

The Oregonian

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' annual State of the City speech is Friday: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Brad Schmidt
January 30, 2015*

At the midpoint of his four-year term, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales on Friday will give his annual State of the City speech and lay out his top priorities.

Leading up to today's event, Hales has used social media to hint about some of the issues he'll address:

On the 1,800 unsheltered homeless Portlanders, Hales' Twitter account said, "We can do better."

On a broken system where police are often the first responders to a mental health crisis, Hales' account said police should instead be the last.

On "benefits corporations" -- companies that focus on more than just profits, including one headed by the chairman of the Portland Development Commission -- Hales' account said they should be rewarded.

On people returning to the community from prison or jail, Hales' account said "they should be able to return to a productive life."

It's not clear what other topics Hales will highlight. He was not available to be interviewed in advance of the speech, a spokesman said.

In his past two annual addresses, Hales spoke about the city's need to maintain city streets and rework urban renewal districts -- two issues that Hales has tried to tackle but have yet to be resolved.

The Oregonian/OregonLive's Andrew Theen will be covering Hales' speech, hosted by the City Club of Portland at the Sentinel hotel. City Club members can stream the event online or readers call follow our coverage online and on Twitter (@ciythallwatch or #SOTC15).

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish is looking for a new chief of staff

*By Andrew Theen
January 29, 2015*

Hannah Kuhn, Commissioner Nick Fish's chief of staff and one of the most senior leaders inside city government, is leaving Portland politics.

The 48-year-old confirmed Thursday she is leaving her post as Fish's top political adviser to spend more time with her husband and travel. Her final day at City Hall is Feb. 6.

"Life is short, and there are some other priorities that are important to me too," Kuhn said.

Fish posted a job opening on Mac'sList on Jan. 22. The new hire will be Fish's fourth chief of staff. Kuhn succeeded Betsy Ames (who since moved to the Portland Office of Management & Finance), who followed Sam Chase (current Metro Councilor).

The commissioner said Kuhn's decision to leave City Hall was "a big loss for me, for the office and for the city." Fish lauded Kuhn for being one of the most knowledgeable, respected, and competent staffers inside city government.

"I'm enormously grateful that she devoted five years of service to my team," he said. He particularly credited Kuhn for recruiting and mentoring several members of his staff.

Chief of staffs in Portland's commissioner form of government play a pivotal role. They meet each week to discuss policy with the top policy advisers for the other four City Council members, keeping everyone up to speed on potential upcoming legislation and hammering out policy.

Kuhn's tenure in the building dates back to Mayor Vera Katz's administration. She was hired in 2002, and went on to work for Mayor Tom Potter to manage Portland's Measure 37, the land-use compensatory

initiative, program. She also worked for the Portland Bureau of Transportation and Portland Public School District.

Fish credited Kuhn for her work in his unsuccessful 2004 City Council campaign. In 2008, she joined Fish's staff after "he twisted my arm pretty hard."

"She's been indispensable to my political journey," Fish said.

She left city government for a more than a year sabbatical in 2009 before returning at Fish's request.

He credited Kuhn with helping develop the 2011 tree code and helping forge a compromise on building permit reform legislation.

Kuhn said Fish's office is "poised for some really great stuff," citing Fish's successful reelection last year and the utility reform measures underway in the wake of the failed public utility district ballot fight.

Kuhn, who is fluent in German, said she's not fully retiring from the working world. "My dream would be to have another job overseas," she added. Her husband Bill McNamee retired from his federal government job in 2009.

Fish said he suspected that Bill's retirement would eventually play a role because they like to travel so much. "When she gets bored, the door is open," Fish said.

She stressed that her departure is on good terms, and Fish asked her to remain involved in his "kitchen cabinet," the informal network of non city hall advisers.

Fish said he hoped to hire a replacement within a month.

The position pays \$81,994 - \$108,992, according to the job listing.

The Portland Mercury

Portland's Camping Ban is Effectively Suspended Until February 3

*By Dirk VanderHart
January 29, 2015*

Camp at your leisure, Portland! Until Tuesday at least.

The city's anti-camping ordinance—currently under challenge in court—is on ice for the next week, courtesy of Commissioner Dan Saltzman.

Saltzman, the city's housing commissioner (for now), penned an email to 16 local entities last week, asking them to hold off on enforcing anti-camping laws or conducting sweeps, the Mercury has learned.

It's not a warm-hearted détente in Portland's ongoing struggles dealing with homelessness. Instead, Saltzman and Portland Housing Bureau officials want to make sure the county's homeless aren't going into hiding as an important effort begins: the every-other-year count of homeless people sleeping on the streets.

The count officially began last night, and continues until Tuesday. In that time, outreach workers and volunteers are combing alcoves, overpasses, and popular camp spots to get a picture of how many people in the county are sleeping outside. (Because the study is technically a one-night snapshot, they're now asking people if they slept outside last night, January 28). The 2013 count found 2,869 people were "literally homeless" up almost 140 from 2011.

The effort is made more difficult if police and other public employees are rousting encampments, making arrests for camping, and taking people's things. So Saltzman's asked city bureaus, county law enforcement, Metro, the Port of Portland, and Union Pacific to lay off. Only Union Pacific, which has its own security force, didn't affirm the requests, according to the housing bureau's Shannon Singleton.

"It's really important to us to get an accurate count," says Brendan Finn, Saltzman's chief of staff. "We don't know who schedules what, when."

Portland Police Bureau chief spokesperson Sgt. Pete Simpson confirms the bureau's on board.

"We'll still obviously respond to incidents," he notes. "We're going to protect the public and respond to crime."

Here's Saltzman's "URGENT REMINDER":

*From: Commissioner Saltzman
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2015 11:03 AM
To: Singleton, Shannon
Subject: URGENT REMINDER: Suspension of enforcement for Homeless Street Count*

As you know, the Homeless Street Count is an effort to capture a snapshot of the numbers, characteristics, and needs of people experiencing homelessness in Multnomah County. This is an additional reminder that the next biannual Homeless Street Count is scheduled for the week of January 28-February 3, 2015. To ensure that the count is as accurate as possible, we are requesting that all entities in Multnomah County that enforce the anti-camping ordinance or conduct homeless camp clean-ups suspend enforcement beginning tomorrow, January 21, to cover the week prior to and during the count (January 21 - February 3, 2015).

I believe most of you have already been in touch with Shannon Singleton of the Portland Housing Bureau to confirm your participation. If you have any questions please contact her at Shannon.Singleton@portlandoregon.gov or by phone at (503) 823-4978.

Again, we appreciate your support for this important effort.

Sincerely,

Dan Saltzman

GoLocalPDX

Is Portland Bolstering Homeless Numbers to Get More Federal Funding?

*By Annie Ellison
January 30, 2015*

A population usually ushered out of sight is being deliberately left in plain view this week to secure federal funding for homeless initiatives.

Under direction from the Portland Housing Bureau, law enforcement, park rangers, and transit police, among others, have stopped clearing out homeless camps, while dozens of volunteers and outreach workers count the city's homeless population.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) point in time homeless count, which began this week in Portland, counts people who are sleeping in places unintended for habitation, such as abandoned buildings, streets, encampments and vehicles. People experiencing homelessness are asked a series of questions, and sign their initials to avoid duplication.

The data obtained from the count will guide policy and discussion for the next two years. It is also the only road to receiving federal grants from HUD.

"You get more money the more people you're able to count," said Paul Boden, Director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), a homeless rights group, who is skeptical of the move to call off the camping ban enforcement for just two weeks during the count.

"If they can do it for a week, they can do it forever," said Ibrahim Mubarak, co-founder of Right 2 Dream Too, a homeless community in Portland's Old Town District. "Right 2 Dream Too and Right 2 Survive have been asking police for years not to sweep people off the street," said Mubarak.

Sally Erickson, Homeless Programs Manager at the Portland Housing Bureau, said officials are taking what measures they can to get the most accurate count possible.

"We need to tell the story adequately, about how we're doing in addressing homelessness," she said.

Calling off camp clean-ups

A group of park rangers, police, service providers and outreach workers agreed “a more complete count” would be possible if officials stopped enforcing Portland’s anti-camping ordinance for the duration of the January street count. This includes camp sweeps and clean ups, Erickson said, and was a measure that proved successful during the count two years ago.

Under the group’s advice, Housing Commissioner Dan Saltzman’s office sent an email requesting all Multnomah County agencies that enforce the ordinance by conducting camp sweeps or clean-ups suspend enforcement from Jan. 21 until Feb. 3.

These include Portland Parks, Portland Police, Multnomah County Sheriff, Gresham Police, Fairview Police, Troutdale Police, River Patrol, Oregon Department of Transportation, Metro, Union Pacific Railroad, the Port of Portland, the Water Bureau, PBOT and others.

Marc Jolin, Director of the city’s Home For Everyone Initiative, said the days-long documentation is more than just a head count, but provides critical information about the homeless population for service providers.

“HUD requires that we conduct the count at least every other year and our doing so affects our overall application, so not doing it would adversely affect all of the HUD funded projects in our community,” said Jolin.

Volunteers and outreach workers from hundreds of agencies fanned out across Multnomah County Wednesday night and Thursday morning for the one-night count of people living on the streets. The same night, volunteers conducted a one-night count of people accessing shelters.

In the months following the count, nonprofits and government service providers will begin feverishly applying for hundreds of grants through HUD, which will go to fund future projects.

“You’re trying to show a need,” Boden said. “These are really competitive grants.” All groups that receive funding from HUD must do the point-in-time count every two years.

Federal grant money

Over \$15 million in federal dollars secured in Portland, Gresham and Multnomah County last year will go to fund more than 40 front-line initiatives, including, heat shelters, women’s shelters, rent assistance, youth and and mental health services.

The overwhelming majority of money obtained through federal grants -- known as McKinney grants, after the 1987 McKinney-Vento Assistance Act -- goes to programs servicing single adults.

Erickson said the number of people counted indirectly impacts the level of funding the city gets for homeless initiatives through an elaborate algorithm.

Boden has criticized the point-in-time homeless count for not gauging or assessing homelessness accurately, because it misses families and people who are couch-surfing or living in vehicles, and focuses less on addressing the gap between need and services. He said many stakeholders agree.

“The only reason they do it is for the federal money,” he said. “Everybody criticizes this shit off the record.”

In Portland, illegal camping can incur a \$100 fine or 30 days in jail. Boden is part of a coalition pushing forth Senator Chip Shields’ fledgling Right to Rest bill, which would allow unhoused people to legally sleep in parks, on sidewalks, and other public places.

“If they’re going to do it when it’s to their economic advantage, they should do it as human beings and all support the Right to Rest Act,” he said.

The Housing Bureau’s Ryan Diebert said the number of homeless people counted does not correlate to the amount of McKinney grant money a city is awarded.