

The Oregonian

Under Amanda Fritz, Portland development bureau told to say 'no' more often

By Elliot Njus
February 17, 2015

Portland regulators have been told they need to tell developers "no" more often.

City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees the Bureau of Development Services, told the department's staff in a memo this month that it needs to "raise the bar" in certain land-use reviews. In particular, she said, staff members should put more emphasis on considerations like neighborhood compatibility, the preservation of trees and availability of on-street parking.

All are issues that have attracted residents to testify at City Hall by the dozens in the past several years as a post-recession building boom has ruffled some feathers in long-established neighborhoods.

"I don't support the philosophy of cramming in density at all costs," Fritz wrote in the memo, obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive. "We need a more balanced approach."

The directive won't impact development that's allowed outright under city code. Rather, it's a change in how planners make "discretionary" land-use decisions, in which some criteria is subjective.

Homebuilders say they've already noticed a shift at the bureau. Rather than hearing "no," however, they're often hearing "I don't know." That has builders and developers worried. Like most businesses, they want certainty when it comes to regulations and how they're applied.

"If you know the code, there's predictability," said Douglas MacLeod, a real estate agent who works in land acquisition and development. "Now it's complete unpredictability."

The shift is the most significant sign of Fritz's influence on the bureau since Mayor Charlie Hales assigned responsibility for its oversight to her in June 2013.

In an interview Monday, Fritz said she wanted to be clear with bureau staff about the expectations of the new City Council, which had overruled city planners' approval of development projects twice last year.

"I'm not going to interfere with their day-to-day professional decision making," Fritz said. "I want to be clear at the policy level."

Her memo advised planners they "do not have to 'get to yes' with every project." But, she said, they should guide developers on how they could tweak their project to could make them more acceptable.

"I want them to give due consideration to the neighborhood as well as the applicants," she said. "It's not one or the other. It's both."

So far, the shift is most evident in an area where Fritz and developers have tangled before: skinny houses.

As a neighborhood activist and then a member of the Portland Planning Commission, Fritz fought the proliferation of skinny houses -- typically built on narrow 2,500-square-foot lots -- in areas that had been zoned for 5,000-square-foot lots.

Now that battle is spilling over into areas zoned for greater density.

The bureau had, with some restrictions, routinely approved narrow lots in the R2.5 zone -- areas of the city that have a density goal of one residential unit every 2,500 square feet.

In a city where the typical lot is 5,000 square feet, it's been common for builders to tear down one house on a lot zoned R2.5, split the lot down the middle and build two houses. They say they're more affordable, and they don't have trouble finding buyers.

In October, the Portland City Council denied a lot division sought by infill developer Vic Remmers, overruling staff at the Bureau of Development Services and a city hearings officer. It agreed with the

Woodstock Neighborhood Association that the lot arrangement, which would create two skinny lots around 30 feet wide, would be incompatible with the existing neighborhood.

The rebuke of the bureau's original findings on the case sent a message it needed to figure out how to account for the character of the existing neighborhood.

The decision doesn't mean skinny houses can't be built in a given neighborhood, said Rebecca Esau, who oversees the land-use division at the Bureau of Development Services. But they might be limited in height or other ways to ensure they fit in.

The bureau, however, hasn't approved a land division in the R2.5 zone since October, shortly after the Woodstock neighborhood decision. Some builders now report they're being advised to withdraw their applications for land divisions.

Greg Cochell planned to divide a 75-foot-wide lot at Southeast 92nd and Yamhill and build three houses. He ran the plan by the city before buying the property and was told it would likely be approved.

Now, he says, two of the 25-foot lots he was seeking are in limbo. Bureau staff have said his plans wouldn't be compatible with the neighborhood, where most lots are 50 feet wide. If he can't build three houses, he said, he's not likely to break even on his investment.

"What's worse is, there's been no code change, no statute change of any kind," he said. "They're evidently just interpreting the code differently, and they've given no notice or guidance to the builders."

Justin Wood, a builder and lobbyist for the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland, said he thinks a builder will challenge the new interpretation of the code to the Land Use Board of Appeals.

"It flies in the face of all common sense," Wood said. "It makes it hard to do density in the neighborhoods that are zoned for density."

The Woodstock case points to the difficulty of determining what's "compatible." A hearings officer who reviewed the case before the City Council described compatibility as "particularly vexing from a legal standpoint because they are so subjective as to be nearly meaningless as a standard."

Terry Griffiths, the Woodstock Neighborhood Association's land-use co-chair, said she realizes the concept of compatibility is one that's subjective. And although she's no fan of skinny houses, she saw the case as more about the way those particular houses would have been arranged and didn't realize her neighborhood's case would have any significance beyond the corner of Southeast 40th and Reedway.

"I'm not sure I foresaw that," she said. "Personally, I don't grieve for (skinny houses). But I realize there is a question of affordability."

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales pulled in \$21,000 in campaign contributions in past few weeks

*By Andrew Theen
February 16, 2015*

In an interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive one month ago, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales confirmed he'd been asking longtime supporters for campaign contributions.

Those requests were fruitful, according to state records.

Hales pulled in \$21,000 in campaign contributions from a handful of supporters in the past few weeks alone, dating back to Jan. 13.

The first-term mayor hasn't explicitly said he's seeking a second term in 2016, although his enthusiasm at the State of the City address Jan. 30 and other appearances around town indicate he's ready to announce sooner rather than later.

Hales couldn't be immediately reached for comment Monday.

The early contributors largely backed Hales' 2012 campaign, too.

On Friday, the Portland Mercury reported a \$5,000 contribution from John Bollier, the president of transportation contractor Stacy and Witbeck. Willamette Week also reported on the new contributions, posted on state servers on Monday.

Bollier's company is behind the construction of the TriMet Orange Line to Milwaukie. Hales met with the executive on his fourth workday at City Hall. Bollier gave Hales \$6,600 in his initial mayoral campaign, with the company chipping in \$25,000.

John Carroll, a Pearl District developer and prior campaign contributor, gave \$5,000. New Seasons Markets co-founder Stan Amy gave \$1,000.

Junki Yoshida, CEO of the Yoshida Group, also chipped in \$1,000.

The Portland Tribune

Policies set for sale of city properties

*By Jim Redden
February 17, 2015*

Following the controversial sale of surplus Water Bureau property in Southwest Portland for residential development, the Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services have developed new policies for disposing of properties they no longer need.

The new policies are especially important because BES, which operates the sewer system, soon will begin selling many of the properties it bought for staging areas during the construction of the \$1.4 billion Big Pipe project.

Commissioner Nick Fish, who is in charge of both bureaus, will brief the City Council on the new policies on Wednesday. They include far more public notification of the sales than had been required when the Water Bureau sold a decommissioned water tank to Renaissance Homes.

"The community in Southwest Portland raised legitimate concerns about that sale and were very helpful in developing the new policies," Fish said.

The sale, which had only been advertised with a single posting on Craigslist, sparked protests from neighbors who opposed the developer's plan to demolish the tank and build three houses on the wooded parcel. Renaissance paid \$140,000 for the .07-acre parcel, which neighbors thought was far below its market value.

Fish, who was assigned the bureau after the property was sold, said his hands were tied because the sales contract was legally binding. The Water Bureau is currently moving a fire hydrant there, which could allow development to begin soon.

The new policies require the directors of each bureau and the commissioner in charge of them to ask the council to designate properties as surplus. Other city agencies then must be notified that the properties are available and given the opportunity to acquire them. If they decline, the properties will be offered to Metro, the elected regional government, and the state of Oregon.

If no agencies want them, the city council must approve them for sale. Neighborhood and business associations in the surrounding areas also must be notified of the potential sales. More public advertising is required if the sales proceed. And both bureaus will have websites that list all surplus properties to be sold.

The council briefing is expected to include examples of how the new policies are working. The Bureau of Internal Business Services also is working on a citywide surplus property sale policy.

Activists want bigger, faster effort by city to save neighborhoods

*By Jim Redden
February 17, 2015*

Neighborhood and preservation activists who are hoping the city will act quickly to slow the increase of residential demolition and replacement projects are going to be a little disappointed.

Mayor Charlie Hales said that preserving neighborhood character is a top priority during his recent State of the City speech. He also has promised to appoint a task force to address the issue. However, the two specific initiatives that have been proposed to date could take years to complete.

Both initiatives are included as budget requests from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. One request is for \$332,000 to pay for an 18-month Single Family Development Review Program. The other is for \$133,000 for the first phase of a multiyear project to update the city's Historic Resources Inventory. The funds are requested for the annual budget that begins July 1. They must be approved by the City Council for the projects to start.

Activists repeatedly have testified before the council that there is no time to wait. They include representatives of the grassroots United Neighborhoods for Reform, the Architectural Heritage Center and Restore Oregon nonprofit organizations, and the city's Historic Landmarks Commission.

Residential demolition and replacement projects are increasing as the economy improves. According to the most recent figures, the Bureau of Development Services is expected to issue 370 demolition permits this year, up from 281 in 2013 and 312 in 2014. That does not include permits for major renovation projects that replace the majority of existing houses.

The activists complain that the replacement houses are almost always much larger and more expensive than the original houses, reducing the amount of affordable housing and changing the character of the blocks where they occur. Many of the projects are happening in a limited number of desirable close-in neighborhoods, increasing their impact.

Home builders say they are only responding to market demand for new houses in those parts of town where people most want to live. They say the replacement houses are larger and more expensive than the original ones because that is what buyers are looking for these days.

The Single Family Development Review Program is intended to respond to those concerns by exploring possible size and design restrictions on the replacement houses, among other things. According to BPS, the money would fund 2.6 full-time-equivalent positions and the bureau would dedicate another two FTE to the project. It would require extensive public outreach and engagement in almost all neighborhoods.

The Historic Resources Inventory project is intended to update a list of historically significant properties in the city that was first compiled in 1984. In addition to being out of date, the original inventory did not survey many properties in East Portland, which the request says is "underappreciated as a cultural resource to the city." The current inventory only includes one property east of 82nd Avenue.

Both requests say that grants also will be sought to increase the funding available for the projects.

Other issues the activists want addressed include the way houses currently are being demolished. Most are simply knocked down by heavy equipment and hauled off to landfills. Complaints include hazardous materials being released into the air, including asbestos and lead-based paint particles, and the loss of reusable building materials. The activists argue the city should require that the houses be deconstructed by hand with strict environmental controls.

Willamette Week

Mayor Charlie Hales Is Building a Re-election War Chest With \$21,000 in New Donations

By Aaron Mesh
February 16, 2015

Mayor Charlie Hales hasn't officially announced he's seeking a second term in 2016—but his campaign war chest says he's made his decision.

Hales has raised \$21,000 in the past two months, collecting campaign donations from pillars of the city's power structure—especially real estate developers.

The mayor's new batch of political contributions includes \$5,000 from Pearl District developer John Carroll, \$1,000 from New Seasons Market co-founder Stan Amy and \$1,000 from Pendleton Woolen Mills president C. M. "Mort" Bishop III. Most of the donations were made within the past two weeks.

Hales' office, which has refused for a month to confirm rumors Hales will seek a second term, could not immediately be reached for comment.

The Portland Mercury first reported Friday that Hales had picked up a \$5,000 check from John Bollier, the president of construction firm Stacy and Witbeck. The other donations were listed on state filings today.

The Portland Mercury

Bike Share's Delayed Again, But PBOT's Director Guarantees a 2016 Launch

By Dirk VanderHart
February 13, 2015

You saw this coming, but now it's official: Portland's not getting a bike share system this year.

Again.

Those tidings come straight from Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat, who sat down with the Mercury earlier this afternoon. After two years of delay—Portlanders were initially told they'd be zooming around on public bikes by spring 2013—Treat says we've got a third coming to us.

But she also made a forceful promise, even pounding her hand on the table with each syllable as she did so.

"We will launch in 2016," Treat said. She stopped the table-pounding to add "I don't know what it's going to look like, but we will launch."

How? we asked. She wouldn't say. Has there been some new promise of funding? Treat was silent, except to note that Portland is still sitting on around \$1.8 million left over from a 2012 Metro grant. "Even if that's all we launch with, we're launching. We have made a commitment and those funds are available for bike share."

Treat's got some experience in such things. She was a deputy director at Chicago's Department of Transportation when the city was getting its Divvy Bike system off the ground. But Divvy's business model isn't the same as what Portland's been attempting: finding lucrative corporate sponsorships that, along with user fees, could sustain a 750-bike system here.

Treat's promise could mean Portland is content to launch a far-smaller system with what funds we have. Or she might pursue a plan where additional public funds subsidize our system. (She didn't indicate or hint that to me. It's merely a possibility, but we've noted before Treat's shown signs she's sympathetic to that model.) Or maybe there's a bunch more federal money up for grabs. It's all unclear, except for the fist pounding and the guaranteeing.

Portland initially promised citizens a bike share launch in 2013, but has had to repeatedly push things back because no one wants to sponsor our system, and the people we planned to buy equipment from went bankrupt. There's been no sign of life in the program for a while now, but change continues. Former Portland outfit Alta Bicycle Share recently moved to New York City after being acquired by real estate honchos out there. It is now known as Motivate, but still has a contract with Portland to bring the city bike share.

Treat wouldn't say whether Motivate will be involved in whatever plans she has for next year. We've already paid the company tens of thousands of dollars, including a cool \$40,000 for a report that was only supposed to be turned in once Motivate (then Alta) had "secured" us millions in sponsorships.

Charlie Hales Has Begun Raising Serious Campaign Cash—from a Longtime Political Supporter

*By Denis C. Theriault
February 13, 2015*

It's been 16 years or so—the end of Vera Katz's second term—since Portland's had an incumbent mayor running for re-election. Put that way, it seems like an astounding amount of time.

But that streak appears over.

Transaction Information (Original)			
Transaction ID :	1978537	Transaction Date :	01/13/2015
Transaction Type :	Contribution	Due Date :	02/12/2015 11:59:00 PM
Transaction Sub Type :	Cash Contribution	Filed Date :	02/12/2015 11:59:00 PM
Payment Method :		Check :	
Amount :	\$5,000.00	Aggregate :	\$5,000.00
Interest Rate :		Repayment Schedule :	
Description :		Exam Letter Date :	
Agent :		Process Status :	Filed
Payer of Personal Expenditure :			
Purpose :			
Address Book Information			
Address Book Type :	Individual		
Name :	John Bollier		
Address :	7616 SE 28th Ave Portland OR 97202		
Occupation :	Senior Executive		
Employer Name :	Stacy and Witbeck Portland OR	Occupation Letter Date :	
Other Information			
Associations :			
In-Kind/Independent Expenditures :			
CoSigner Obligations :			

About a month or so after Mayor Charlie Hales demurred on the subject of re-election, he's just reported a very serious contribution with the state elections office: \$5,000 from John Bollier, the president of prominent transportation contracting firm Stacy and Witbeck.

Hales' spokesman, Dana Haynes, reminded me that his boss has yet to announce his next steps but said he'd check again to see if anything had changed. But reading between the lines here, it's hard to see Hales not about ready to leap in.

For one thing, Bollier appears somewhat tight with Hales. In 2012, when Hales was finding creative ways to get around a self-imposed \$600 campaign donation cap from individuals and organizations, Bollier was one of the Hales campaign's "deputy prospects"—charged with helping collect checks and raise thousands from other big wheels in town.

And they've also apparently seen fit to talk business together after Hales was elected. In 2013, the Oregonian reported Hales and Bollier meeting about land acquisitions along the new light rail line to Milwaukie. After those meetings, the paper reported Hales had ordered staff to expedite permit applications submitted by Stacy and Witbeck.

Hales has been sending other signals he's not looking to be Portland's third consecutive one-term mayor—like getting cozy with labor leader Tom Chamberlain at his State of the City speech, announcing some \$15 minimum wage news that was also applauded by 2012 backer Service Employees International Union.

The mayor did confirm last month that he's been asking for donations. And he's already recorded some small ones in the past few days. But this one's serious. Serious enough that it strains credibility to say he's still just thinking about a chase for a second term.

Daily Journal of Commerce

Photos: Water Bureau reservoir project nears home stretch

By Sam Tenney
February 12, 2015



The reservoir is comprised of two cells, each with a 12.5 million gallon capacity. Both cells together measure approximately 400 by 300 feet, with a total of 252 support columns.

25-million-gallon underground concrete reservoir under construction in Southeast Portland is slated to go online this spring. Hoffman Construction is the contractor on the Portland Water Bureau's \$90 million project, which replaces a 10-million-gallon steel tank formerly at the site.

Work on the project began in late 2012 with the demolition of the 43-year-old tank. Following the demolition, nearly a year of excavation at the site took place, while concrete for the reservoir began being poured in fall of 2013.

Around 2,000 truckloads of concrete were brought in to pour a total of 266 squares, each measuring 20 feet by 20 feet. The squares were poured in a checkerboard pattern to control shrinkage cracking. The reservoir's walls, roof, and 252 support columns were completed in summer 2014.

Backfilling around the sides of the reservoir began last fall, and continues with the installation of mechanically stabilized earth walls. The reservoir will begin operations after being disinfected and commissioned. Work at the site will continue with construction of access roads, fencing, landscaping and mitigation plantings. Total completion of the project is slated for this fall.

The Portland Business Journal

Get ready to hail a Tesla taxi in Portland — if city hall votes yes

*By Wendy Culverwell
February 17, 2015*

The Longview painting executive behind a Tesla-based taxi service is on his way to bringing an electric fleet to Portland.

On Feb. 12, the city's Private for Hire Transportation Board of Review authorized 242 new taxi permits and recommended the city council approve an additional 51 permits for Ron Knori's EcoCab.

If approved, the board's recommendation will boost the city's tax fleet to 753 vehicles.

Knori submitted his application to the city last Halloween.

EcoCab would employ 32 drivers at the outset and treat them as employees rather than independent contractors. As employees, they will be eligible for sick leave, paid time off and insurance stipends.

Knori plans to launch with two Tesla Model S vehicles, 10 Nissan Leafs and several handicap-accessible vans, with the fleet expanding over time to 50, comprised mostly of Teslas.

The company intends to lease space for its business on North Columbia Boulevard.

Fritz wants to raise bar for Portland neighborhood developments

*By Andy Giegerich
February 17, 2015*

A Portland City Commissioner has asked city regulators to take closer looks at developments within Portland's residential neighborhoods.

According to the Oregonian, Amanda Fritz wants the Bureau of Development Services to cast a more critical eye on the ways proposals could affect the neighborhoods.

As more mixed-use and multi-family projects pop up all over town, Fritz asked the Bureau to examine projects that require land-use decisions that may include subjective criteria, according to the Oregonian.

"I want them to give due consideration to the neighborhood as well as the applicants," she said. "It's not one or the other. It's both."

Fritz made the request in a Feb. 5 letter to the BDS land use division, published on the O's website.