

The Oregonian

Commissioner Amanda Fritz 'disgusted' as City Council approves downtown Portland development plan

*By Brad Schmidt
March 06, 2015*

The Portland City Council approved a sweeping plan Thursday to guide downtown-area development for the next 20 years over the scathing objections of Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

The West Quadrant Plan, adopted 4-1, outlines broad policies that will help shape the city's future skyline, although many key changes won't go into effect until the City Council approves new zoning sometime in the months ahead.

The City Council first considered the plan last month but delayed action. Fritz, a former planning commissioner, proposed 49 of the 72 plan tweaks considered by the City Council during a three-hour hearing Thursday.

But when Fritz couldn't get traction from the City Council to pare back proposed height increases at the Hawthorne and Morrison bridgehead properties, or to maintain zoning within Goose Hollow, she blasted the process.

"I'm absolutely disgusted with this entire hearing," she said. Fritz went on to say that the City Council was essentially authorizing spot zoning changes to benefit a handful of developers who are tight with members of the City Council.

Commissioner Nick Fish responded, without directly calling out Fritz, saying it was inappropriate to question motives or make "wild claims."

Commissioner Dan Saltzman said allowing more height on select properties will be good for the city.

"A skyline defines a city," he said. "There's nothing to be ashamed about."

The West Quadrant Plan is a 200-plus-page policy to guide development and growth for downtown Portland, including Old Town Chinatown, the Pearl District, Goose Hollow, the West End, the South Waterfront and south downtown hemmed in by Interstate 405. Planners have forecast about 31,000 new residents and 23,000 new jobs by 2035, compared to 2010 numbers.

The plan will eventually be combined with two other efforts for North/Northeast Portland and the Central Eastside to make up a new 20-year plan for the Central City.

The slew of proposed changes created several head-scratching moments as officials regularly lost track of what they were considering and what had been approved.

"I'm a little bit confused myself," Joe Zehnder, the city's chief planner, said at one point.

Much of the contentious debate Thursday focused on building heights, Tom McCall Waterfront Park and Goose Hollow.

Fritz objected to proposed height increases at the Morrison and Hawthorne bridgeheads, saying new limits of 250 feet or 325 feet were too high and didn't offer an appropriate step down to the Waterfront Park. Today's restrictions are 75 feet and 235 feet.

But the rest of the City Council and planners disagreed with Fritz, noting that Multnomah County is interested in building a new courthouse at the Hawthorne bridgehead and Melvin Mark Development Co. wants to build at the Morrison bridgehead.

Fritz also scoffed at a proposal to increase height limits mostly along the Willamette River between the Broadway and Fremont bridges. The existing maximum is 175 feet but the new policy calls for up to 250 feet, if developers offer some sort of public benefit.

That change would impact only a handful of properties, including: land owned by the Portland Development Commission such as Centennial Mills, which could be redeveloped by the Schnitzer family's Harsch Investment Properties; property held the Naito family; land owned by developer Jim Winkler; and property owned by developer Yoshio Kurosaki.

As a point of reference, the new heights for the Pearl waterfront would equal the tallest condo towers in the South Waterfront District, which are 250 feet.

Mayor Charlie Hales, at time noticeably irritated with Fritz, said the City Council was only authorizing more study and zoning changes would need approval later.

"No one can build that (250-foot) building," he said.

Fritz also lost an effort to ensure residential zoning on certain Goose Hollow properties, as planners and the City Council preferred mixed-use zoning that allows for commercial and office development.

Fritz did get her way on one topic: she delayed creation of a new master plan for Waterfront Park from sometime in the next five years to sometime in the next 20 years.

Fritz, in charge of Portland Parks & Recreation, said Waterfront Park shouldn't be prioritized over more than a half-dozen parks in east Portland that have never had a master plan.

Hales, in closing out Thursday's hearing, praised efforts behind a West Quadrant plan that took about two years to produce.

"Good work is being done here," he said.

Last Thursday: Portland mayor wants to limit event to three summer months

*By Brad Schmidt
March 05, 2015*

The frequency of Portland's popular Last Thursday event on Northeast Alberta Street would be cut from five months to three under a plan released Thursday by Mayor Charlie Hales.

Hales wants to limit the city's commitment to only the last Thursdays in June, July and August, eliminating May and September.

The move would cut costs by up to 40 percent, according to the mayor's office. The city has spent about \$80,000 a year on the event.

"Taxpayers throughout the city have picked up the tab for Last Thursday," Hales said in a prepared statement. "That's not a sustainable practice, and it's not fair."

The event originally began as an arts walk but now is a popular festival that attracts up to 20,000 people during peak months to 15 blocks of Alberta Street. Its popularity became a problem as residents complained of all-night partying, prompting Hales last year to close the event at 9 p.m.

The upcoming season marks Last Thursday's 18th. Dana Haynes, a spokesman for Hales, said organizers could still do shop-centric festivities in May or September, but the city won't close the street -- the fulcrum for Last Thursday in those months.

Hales would also like to see private sponsors step forward to help pay for the event while still meeting three goals: celebrating arts, ensuring the event doesn't bother neighbors, and reducing costs to taxpayers.

"To accomplish these three goals," he said in the statement, "Last Thursday probably has to get smaller, temporarily, in order to get bigger and better in the long run."

Mount Tabor reservoir advocates ask Governor Kate Brown to intervene: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Andrew Theen
March 06, 2015*

Floy Jones, an outspoken supporter of Mount Tabor's reservoirs and a cosponsor of the failed 2014 ballot measure to create an independent Portland Public Water District, asked Governor Kate Brown to intervene in the more than decade-old fight over the future of the historic structures.

"We applaud your efforts to improve government transparency, reform public records laws, and address conflicts of interest," Jones wrote earlier this week.

"Conflicts of interest, revolving-door consultants, cronyism, and stonewalling release of public records are problems that have long led to a lack of public trust in the Portland Water Bureau."

The Portland City Council will hold a public hearing on May 14 at 2 p.m. to discuss dueling land use appeals filed last week. The city is planning on disconnecting the three historic reservoirs at the Southeast Portland park. The reservoirs hold Portland's drinking water, piped in via gravity from the Bull Run Watershed.

According to Jones and her group the Friends of the Reservoirs, "the community's preferred course of action" is for Brown to order the Oregon Health Authority to adjust the timeline needed to comply with federal regulators that called for open reservoirs to be treated or removed from service this year.

Jones said former Governor John Kitzhaber ignored similar calls for intervention, costing ratepayers "over \$160 million short-term and hundreds of millions more long-term."

Portland built underground reservoirs at Kelly Butte and Powell Buttes to replace open air reservoirs at Tabor and Washington Parks. Water officials said the city must have the reservoirs disconnected by December 2015.

Jones suggested another timeline. "Direct the Oregon Health Authority to approve a 'temporary' disconnection of the Mt. Tabor reservoirs. In this manner, Portland could stop serving drinking water from the Tabor reservoirs by December 2015, the current negotiated deadline, but avoid the aggressive digging, cutting and plugging of pipes."

Portland is following federal guidelines, the so-called LT2 rule, to address what government officials say could be the risk of a Cryptosporidium outbreak (a waterborne parasite that hasn't posed a problem in Portland but is blamed for leaving 400,000 people ill and causing the deaths of more than 100 people in 1993 in Milwaukee).

A call to the governor's media office wasn't immediately returned Friday morning.

The Portland Mercury

Commish Fritz Takes on Council and Developers

*By Steven Humphrey
March 6, 2014*

Marjorie mentioned this in Good Morning, News—but it's worth reading the entire Oregonian article about Commissioner Amanda Fritz and her battle against the rest of the council and Portland's most high-powered developers. For those coming in late to the show, the West Quadrant Plan (highly beloved by the PBA—shock) is a plan two years in the making and has the potential to drastically reshape the waterfront skyline... that is if council approves the zoning changes. Commissioner Fritz is especially upset about the proposed changes in building height—particularly along the river between the Broadway and Fremont bridges. The current maximum height allowance is 175 feet, but the new plan would bump that up to 250 feet (roughly the same height as the biggest buildings on South Waterfront). During yesterday's contentious meeting, Fritz, needless to say, was not amused. From the O:

"I'm absolutely disgusted with this entire hearing," she said. Fritz went on to say that the City Council was essentially authorizing spot zoning changes to benefit a handful of developers who are tight with members of the City Council.

Commissioner Nick Fish responded, without directly calling out Fritz, saying it was inappropriate to question motives or make "wild claims."

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"A skyline defines a city," he said. "There's nothing to be ashamed about."

And that's the crux of this topic: Density makes for a robust, thriving city... but at what point does it start to hamper that city's livability? Fritz was overwhelmed by the 4-1 adoption of the plan—but she

was absolutely right to put up a fuss. Someone on council needs to be looking very carefully at developers like the Schnitzer family who already wield too much power over the direction our city is going.

Read the Oregonian article for a lot more detail on this plan and yesterday's battle. It's an important issue. And while you're at it, check out this week's Hall Monitor in the Mercury... which floats the idea of a Fritz mayoral run. Whether right or wrong on this particular debate, we like the cut of her jib.

Daily Journal of Commerce

Updated comprehensive plan due for review

By Inka Bajandas

March 5, 2015

The Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission will continue discussing the draft update to the city's comprehensive plan in an upcoming work session focused on housing needs, residential density and transportation infrastructure upgrades.

Commissioners are scheduled to meet Tuesday from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. at 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave. in Suite 2500A to discuss portions of the draft 2035 Comprehensive Plan – a long-range look at anticipated growth and development in Portland over the next 20 years.

City staff reports for the work session published online recently include recommended amendments to the draft plan based on public testimony regarding housing issues, residential densities and the proposed Transportation System Plan.

Planned work session discussion topics include prioritizing transportation infrastructure projects to keep up with Portland's growing population and meeting housing needs while addressing concerns about affordability, gentrification and displacement. Commissioners will also discuss increasing or decreasing the amount of residential density allowed in certain parts of the city as well as the impacts of infill development on established neighborhoods, said Eden Dabbs, spokeswoman for the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

City planners last summer released the draft comprehensive plan. The effort updates the current comprehensive plan, adopted in 1980, based on a Metro forecast that Portland will gain 200,000 residents between now and 2025.

Tuesday's work session will be the fourth featuring discussion of the draft plan before a vote by the commission this spring whether to recommend its goals, policies and land use map to the Portland City Council for approval, Dabbs said. A fifth work session is scheduled for March 24 at 3 p.m. to discuss additional topics not covered in previous sessions, she said.

This summer and fall, the commission will review the plan's proposed zoning changes under a separate approval process, Dabbs said. If the City Council were to adopt the updated comprehensive plan, it would need state approval to take effect, she said. The new zones likely would not go into full effect until 2017.

GoLocalPDX

Is Portland's Homeless Problem Undermining its Potential?

By Annie Ellison

March 5, 2015

Pastor Steve Trujillo can tell the difference between the people sleeping on Portland's streets who are locals, and the people who are moving through.

He calls them "the travelers."

Trujillo, who serves as the public safety chair for the Portland Downtown Neighborhood Association and has been working with the city's homeless population since 1991, applauds the public services available to unhoused people.

But he said it's those very services, Oregon's wide-ranging free speech law, and high tourist traffic that attract a vagrant population that is undermining the city's expanding business and tourism industries.

"It's not the homeless of Portland that are causing problems, the bad behavior that drives away the business and tourists--it's the travelers," Trujillo said. "They tend to pick the cities that are lenient."

In 2004, the city of Portland launched a 10-year plan to end homelessness. When 2014 came around, the number of people in Multnomah County who were sleeping outside, in a vehicle, an abandoned building, or transitional housing had increased to 4,441, according to the most recent numbers from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The recent approach taken by officials from multiple agencies in Multnomah County has been a comprehensive, "housing first" strategy intertwining law enforcement, social services, and mental health and medical services, called A Home For Everyone (HFE).

"Are we being successful, or are we being so generous we're attracting a lot of homeless people from outside the city?" Trujillo asks. "If you provide a good thing, people will come."

Multnomah County spokesperson David Austin said the HFE strategy is an improvement from the 10-year plan.

Sidewalks and Free Speech

One thing that makes Portland, and Oregon, less hostile than other states for unhoused people is the state's robust free speech law. Under the provisions of Article I, Section 8 of the Oregon Constitution, a person can be on the sidewalk so long as he or she is three feet from the curb.

The state mandates how sidewalks are used, not cities, meaning a change in law must come from the state legislature. Portland has no laws governing behaviors like panhandling.

According to the Portland Housing Bureau's Matt Grumm, no plans are in the works to implement legislation, such as an aggressive panhandling ordinance, which have been implemented by other West Coast cities.

"It's your right to speak and be there," Grumm said.

According to Travel Portland, tourists spent \$4.6 billion in the city in 2014. They come to see the bridges, the bike scene, and Powell's City of Books, and it's good news for the economy.

Travel Portland's Marcus Hibden said the organization could not comment on the effect the city's homeless population has had on tourism. Tourists flock to line up outside Voodoo Donuts in the city's Old Town district, the hub of Portland's homeless services.

"Every once in a while we might hear something," Hibden said. "Everyone has a different comfort level when it comes to those issues."

Doug Sera, a former downtown hotel worker, said he regularly interacted with homeless people and police regarding public urination, drug use and sleeping on hotel property.

"We've had guests say they wouldn't be back to Portland because of the homeless problem," he wrote in a Facebook post.

Trujillo remembers the owner of a dress store at SW 3rd and Stark who eventually took her business from the area because of people--largely travelers--sleeping in the doorway.

"She had an issue with them staying next door with pitbulls, keeping people from coming in," he said.

A person can sit within three feet of the curb, in the "furniture zone" of the sidewalk, and legally cannot be forced to move. Numerous attempts to enact a "sit-lie" ordinance have been struck down or expired.

"Portland is an easy target for travelers because people are generous and the rules are lenient," Trujillo said.

Locals vs. Travelers

With services located in Old Town, and near central Southeast Portland's Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, and St. Francis Parish, the majority of Portland's unhoused people do not go far from the area.

Encampments in Central Southeast, near the Hawthorne and Morrison Bridges are growing, according to advocates, as the weather warms. The encampments affect where customers decide to park their cars, which affects nearby businesses, said Michael Fournier, a homeless advocate who operates Film the Police.

Of three people found dead near the Willamette River's East Bank last week, two were homeless. The third, Francisco Marcelo Flores, 61, also died of drowning, though his living situation was unknown, according to the Multnomah County Sheriff's Dept.

Jamee Riebhoff, 26, who died of a medical event, was found on the East Bank's esplanade March 26. Robert Allen Hannick, 48, was first spotted in the river under a drain pipe the same day.

"My first thought was 'I bet he climbed in the pipe looking for shelter'" said Fournier. "Because of police pressure, people can't secure shelter."

HFE is currently outlining a strategy for the next decade, while the first of a three-pronged Homeless Bill of Rights, which would guarantee the right to sleep on sidewalks, has been introduced in the Oregon legislature.