, city task force picks up

*By Jim Redden
January 20, 2015*

Portland is working hard to legalize businesses that haven't followed the rules — so far.

The first meeting of a task force created to pave the way for so-called ride sharing companies to operate in the city was held last Wednesday afternoon. It was appointed by Commissioner Steve Novick after Uber, the largest and most aggressive of the companies, made it clear they want to operate in Portland.

The meeting took place the day after all six Portland taxi companies protested Uber at a Pioneer Courthouse Square rally. They are upset because Uber began offering rides in town on Dec. 5, even though its drivers don't meet city rules that all taxi companies and drivers must follow, like specific comprehensive insurance coverage. Uber drivers — who pick up passengers through the company's smartphone app — also charge less than taxi drivers, whose rates are set by the city.

"Uber is hoping that the task force findings will prompt Portland City Council to amend existing laws and essentially deregulate the for-hire transportation industry in our city, at least as it applies to the for-hire service they provide. This outcome would threaten the safety of people seeking rides in our community," Radio Cab supervisor Noah Ernst said at the protest.

Ernst also complained that taxi companies and drivers had no input into the creation of the Private For Hire Transportation Innovation Task Force, even though it could recommend changes that affect their livelihood.

Uber suspended service in Portland after the city sought an injunction in court. The company has said it will return to the city on April 9, however, whether or not the council has adopted new regulations allowing their drivers to pick up passengers. Staff members representing Hales and Novick told the task force their bosses believe it can resolve all the safety and accessibility issues by then. Some task force members agreed, but others said such work will take much longer.

The task force met hours after the City Council expanded rules governing short-term residential rentals, a change made to accommodate Airbnb and other new businesses that help people rent out rooms in their homes. The council already had approved such rentals in single-family houses.

The expansion covers apartment and condominium buildings. The expansion was approved even though an estimated 93 percent of Airbnb hosts are not following with previous requirements to obtain permits and pay transient lodging taxes, like hotels and motels.

Only Commissioner Nick Fish voted no, saying he is concerned Airbnb and their hosts aren't

following the existing requirements. The council is scheduled to consider an enforcement ordinance this week.

Uber genie and the bottle

Uber and Airbnb are just two companies that are making money by disrupting traditional business models. They profit by offering cheaper services than existing businesses. Investors have poured large sums of money into them — in Uber's case, \$2.5 billion — even though they disregard the laws and rules in many of the communities they operate.

Wynde Dyer, a medical driver for Green Transportation, wonders why Portland officials think Uber will comply with any new rules it doesn't like. She is concerned a deal has been struck for Uber to begin operating in Portland again on April 9, even though no one can predict what the task force will come up with by then.

"Once you let that genie out of the bottle, it's going to be impossible to get it back in," says Wynde Dyer, who drives medical trips for Green Transportation, one of Portland's existing taxi companies.

Uber and businesses like it are officially known as Transportation Network Companies. Hales and Novick want the 11-member task force to propose new regulations for them covering such safety-related issues as mandatory driver background checks, vehicle inspections and insurance coverage by April 2. The task force has scheduled a series of meetings between now and then, including a forum with existing taxi drivers on Feb. 10 and a public listening session on Feb. 19.

After April 2, Hales and Novick want the task force to make recommendations on such larger issues as whether the city should continue to limit the number of permits issued to taxi drivers and set the fares they can charge for rides. The schedule calls for those recommendations to be finalized by July 2.

Task force members did not discuss any of the issues at length during the first meeting, which involved background briefings and the remaining schedule. Comments made by several of the members revealed deep philosophical splits, however.

Early in the meeting, Richard Lazar, a member of the Technology Association of Oregon, said he thought all of the issues could be easily resolved before the April 2 deadline. This was met with surprise by Sue Stahl, a member of the Portland Commission on Disability, who said the federal Americans with Disabilities Act has many requirements that paid-ride providers must meet. JoAnn Herrigel, representing Elders in Action, said ensuring safety and accessibility is a top concern for seniors.

When discussing the forum with drivers, citizen representative Jeff Lang balked at having to meet them face to face. He proposed video testimony to maintain a professional level of detachment. But Kayse Jama of the Center for Intercultural Organizing said many drivers are Somali immigrants for whom personal conversations are the cultural norm.

The next meeting is set for 3 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 28 in Room C of the Portland Building. It will include presentations for those in the paid-ride industry. Among those invited to testify are representatives of Uber and the taxi companies.

Integrity of the system

Uber has found success around the world because it offers something people want — a cheaper and quicker alternative to local taxi companies. It also allows people who own cars to make money without having to go through lengthy, expensive and restricting permitting procedures.

The taxi protest was organized by the newly formed Transportation Fairness Alliance, which includes Broadway Cab, Green Transportation, Portland Taxi Cab Co., Sassy's Cab Co., Union Cab PDX, and Radio Cab. Although they normally compete against one another for customers, Ernst says they came together because company's like Uber threaten the integrity of the city's public transportation system.

Although taxis are privately owned, they are part of the public transportation system the city has established over many years. It is intended to provide safe and equal transportation services to all people in the city on a 24-hour basis, regardless of where they live, the color of the skin, their sexual orientation, or their physical condition, Ernst says.

"Portland has spent years adopting rules that make sure taxis provide a public service. They are part of the city's overall public transportation system," he says.

According to Ernst, the City Council has approved numerous policies to ensure taxi companies meet these goals.

"We're required to dispatch taxis 24 hours a day, take all fares, and make sure 10 percent of our taxis are wheelchair-accessible. We also have to conduct real background checks on our drivers, carry insurance that covers anyone involved in an accident, and properly maintain our vehicles to make sure all rides are safe," he says.

As Ernst sees it, Uber and its drivers don't meet any of these standards. Uber is a smartphone app that allows anyone with a credit card to request a ride from a private person who has signed up with the company. Right there, that eliminates anyone without a smartphone or credit card, he says.

And, Ernst adds, there can be gaps in service hours, people with disabilities might not be accommodated, no one at the city knows for sure how the company conducts background checks, most personal insurance policies exclude commercial trips, and vehicle maintenance is up to the drivers.

On top of that, Ernst says, the city sets taxi rates to make sure there are no misunderstandings about the cost of a ride. They include a \$2.50 minimum flag drop, \$2.60 per mile, \$1 per extra passenger, and \$30 per hour waiting time.

In contrast, Uber is trying to copyright a "surge pricing" technology that changes during peak travel times, like rush hours and during emergencies and special events, Ernst says.

All these issues are expected to be discussed by the task force at future meetings.

City Council revisits FBI task force issue

*By Jim Redden
January 20, 2015*

Less than two weeks before President Obama convenes an international conference on fighting terrorism, the City Council is once again scheduled to discuss its involvement with the local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Mayor Charlie Hales has tentatively scheduled a work session on Portland's participation in the JTTF for Feb. 5. The White House has announced plans for world leaders to gather Feb. 18 in Washington, D.C., to better coordinate their efforts against homegrown terrorists and other extremists. The "Summit on Countering Violent Extremism" was called in the wake of the attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, where 17 people died.

Portland's current involvement in the JTTF is limited. No police are permanently assigned to the JTTF, but they are allowed to participate in its investigations on an "as-needed basis," provided they are investigating suspected criminal activity. The Portland police chief must also present an annual report to the council on activities in the previous year.

Mayor Hales is not pleased with that level of participation, according to spokesman Dana Haynes. Hales also thinks the annual reports have not provided enough information for the council to understand what the investigations involving the police have entailed.

"The mayor thinks the city should either be all in or all out. He does not have preference at this point, but wants the council to discuss it and make a decision, one way or another," Haynes says.

Portland FBI Special Agent in Charge Gregory Bretzing says his agency prefers the city to be fully involved in the task force.

"We think Portland is safer if the police are fully involved. They have a unique perspective of the city and have knowledge of people we might not be aware of," Bretzing says.

The ACLU of Oregon believes the city should fully withdraw from the JTTF, however, according to Legislative Director Becky Straus.

"The FBI has a well-documented history of abusing the rights of law-abiding citizens," Straus says.

According to Straus, although the ACLU supported the current arrangement when it was approved in 2011, the organization has been disappointed by the lack of information in the annual reports.

"We think Portland should be a national model for protecting rights and transparency, and there is not enough information in the reports for us to tell if the arrangement is working," Straus says.

Homegrown extremists

Hales first requested the work session in December, weeks before the Paris attacks and upcoming international terrorism summit. Haynes says those events could affect the council's deliberations, because they are so emotional and high profile. At the very least, they have focused attention on the role of local law enforcement agencies in fighting homegrown extremists.

The Paris attacks and others in Canada and Australia in recent months involved "lone wolfs" who are not easily tracked by national authorities.

"Recent events show the nature of terrorism is changing and we need to respond to that," Bretzing says.

According to Bretzing, even if Portland completely withdraws from the JTTF, the FBI will brief Hales and new Police Chief Larry O'Dea on any imminent threat to the city.

Portland and the FBI

The FBI Portland JTTF is one of 104 task forces based in cities involving federal, state and local law enforcement officials in the county. The first was established in New York in 1980. More than half — 71 — have been created since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.

Portland's involvement in the local JTTF always has been controversial. When the council voted to authorize Portland police to participate in 2000, civil libertarians complained about the FBI's civil rights violations, among other things. Hales, who was a city commissioner at the time, was the lone "no" vote. Haynes says Hales always has opposed assigning police to duties, such as border patrol, outside the scope of the Portland Police Bureau.

Objections surfaced each time the council reauthorized the participation until 2005, when then-Mayor Tom Potter complained he could not properly oversee the officers' involved in it and the council voted to withdraw.

The council came up with its current arrangement in 2011 after 19-year-old Mohamed Osman Mohamud was arrested by the FBI on charges of trying to detonate a bomb in Pioneer Courthouse Square several months earlier. The deal was brokered by Dwight Holton, who was the Oregon U.S. Attorney. He argued Portlanders would be safer if the police were once again participating in the JTTF. The council only agreed to limited involvement, however, and required the annual reports that have proven controversial. Former Police Chief Mike Reese explained the information in them was limited to not compromise ongoing investigations.

Controversy has accompanied all of the JTTF's known investigations. Mohamud's lawyers unsuccessful argued he was entrapped in the bomb plot by overzealous undercover agents who took advantage of his young age. Six years before that, the FBI apologized for suspecting Portland lawyer Brandon Mayfield, a Muslim, of participating in a terrorist bombing in Spain. Some people even criticized the FBI for pursuing the Portland Seven, a group of local Muslims whose members tried to travel to Afghanistan to fight coalition forces in 2002. Although some of them talked about attacking local targets when they returned home, local Muslims and others accused the FBI of setting them up.

More recently, Reaz Qadir Khan, a Portland Bureau of Environmental Services employee, was arrested in March 2013 on charges of aiding a terrorist attack on a Pakistani government compound four years ago that killed 30 and injured 300 people.

The White House says the Feb. 18 terrorism summit will "highlight domestic and international efforts to prevent violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States and abroad to commit acts of violence."

The announcement specifically mentioned the role local governments can play in such efforts. Officials from such cities as Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis-St. Paul are scheduled to discuss strategies they have used.

City extends deadline, cuts fee for Street Seats

*By Jennifer Anderson
January 20, 2015*

The city of Portland is making it easier to apply for street seats — so much so that they've extended the deadline and cut the fee in half.

Now in its fifth year as a program of the Portland Bureau of Transportation, the deadline for Street Seats applicants had been Jan. 15, but has now been stretched to Feb. 4.

The nonrefundable application fee is still \$100, but the annual permit fee has been reduced from \$500 to \$250.

This year, Street Seat administrators will choose up to 10 new locations to move forward with concept-level designs for review and preliminary approval.

Those with creativity of design, "public seating" proposals, and demonstration of community support will be given priority.

PBOT encourages applicants to seek out early professional design assistance.

The city held an informational Open House in December.

In 2014, the Street Seats program grew to include 12 locations, 10 of which were restaurants offering outdoor cafe seating.

The other two were open installations on Northeast Alberta Street, designed for public seating as a collaboration between PBOT and the Center for Architecture in its second annual Street Seats Competition.

The program is open to all businesses or nonprofit organizations that wish to convert on-street parking into other public uses, such as cafe seating or a mini-park.

Based on similar programs in San Francisco and New York City, the program enlivens the streetscape by creating spaces for the public to stop, sit and enjoy the streetscape.

Street Seats also enhances street vitality and benefits neighboring businesses. Each business or hosting organization manages its own maintenance of the Street Seats, plus the cost of the lost parking space revenue.

Moving forward, PBOT staff want to encourage proposals that are open to full public use, and show creativity and excellence in design.

Proposals may be seasonal or year-round, and may be located in any part of the city except the downtown core from West Burnside to Southwest Harrison streets, and Southwest Second to 10th avenues.

Package deal on waterfront could bring new city park under Ross Island Bridge

*By Steve Law
January 19, 2015*

The Portland Development Commission is negotiating a deal that would commit the agency to spend \$5 million for a new downtown park site and greenway under and around the Ross Island Bridge.

The tentative deal for a new Ross Island Bridge Park and greenway extension between the Ross Island and Marquam bridges is part of a major development agreement the PDC is discussing with representatives of the Zidell family for the family's South Waterfront property.

Thanks to a pending expansion of the North Macadam Urban Renewal Area, PDC stands to collect an additional \$81 million from property taxes to spend on urban renewal in the South Waterfront area, and the Portland Housing Bureau is slated to collect an additional \$32 million for affordable housing.

The Zidells own about 30 acres on the waterfront near their barge assembly plant on the Willamette River, the largest section of vacant, undeveloped land in Portland's central city.

PDC is negotiating a development agreement with ZRZ Realty Co., which represents the Zidells, that would offer \$27.4 million for the park, roads, and other infrastructure. Those subsidies and amenities would complement ZRZ's plan to build more than 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use developments, including employment-oriented commercial and residential projects, north and south of the Ross Island Bridge.

In tandem with the Zidell development agreement and expansion of the urban renewal area, PDC is working with the Housing Bureau on a proposal to develop a large multifamily project containing 200 to 400 affordable housing units at 2095 S.W. River Parkway. That site near the RiverPlace project could accommodate 450 multifamily units. Development there would help the city meet its unmet goal for providing affordable housing in the urban renewal area along the waterfront.

Some city commissioners have objected to a proposed reshuffling of urban renewal areas proposed by Mayor Charlie Hales, until the city steps up its commitment to provide affordable housing in its downtown urban renewal areas.

The PDC board will discuss the idea of using that site for affordable housing at its meeting this Wednesday, which starts at 1:30 p.m. at 222 N.W. Fifth Ave.

The urban renewal district changes are scheduled to come to the City Council for final approval on Jan. 29. A development agreement with ZRZ Realty also is expected soon before the City Council, after it wins approval from the PDC board.

Deal could bring affordable housing to South Waterfront

*By Steve Law
January 19, 2015*

A tentative deal has been struck at City Hall to foster more affordable housing in the South Waterfront area, which could end a standoff that's blocked Mayor Charlie Hales' overhaul of urban renewal.

The deal could bring at least 200 new affordable housing units, perhaps atop a future grocery store on 2095 S.W. River Parkway.

"If it all comes together, this will be a big win for low-income families in North Macadam," said Commissioner Nick Fish.

Hales has been working for months on a proposal to shrink two urban renewal districts, pull the plug on two other ones and expand two others, including the North Macadam Urban Renewal Area that includes the highrise-dominated South Waterfront area.

Affordable housing advocates have complained the city was backing off its still unmet goals to include a healthy share of affordable housing as it redevelops the South Waterfront area along the Willamette River, a signature city effort that includes several residential and office towers plus the aerial tram to Oregon Health & Science University. Only 209 affordable apartments have been built in the urban renewal area, leaving the city 579 units shy of its goal. The Portland Housing Bureau recently suggested the city should pare back its goal, which prompted a group of affordable housing activists to spring into action, pressing the city to meet its past commitments.

Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz were sympathetic, and reluctant to approve the expansion of North Macadam until the city recommitted to its original affordable housing goals for North Macadam. They got more clout when Commissioner Dan Saltzman announced some weeks ago that he'd abstain on that expansion because his family owns property in the district. Hales suddenly lacked the three City Council votes needed, prompting him to reschedule a final vote on his urban renewal redo until Jan. 29.

Hales' urban renewal overhaul includes many inter-related pieces, and the North Macadam expansion is pivotal. Hales also plans to nix the Education Urban Renewal Area surrounding Portland State University, but fold some PSU-related properties into the expanded North Macadam district.

"Unless there's a clear road map for meeting the existing targets, this particular amendment will not move forward," Fish said.

Now a deal appears close.

The Portland Development Commission on Wednesday will discuss using the two-acre parcel on River Parkway for affordable housing. The agency will have more money to spend on the urban renewal district

once it's expanded, generating more property taxes for urban renewal. The expansion also will bring an additional \$32 million for affordable housing.

City warns of Art Tax phone scam

*By Jim Redden
January 16, 2015*

Portland officials are warning city residents about a telephone scam involving the Art Tax.

The Revenue Division has received several reports of Portlanders receiving calls from people claiming to be employees of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) collecting the \$35 annual Arts Tax on behalf of the city. According to city officials, these are con artists can sound convincing when they call. In at least one instance, the scammer threatened to file legal action in a court of law.

In fact, the IRS is not collecting the Arts Tax — formally known as the Arts Education and Access Income Tax — on behalf of the City of Portland.

"These types of fraud schemes are all too common," said Revenue Division Director Thomas Lannom, adding that the IRS issues warnings about these types of scams on a regular basis.

According to Lannom, the city will not:

- 1) Call to demand immediate payment.
- 2) Call about taxes owed without first having mailed you a letter.
- 3) Require you to use a specific payment method for your taxes.
- 4) Threaten legal action without prior written notification.

Lannom says taxpayers should remember their first contact with the Revenue Division will not be a phone call, but through official correspondence sent through the mail. A big red flag for these scams are angry, threatening calls from people who say they are from the IRS or the city and urging immediate payment. This is not how we operate.

Taxpayers who believe they have received a fraudulent phone call are asked to take note of the telephone number and circumstances of the call. Taxpayers are urged to report instances of attempted fraud to the Revenue Division by calling 503-865-4ART (4278) or e-mailing artstaxhelp@portlandoregon.gov.

The city has reported these fraud attempts to the IRS and the Oregon Attorney General.

The Arts Tax is due every year on April 15.

The Portland Mercury

Prominent Street Fee Critic Was Recently Elected Head of the Multnomah County Republican Party

*By Denis C. Theriault
January 16, 2015*

An Oregonian story this morning on the beleaguered state Republican Party's leadership and fundraising struggles included a familiar name—alongside an unfamiliar title—for anyone following the months-long story over Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales' struggles to raise new transportation revenue.

It identified economist and professor Eric Fruits, one of the street fee's most prominent foils/critics, as the current chairman of Multnomah County's Republican Party.

"I think most people would agree the Art Robinson term has been pretty disastrous," said Eric Fruits, chairman of the Multnomah County Republican Party.

"He came in with the promise that he had some donors who were going to get the party up and running," Fruits added, "and that hasn't happened."

That was news to a few people at city hall and elsewhere, who noted that Fruits' partisan affiliation has never come up in any of Fruits' visits to city hall or appearances in the media. It's also not been mentioned on the anti-street-fee blog that Fruits curates.

Not that having ties to the GOP would be wildly out of character for Fruits, given his antipathy not only for the way the street fee's been put forward but also for the city's arts tax and other issues. But it's meant that someone with prominence in the Republican Party—especially so, given the county's size and wealth—has spent weeks if not months publicly taking aim at one of Oregon's most progressive politicians, Novick, without anyone quite realizing the juicier dynamics in play.

So what gives?

"It's a fairly new event. I was elected in mid-November," says Fruits, adding that he ran unopposed for a two-year term and was first approached by party officials to take a leadership post in October. "And I've just been so busy with street fee stuff that I really haven't done much with the party yet."

Fruits also reminded the Mercury about the timing of his election (last fall) vs. the beginning of the street fee conversation (last spring). But when asked about quotes and radio appearances that came after he'd been slated as the new GOP chair—including this week—he said he didn't think it was right to identify himself, in the same way he doesn't mention his membership as a Laurelhurst Neighborhood Association board member, to avoid being seen as speaking for the party and not just himself.

"That's one reason why I stayed quiet about it. I know a lot of Republicans are anti-street fee, but I was involved well before I was elected chair," he says. "I didn't think it was proper to put myself out as chair of the Republican Party when I was talking about the street fee because we hadn't taken a position on the street fee."

Update 3:50 PM: Novick, returning a message seeking comment, says he doesn't think Fruits "was under any obligation to disclose his party affiliation in the context of these discussions."

However, he says: "It does reflect a point people should keep in mind. The loudest voices in a public conversation on any issue are not necessary representative voices. The fact that you see the same angry citizens quoted over and over again on every issue does not mean all citizens are angry about that issue. Eric probably does reflect the views of most Republicans on most issues. That does not mean he represents the views of most Portlanders—who are not Republicans.///end update

It's worth noting the casual reveal of his new role, which Fruits says wasn't kept secret but also wasn't much hyped, comes the day after the street fee went into what Fruits' blog described as "hibernation." Hales and Novick said they're pausing while Salem works out some transportation-related lawmaking that might lead to a higher statewide gas tax or new powers for cities like Portland looking to raise money on their own.

Fruits says his own street fee efforts also will head into hibernation—which is good, he says, because he's got his work cut out for him as a Republican leader in a county where Democrats are more likely to be challenged from the left than the right.

He's touting a "big tent" model of his party in which anyone who identifies as a Republican and wants to help get Republicans elected is welcome to join up—meaning he won't be focusing so much on social issues like marriage equality and sexual politics. The party is in "rebuilding" mode, but if it assembles a broader base of donors and attracts more precinct workers, Fruits says, then it might be helped back to being more competitive.

"It may be hard for us to compete in Multnomah County for legislative seats," he says. "But look at Chris Dudley. If a few more people in Portland had voted for him, he'd be governor. We can help swing some of those statewide elections if we boost Republican turnout."

Daily Journal of Commerce

City hoping state will provide street money

By Shelby King

January 16, 2015

After 14 months of work group meetings with citizens and public hearings to determine how to best use taxpayers' dollars to pay for a backlog of city street work, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales announced Thursday that he and the City Council would instead look to the state for money.

"During the passionate conversations we have had in Portland regarding transportation funding, many options were discussed, none of which were popular," Hales said in a news release. Some options were put forward by Portlanders that we do not have the authority to enact. As your mayor, I will go to Salem to seek that authority."

At a Jan. 8 hearing, Hales, Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick and the rest of the city council heard public testimony on funding options. They also asked at the hearing for suggestions from citizens for funding options and announced that they would seek an "advisory vote" from the offered options on the May ballot. In an advisory vote, citizens would choose their favorites among three to six options. The council said it would choose several of the more popular options for adoption.

Many citizens at the hearing suggested requiring anyone parking downtown to purchase and display a sticker on their car indicating they had paid a parking fee separate from the usual pay-to-park fees. The council explained that state laws prohibit cities from assessing a "registration fee" for cars, which is what the councilors believed the sticker system would equate to.

Hales said in the news release that Gov. John Kitzhaber and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, both assured him that "a statewide transportation package is a top priority" for the Oregon Legislature in the session that begins in February.

"We are pleased to know that the Legislature is very interested in a transportation funding discussion this year," Novick said. "We have said all along that the street fund we have proposed will not address all our needs and that we are counting on the state and federal governments to step up."