

The Oregonian

Why Portland's budget-busting sewer building is killing birds

*By Brad Schmidt
March 12, 2015*

The budget-busting sewer building that recently cost Portland's longest-tenured administrator his job is now taking more victims: birds.

An estimated 27 birds have crashed into the Columbia Building's stylized glass façade since October, with at least eight confirmed deaths, according to Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services.

The frequency of crashes has alarmed the Audubon Society of Portland and city employees, who began taking steps this month to document the problem so they can craft a solution. The move comes just as Portland prepares for an influx of birds migrating north this spring.

Bird advocates and city officials say the strikes could happen anywhere and are not unique to the Columbia Building, touted for its green construction standards but lacking a bird-friendly design.

The crashes mark the latest trouble for a now-notorious project that saw costs triple to \$11.5 million and prompted a record-setting severance payment of nearly \$200,000 to Dean Marriott when he resigned as bureau director in January.

"Obviously this building has a more-than-controversial history," said Bob Sallinger, conservation director for the Audubon Society.

But because crashes are the second-leading killer of birds, behind habitat loss, Sallinger warned: "I think you can overstate the irony on this thing."

Jane Bacchieri, Portland's watershed manager, said city officials have been taking the issue seriously since before being contacted by Sallinger on March 1.

"It's something we want more information on, and we want to figure out a solution if it's a chronic problem," she said.

Although employees began working in the Columbia Building in January 2014, officials didn't begin anecdotally monitoring bird strikes until October. The bureau now estimates 25 crashes last fall resulting in the confirmed deaths of six birds.

In mid-January, employees decided to create a formal document to track collisions - including what window the bird hit, the species and if it died or flew off.

This year, at least two more birds have crashed into the building and died. The second death - of a northern flicker woodpecker - was reported Monday, the same day that city officials finalized their new tracking form.

The Columbia Building's celebrated design is likely creating the problem. Bureau leadership wanted to "showcase the sustainability of City and BES values" and signed off on a building to meet LEED gold standards, including a design with lots of natural light. The elaborate, curved project includes a bay of 16 large windowpanes that make up the building's backside.

Just north of the building's 12-foot windows is a bird paradise: A courtyard with towering trees, a small feeder for hummingbirds and a nearby pond frequented by a blue heron - which happens to be the bird on the bureau's official logo.

Sallinger and city officials suspect that birds, perhaps migrating from out of the area, stop to perch at trees in the courtyard. The site is just off the Columbia Slough, and Portland is along the migratory Pacific Flyway, making it an ideal stop.

From there, the birds unknowingly crash into the glass - either trying to fly into the building thinking they can pass through, or confused by the reflection of the trees in the courtyard.

"I can certainly see why there would be a problem there," Sallinger said.

Design for the Columbia Building began in 2010 and construction had largely been completed by Oct. 2013, when the City Council unanimously adopted a resolution to promote bird-friendly designs, as recommended by the Audubon Society.

The City Council pledged to "seek opportunities to incorporate bird friendly building design and practices into City facilities."

Among other things, the guidelines recommend treating windows with film, etching, or designs to help birds recognize a glass barrier. The advice applies to building heights of up to 40 feet and calls attention to the first floor below eco-roofs - which the Columbia Building features.

"The building was under construction before those guidelines were finalized," said Linc Mann, a bureau spokesman.

Sallinger said he's not surprised the Columbia Building is having problems and suggested Portland leaders take the opportunity to adopt stronger policies.

"I'm not giving them a pass on this at all," he said. "But at the same time, I don't think the mechanisms are in place to actually really raise the elevation of this issue in a way that it truly gets flagged."

Already, some city engineers working in the Columbia Building have tried to make quick, cheap improvements to alert birds about the windows. They've posted small leaf decals on the reflective glass. Other short-term options may be considered.

Applying a film to the window, which would help birds recognize it as a barrier, is estimated to run up to \$15,000.

Bacchieri said city and Audubon Society officials will likely study the problem through about June before identifying or recommending long-term fixes.

"I think any city bureau," she said, "would be frustrated by this type of situation."

The Columbia Building has frustrated a variety of birds, too, although not all incidents have been deadly encounters.

The heron? It's been seen pecking at its reflection in the glass.

Nick Caleb to challenge Steve Novick in 2016 Portland City Council race

*By Brad Schmidt
March 11, 2015*

Portland Commissioner Steve Novick has his first challenger for next year's re-election campaign: Nick Caleb.

Caleb said Wednesday that he's running again for a seat on the City Council. His decision was first reported by the Portland Mercury.

Caleb is a part-time Concordia University professor who ran for Commissioner Dan Saltzman's seat last year on a \$15-per-hour fair-wage platform.

The then-30-year-old raised about \$5,600 in cash and in-kind donations for his campaign. He won the Portland Mercury's endorsement and secured 19 percent of the vote against Saltzman -- the city's longest tenured politician -- in the May 2014 primary.

Caleb was among the early supporters of the \$15-per-hour policy, which in the past year has gained momentum among politicians.

"I was really encouraged the first time around," he said, noting the challenges of running as a last-minute candidate in 2014. "I wanted people to be talking about things I cared about."

Caleb said he will maintain his focus on fair wages. He said he's also interested in police accountability and affordable housing. "I think there's just a lot more that we can do," he said of affordable housing efforts.

Novick, who said in January that he would seek re-election, won his 2012 campaign with 76 percent of the vote.

Candidates can't officially file city paperwork for the May 2016 election until September.

"I'm interested in winning," Caleb said.

Steve Novick is seeking re-election. Was there any doubt? Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Brad Schmidt
March 11, 2015*

Portland Commissioner Steve Novick, who told The Oregonian/OregonLive that he was running for re-election in January, made headlines Wednesday when he reconfirmed his election plans for 2016.

Novick has long been considered a shoo-in to seek a second term, famously signaling his intent to run amid the street fee controversy.

When Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales announced a controversial plan to collect taxes or fees to pay for road improvements, Novick quipped in May 2014: "If the voters are really mad at us, we're both up for re-election in 2016. They can throw us out."

The Oregonian noted that Novick said he would seek re-election in January, as part of a story about Commissioner Amanda Fritz's decision to seek a third term. Fritz previously said she would not run again.

At the time, Novick, in charge of the Portland Bureau of Transportation, was still stinging from a recent article about the city's street-funding woes.

The story highlighted how the City Council spent hundreds of millions of dollars on "special appropriations," such as arts programs, while not following through on a City Council resolution meant to steer utility license fees to transportation.

"Once we get the street fund established, I need to stick around to make sure that nobody steals it to spend it on art," Novick said in a text message from January.

The Portland Tribune and other news outlets reported Wednesday that Novick will seek re-election.

Novick won the seat vacated by former Commissioner Randy Leonard in 2012, securing 76 percent of the vote.

When should a job applicant's criminal history be considered? Portland debates tough issue

*By Andrew Theen
March 11, 2015*

Portland is considering new regulations that would prevent private employers from considering a job candidate's criminal history during the application and interview process.

Last year, the city banned questions relating to criminal history from its in-house job applications, joining dozens of municipalities nationwide in the so-called "ban the box" movement.

Now, Mayor Charlie Hales is partnering with the AFL-CIO, Urban League and other organizations to press for a broader policy change meant to level the playing field in Portland for applicants with a felony or other criminal history.

"We're not trying to substitute governmental control for employer's judgment," Hales said in an interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board on Monday. "What we are trying to do is get people coming out of a publicly funded criminal justice system, an extremely expensive criminal justice system, a chance to do what that justice system is labeled to be -- which is a corrections system."

Hales said Portland is not wedded to any specific policies. But under a draft ordinance provided to The Oregonian/OregonLive, one proposal would compel employers to wait until a "conditional offer of employment" has been extended before running a criminal background check.

The policy also includes the private right of action, meaning anyone who believes he or she was wrongfully denied a job by "an unlawful employment practice" could seek damages in court.

The draft ordinance allows employers to rescind a job offer if they "determine that a specific offense or conduct has a direct relationship to a person's ability to perform the duties or responsibilities of the employment."

Employers could make a judgment call regarding criminal history at that point and weigh the "nature and gravity of the offense, the time that has elapsed since the offense took place and the nature of the employment held or sought."

But employers would not be allowed to consider convictions that have been voided or expunged, charges that were resolved through diversion programs or an arrest that didn't lead to a conviction (unless charges are pending).

A bill introduced in the Oregon Legislature, introduced at the request of the AFL-CIO and Urban League, also would create penalties for using criminal charges or convictions against job applicants.

Portland's chamber of commerce circulated a news release Monday in response to the draft proposal. Though the Portland Business Alliance supports the ban the box movement, it said it wants more "balanced" policies than the current draft provides.

"Employers need flexibility to review applicant backgrounds during the interview process when they believe it is necessary given the nature of the job," President and CEO Sandra McDonough said.

Gale Castillo, president of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, said the policy "seems to set up a process that could lead to contentious legal fights rather than creating more opportunities for work. There should be a different way to achieve the goals we all agree to, which is greater employment opportunities."

According to the PBA, just 14 cities or states extend "ban the box" rules to private employers. "And of those 14, only three prohibit criminal background checks until a conditional offer has been made, and only two permit private rights of action. Most allow the checks after an initial screening or interview," the release said.

Hales, Urban League President and CEO Michael Alexander and Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain briefed the editorial board and reporters on the bare bones of the plan.

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council will hear testimony from staff and interest groups on what a new policy might mean for ex-offenders and employees in the metro area.

The mayor and his allies pitched the plan as both cost effective and the right thing to do -- saying that many ex-offenders are unfairly dumped during the screening process specifically due to their criminal pasts.

Hales included socio-economic policies, such as those that help ex-offenders, among the pillars of his State of The City Speech in January.

Alexander, who is retiring from the Urban League this spring, said Oregon's criminal justice system disproportionately jails African Americans. He noted that blacks account for 11 percent of the state's prison population, but just 2 percent of the overall population. "What we are asking is for employers to do what employers are known to do, and that's evaluate talent," he said.

Alexander said the proposal also would require employers to explain why a job offer made after the background check has been rescinded.

Chamberlain said the coalition had been working on the policy for months. "The best way to keep folks from returning to prison is a job," he added.

Portland's draft plan has additional exceptions. The policy would not apply to law enforcement or criminal justice jobs or employees who have "direct access" to children, the elderly or people with disabilities or substance abuse issues.

The City Council will accept a report and hear testimony on the topic at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

City should help ex-convicts' hiring prospects without punishing employers: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
March 10, 2015*

Second chances are hard to come by for ex-convicts. Those who have served a prison sentence, performed their community service or otherwise fulfilled every obligation imposed by a court can still feel the stigma each time they encounter the question on a job application form: Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense?

To that end, Portland eliminated the question from most of its application forms last year. It also removed a warning in city job postings that candidates might be subject to a criminal history check. The notice,

said Portland Human Resources Director Anna Kanwit, discouraged some people from even applying - regardless of whether their convictions were for offenses completely unrelated to the duties of the job being advertised.

Now the city wants to take the effort much farther. Mayor Charlie Hales told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board that he is interested in a mandate for private businesses that bars potential employers from conducting a criminal background check until after a conditional offer of employment has been made to the applicant. The employer could rescind the offer after the background check but would have to give a written explanation for why. The proposal would also give the applicant the right to sue in court.

Hales emphasized that the conversation is just beginning. City commissioners are to hear a presentation Wednesday morning about some of the ideas behind the "Ban the Box" movement - so called for its emphasis on removing the criminal-history question that applicants must check off. Cities across the country have adopted various policies restricting what governmental agencies or private businesses may consider in making their hiring decisions.

The Portland proposal, as provisionally outlined, has pitfalls. Commissioners should seek out community and business input to ensure that any final proposal avoids the logistical and legal snags detailed in a draft ordinance.

The goal of helping ex-convicts get fair consideration by potential employers is a worthy one that deserves support. Employers hurt not only ex-convicts by refusing to consider them for an open position - they hurt themselves by artificially narrowing the field of candidates who can help their businesses succeed. Shouldn't employers at the very least find out more about the type of crime, the circumstances and when it occurred before moving a candidate's application form to the trash heap? And there's the inherently human question that the proposal puts forth: Do people convicted of a crime deserve a shot at redemption?

But city officials should be careful not to punish employers. Just as employers should not issue a blanket disqualification of ex-convicts, the government should not mandate a blanket approach on when and how businesses can consider an applicant's criminal background in the hiring process. Just as a police bureau automatically prohibits candidates with felony convictions from joining the police force, so should a private housecleaning business be given leeway to drop those with a burglary conviction.

If the goal is to have a conversation about an applicant's criminal history, there's no need to wait until after a job offer has been made. An interview would be a good time to have that discussion. In fact, Seattle and other cities have adopted a ban the box type ordinance that allows an employer to evaluate criminal history before making a job offer to anyone. Unlike Portland's draft ordinance, the Seattle ordinance sets up an administrative remedy for violations, rather than grant an applicant the right to go sue the business.

Again the goal should be for an employer and applicant to have an honest conversation about whether or not they are a good match. It should not be to ensnare an employer into a lawsuit, whether merited or not.

The city leadership deserves credit for starting the conversation. But city officials should be careful not to turn a supportable "ban the box" sentiment into a "box the employer" trap.

No special treatment for Uber in Portland (OPINION)

*By Guest Columnist Noah Ernst
March 12, 2015*

Uber wants Portland to create a whole new set of for-hire transportation regulations on the merits of an app. Let's call Uber what it is: A taxi company that relies on an app that Uber would have us believe is something new and revolutionary.

It's not.

That's because -- long before Uber entered Portland illegally -- Portland cab companies began offering real-time booking through Curb, an app that connects passengers with rides provided by regulated taxis. Regrettably, many passengers just don't know about Curb. That's because cab companies can't compete with Uber's million-dollar marketing budget.

As part of its marketing, Uber has done an exceptional job of using the news media -- The Oregonian/OregonLive included -- to perpetuate the myth of the "protectionist" cab industry. It's important to note that this perception is being attributed to a regulated industry composed of small businesses. And

that the regulations imposed on the cab industry by the city, which have been layered on over the decades, are based on the city's determination of what best serves the interests of the general public.

The Oregonian/OregonLive did get it right when it called out commercial liability insurance, driver background checks, safety inspections and vehicles accommodating the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for wheelchair accessibility as the highest priorities. If Uber's safety precautions and accessibility commitments are the equal of what Portland's taxis meet, as Uber claims, then why doesn't Uber just comply with the same regulations?

And yet, Uber arrogantly flaunts its disdain for these regulations, dismissing them as antiquated and not applicable to its business model. The real difference between the Uber business model and that of traditional cab companies is that Uber blatantly breaks the law in every jurisdiction it enters. It's no different in Portland, where Uber illegally entered the market. Uber was issued more than \$67,000 in -- as of yet, unpaid -- fines by the city for this prohibited act, but to what end?

Because it breaks the law, on so many levels, Uber puts pressure on city governments across the globe until due process is exhausted, papers studying the dilemma are a mile high and the elected officials eventually give up. Fatigued elected officials throw up their hands and say, "Why not let Uber in?" -- forgetting the fact that law-abiding taxi companies would be fined or even barred from doing business if they blatantly broke the law in the same way Uber does.

This is exactly how it's played out in our city. As The Oregonian/OregonLive reports, Mayor Charlie Hales has pledged to let Uber come back to Portland on April 9, regardless of what the Private For-Hire Transportation Innovation Task Force decides, and regardless of what the City Council dictates.

We ask our fair mayor, "Why the task force if the outcome of this process is fixed?"

Clearly, it was a very productive lunch meeting the mayor shared with Uber -- a lunch meeting to which Portland's cab companies were not invited, and a lunch meeting which the mayor will not duplicate with us. Apparently, one has to be a lawbreaking entity to get the mayor to listen.

But if due process does matter in the end, we ask the mayor, city council and the task force, "Given that Uber and Portland's taxi companies each provide taxi service using apps, would it make any sense at all to give Uber, and Lyft for that matter, a different set of rules than the ones taxi companies are required to follow?"

Of course not.

Portland's cab companies embrace technology and innovation, and we welcome competition, as long as everyone operates under the same regulations -- app or no app.

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Noah Ernst, a superintendent with Radio Cab, offers these comments on behalf of the Transportation Fairness Alliance. The Transportation Fairness Alliance represents Portland's taxi industry and includes drivers and management from Broadway Cab, Green Transportation, Portland Taxi Cab Company, Sassy's Cab Co., Union Cab PDX and Radio Cab.

No Portland urban renewal without affordable housing (OPINION)

*By Guest Columnists Margaret Noel and Kathleen Hersh
March 10, 2015*

When Portland invests millions in taxpayer money, the investments should benefit a broad range of citizens. This principle guides the League of Women Voters of Portland and affordable housing advocates as we urge the City Council to delay its decision on committing to further spending in the South Waterfront urban renewal district.

Since 1999, hundreds of millions of public dollars have been spent on planning this district and installing infrastructure, including the OHSU aerial tram, Portland Streetcar, light rail, streets, sidewalks and a park. These public investments have benefited the district's private developers, landowners and institutions, facilitating their success and growth. Little has been asked of them in return.

Portland City Council is considering adding five years to the life of the South Waterfront urban renewal district. This would commit the city to tens of millions of dollars in additional property tax

expenditures. The city also plans to provide OHSU and ZRZ Realty with a substantial public investment by extending SW Bond Avenue.

We believe the urban renewal extension and additional public investments must be contingent upon 1) securing sites for future affordable housing projects from the district's major land owners (ZRZ Realty, OHSU and PSU) and 2) a commitment to develop 400 affordable units on a city-owned site near Riverplace.

In order to achieve the vision of a mixed income neighborhood where people from all walks of life can benefit from the substantial public investment, the city's housing strategy calls for securing affordable housing sites early, in exchange for infrastructure improvements. Over the years, the Portland Development Commission negotiated deals that included affordable housing. Yet longtime observers have witnessed the city release developers from affordable housing obligations in the high-rise condo area, on OHSU's block 33 adjacent to Elizabeth Caruthers Park and with PSU at the Doubletree site.

Nearly 2,500 households call South Waterfront home, but only 209 units are affordable to the clerks, janitors and health care workers who serve the neighborhood. Had the city adhered to its housing policy, close to 1,000 affordable units would be available to individuals who work or study nearby.

A recent report in *Governing* magazine (governing.com/gov-data/census/gentrification-in-cities-governing-report) places Portland at the top of a list of 50 U.S. cities that have gentrified since 2000. If Portland is going to reverse that trend it needs to seize opportunities in its urban renewal districts by leveraging its substantial public investment and requiring the developers and institutions that benefit to make land available for affordable housing.

The five-year extension of urban renewal expenditures in South Waterfront is critical to the success of ZRZ Realty's, OHSU's and PSU's plans. Until affordable housing sites have been secured, City Council should withhold approval of the extension and suspend infrastructure investments. This is the city's last chance to realize its vision of a South Waterfront neighborhood that welcomes not only the affluent, but also workers from the new Hyatt Hotel being built on land the city recently sold, as well as PSU and OHSU employees and students.

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Margaret Noel and Kathleen Hersh are co-presidents of the League of Women Voters of Portland.

Oregonians want better roads, not green boondoggles (OPINION)

*By Guest Columnist Rep. Julie Parrish
March 10, 2015*

When constituents ask me what government should do for its citizens, this suburban, minivan-driving mother of three very active boys consistently replies: "I need a road to soccer practice - that's what government should do." As a Republican who supports infrastructure like roads, bridges, libraries, police bonds and school upgrades, it's very rare when I don't vote "yes" on well-thought-out requests to support those types of projects. During the 2014 elections, one of the hottest topics for nearly every business organization, and amongst my own district residents, was the need for a responsible transportation package that supports increased infrastructure for moving goods, freight, services and people across our state.

While the road to a transportation package vote goes through all 60 legislative districts, in a district like mine, transportation is a top priority. The city of Tualatin, which represents roughly half of my district, surveyed residents about their governmental priorities and concerns. Their top response was transportation. No other topic even came close. The second-most chosen response was "none of the above." Centered in my district is the juncture where drivers headed northbound make a daily decision - fight I-5 traffic, or take their chances on I-205, which narrows to two lanes right through my district, tying up the freeway for hours and diverting high-speed traffic to back country and city roads. Highway 43 in West Linn is in extremely poor condition. Nowhere has gridlock been more dramatic than the increased traffic on Tualatin-Sherwood road as industrial business traffic seeks to connect with the freeways so we can get our products to market which strengthens our state's economy.

There has been a lot said about Senate Bill 324's ties to the ability to successfully pass a transportation package this session. For me, the line is clear. Senate Bill 324 would require a state with a decades-long track record of failed projects, nearly a billion dollars wasted in the last decade alone, to fully

implement an untested and unproven concept that will not only cost tax dollars to build and run, but will drive up costs for Oregonians at the pump, at the grocery store, and in nearly every consumer purchase. Failure after failure with the Business Energy Tax Credit program alone should be enough for any level-headed legislator to put on the brakes. Our rush to the next green energy boondoggle should have every taxpayer emailing Gov. Brown asking her to ratchet this back for further discussion. In the course of the SB 324 hearings the Department of Environmental Quality, quietly on a Friday night, retracted some of the information they'd presented to legislators because the data was wrong. So if the agency is ill-equipped to even give the Legislature good data, how can we trust them to run a program like this?

I do not put myself in the climate denier camp. I am very interested in how we reduce carbon emissions and have a bill that I think helps on that front, and creates "green jobs" with very little tax dollars to make that work. As the wife of a two-time Iraq War veteran, I take energy independence from foreign oil seriously. I applaud innovative electric vehicle companies like Tesla and wish they had sited their factory in Oregon, but we weren't even in their consideration set. For that matter, I wish Tesla made an inexpensive minivan!

I have written for years about how we put ourselves at risk when we position our food and our fuel supply against each other competitively, especially when the environmental return on investment is negligible. Too many families are living on the margins in Oregon. Until 775,000 Oregonians no longer need food stamps, I'm definitely not interested in raising the cost of their groceries.

If I'm going to be labeled an obstructionist for voting "no" on a transportation package, let it be for obstructing unproven, wasteful government programs that cost taxpayers money. When I go back to my district, it will be with a message that I am unwilling to have my constituents pay twice at the pump, once to private companies who will profit on SB 324, and once for a tax increase, regardless of how well-intentioned either policy might be.

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Julie Parrish, of West Linn, represents District 37 in the Oregon House of Representatives.

The Portland Tribune

Novick to run for re-election in 2016

*By Jim Redden
March 11, 2015*

Commissioner Steve Novick has told the Portland Tribune that he will run for re-election in 2016.

"There are a number of issues I'm working on, any one of which could keep me busy until 2017 and beyond," the first-term City Council member said.

Novick's announcement means that all three council members up for reelection next year will run again. Mayor Charlie Hales told the Portland Tribune editorial board he will seek reelection last week. Commissioner Amanda Fritz announced for re-election several weeks ago.

No one else has yet announced for any of the offices, although the filing deadline is still more than a year away.

Novick told the Tribune the issues that concern him include:

- Figuring out how to pay for city transportation maintenance and safety. Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales had been working to enact a new street fee, but suspended the effort during the 2015 Legislature, where additional transportation funding is expected to be considered. Hales has said he and Novick will renew the local debate after the Legislature completes its work.

"I obviously hope that we will adopt a transportation tax or fee by the end of 2016, but assuming we succeed, I would want to be around to make sure the money goes to the right places," Novick said.

- Regulations requiring that unreinforced masonry buildings be retrofitted to protect them from collapsing during earthquakes. Novick also wants to find a way to help building owners pay for the expensive work.

"We have task forces working on those issues now, and I hope we will have something in place by next year, but if we don't I'd like to see it through."

- Building public support for starting public school at 9 a.m. because research shows teenagers need nine to 11 hours of sleep.

"This is outside the city's control, but the city has a keen interest in it," says Novick. "This could require a long community conversation; being on the council gives me a bully pulpit."

- Crafting city rules to require developers to include affordable units in their multi-family housing projects, assuming the 2015 Legislature repeals the law against so-called inclusionary zoning.
- Continuing to work on the two new high capacity transit lines currently being planned. One is between Portland and Gresham, and the other is between Portland and Tualatin. The Powell-Division project to Gresham is expected to include the region's first bus rapid transit line. No decision has yet been made on the type of transit in the Southwest Corridor project to Tualatin.

"Both of which are critical to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, but I don't know that we will be assured of success by late 2016. One reason I really want inclusionary zoning authority is that I don't want the new transit lines to just be tools for gentrification," says Novick.

- Fixing the Portland Building so that it doesn't continue to leak in the rain and will survive an earthquake. The cost is estimated at around \$100 million, and Novick recently suggested the council dedicate some of the additional \$31.1 million projected in next year's budget to the project.
- A system by 2016 to better coordinate public and private utility work in the streets.
"It would be nice to see that in action for a while and see how much money we save." Novick says.
- Reforming the system of responding to 911 calls to eliminate unnecessary emergency room visits. Novick says he will travel to Reno Thursday, March 12, to study that city's response system, where dispatchers ask questions to determine if the caller is in immediate danger, and, if not, has the option of putting them on the phone with a nurse, who might conclude that they would be well served by taking a cab to an urgent care or some other clinic.

"We are interested in exploring that kind of system in order to get people appropriate care and reduce health care costs by avoiding unnecessary, expensive ER visits. It's something we'd need to develop in partnership with Multnomah County," Novick says.

Novick first ran for the council in 2012. He has about \$112 in his campaign account.

Novick grew up in Cottage Grove and graduated from the University of Oregon and Harvard Law School. He worked for nine years as an environmental law enforcement lawyer at the U.S. Justice Department before returning to Oregon in 1996. Before running for the council, Novick worked as a policy director in Governor Kulongoski's 2002 campaign, as communications director for the nonprofit Citizens for Oregon's Future, as legislative liaison for former Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Castillo, as a policy analyst and spokesperson for numerous political campaigns, and as a policy analyst at the Oregon Health Insurance Exchange.

More heat expected at reservoir hearing in May

*By Jim Redden
March 10, 2015*

For years, City Council members have been insisting that disconnecting the open reservoirs is a done deal that cannot be reversed.

But now the council will be required to formally authorize the project to be completed in a public vote following what will undoubtedly be a heated discussion. The hearing is scheduled for May 14 at City Hall, and the vote could happen a week or two later. However, even that vote — which is needed to issue a permit to the Portland Water Bureau to disconnect the reservoirs at Mount Tabor — might not be the final decision. Because it is officially a land use decision, council approval of the permit can be appealed to the state Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) and Oregon's appellate courts.

For reservoir supporters, the battle over the permit is a last-ditch effort to prevent the reservoirs from being disconnected. But they have already lost much of the war. The council has already authorized hundreds of millions of ratepayer dollars to construct the replacement underground storage tanks — a cost the reservoir supporters have long fought to avoid.

If the council approves the permit, the water bureau could disconnect the reservoirs even if the decision is appealed to LUBA. It is unclear whether LUBA or the courts could order the city to reconnect the reservoirs, or whether the issue will only be whether to maintain them as a historic artifact.

In the meantime, Friends of the Reservoirs, a grassroots organization fighting to keep the reservoirs, has asked Gov. Kate Brown to intervene.

“We appeal to you as the highest authority in the state of Oregon. We trust that you will take action to restore trust in government by bringing rationality and sound science to a public health mandate and stopping the waste of precious public resources,” reads the March 2 letter signed by founder Floy Jones.

Nothing clear with reservoirs

If the reservoir issue sounds confusing, it is. The council has decided that recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules require the city to replace the open reservoirs in Mount Tabor and Washington parks with underground storage tanks. But reservoir supporters say the council has dodged having a public hearing and an up or down vote on disconnecting the reservoirs. Instead, after years of heated debate, it has quietly advanced the replacement project by funding the underground tanks in stages in the water bureau’s annual capital construction budget.

The council so far has funded several different parts of the replacement project. One is a new 50-million-gallon storage tank at Powell Butte at a cost of \$117.3 million. Another is a 25-million-gallon tank at Kelly Butte for \$75.4 million that is expected to be completed at the end of the year. A 12-million-gallon tank in Washington Park is also planned for an estimated \$75.6 million. Disconnecting the Mount Tabor reservoirs is expected to cost \$8 million.

Reservoir supporters have opposed all of these projects to no avail. Council members have consistently said the EPA requires the Mount Tabor reservoirs to be disconnected to safeguard against potentially deadly contamination. Although reservoir supporters insist no one has ever been sickened by drinking Portland water, the council has promised to disconnect them by December 2015.

Approving the permit is necessary to meet that schedule. But the question facing the council is bigger than that — it is also about the future of the reservoirs after they are disconnected.

The Mount Tabor reservoirs have been designated as historic landmarks, meaning they are subject to preservation rules. Because of that, the permit application was reviewed by the city’s Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), not the Bureau of Development Services.

The HLC approved the permit with conditions to maintain the historic appearance of the reservoirs.

Among other things, it required they remain full of water except for 60 days a year, when they are drained, cleaned and refilled. And they required the water bureau to undertake restoration work detailed in a 2009 draft Mount Tabor Reservoirs Historic Structures Report.

Both the water bureau and the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association appealed the permit approval to the City Council, as allowed by land use rules.

The water bureau wants the council to approve the permit. But it opposes the requirement that reservoirs be filled all but 60 days a year, saying that is not technically feasible. And the bureau opposes being required to comply with the 2009 report, arguing it will cost \$1.5 million the council has not approved.

The neighborhood association wants the council to deny the permit. It filed a detailed appeal prepared by the Dunn Carney Allen Higgins & Tongue law firm. The appeal argues the water bureau’s original application does not meet basic legal requirements for land use changes — especially one for such a large site. Instead of using independent professional planners and engineers to prepare the application, the appeal says “PWB cobbled something together and threw it at the Historic Landmarks Commission.”

If the council agrees with the neighborhood association, the water bureau will have to resubmit its application and go through the HLC hearings process again, potentially threatening the December 2015 deadline for disconnecting the reservoirs.

Hales to run again: 'There's more work to do'

*By Jim Redden
March 10, 2015*

Saying that he believes Portland has turned a corner and is headed into a unprecedented period of change, Mayor Charlie Hales has decided to run for reelection in 2016.

"I'm enjoying the job and believe I am the right person for it," Hales said during a Portland Tribune editorial board interview Friday afternoon.

Hales said he was not certain he would run for reelection when he first campaigned for mayor in 2012, but said he was enjoying the job and felt he still has a lot to offer city residents.

"This is a time of great change for our city, and I believe my skills are right for the challenges," said Hales.

Hales explained he has spent much of the first two years of his administration fixing problems from previous administrations. They included strained relations between the police and the community, the impression the water and sewer bureaus were wasting ratepayer dollars, and an urban renewal system that needed reform.

Hales believes he has made progress on such problems. Hales says his accomplishments include implementing the U.S. Department of Justice civil rights settlement agreement concerning the Portland Police Bureau, increased public oversight of water and sewer spending, and reshaping the city's existing urban renewal areas.

"We are at a point now where we can make things happen instead of just fixing problems," Hales said.

As Hales sees it, the improving economy is increasing city revenues enough to launch new initiatives, including increased funding for affordable housing and tax breaks for businesses that benefit society by doing such things as hiring people released from prison. Both ideas were included in the State of the City speech Hales delivered before the Portland City Club at the end of January.

"Going forward, I'm going to be rolling out proposals to implement the talking points in the State of the City speech," Hales said.

Hales has not yet decided on a reelection campaign budget. He has raised around \$35,000 in the past two months.

Major contributors include developers and a senior executive at a company involved in local transit projects. Hales would not comment on other potential candidates who are being mentioned within political circles, including State Treasurer Ted Wheeler and Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, saying he will wait to see who actually files for office.

In addition to Hales, commissioners Amanda Fritz and Steve Novick are up for reelection in 2016. Fritz has already announced for reelection and Novick has not made any public statements.

Success breeding gentrification

According to Hales, one of the greatest challenges facing Portland is keeping the city affordable for families while accommodating the new people and jobs that are coming.

Recent studies show that more young professionals are moving to town to take jobs with start-up companies and enjoy the city's internationally famous culture. However, they are also helping to drive up the cost of housing in close-in neighborhoods, contributing to the gentrification that has already pushed many minorities to the East Portland and Gresham areas.

"We don't want to turn out like San Francisco, where our kids can't afford to live here but we have really cool restaurants," Hales told the editorial board.

As Hales sees it, the solution is a combination of public investments, new regulations, and good planning. He took credit for the recent decision to allocate \$20 million for more affordable housing in North and Northeast Portland, and noted his urban renewal reforms will generate an additional \$47 million for affordable housing in the expanded North Macadam renewal area.

Hales also said he is lobbying the 2015 Oregon Legislature to change the law and allow cities to be able to require developers to include a certain number of affordable units in their housing developments. He

said city planning efforts are making affordable neighborhoods in the Lents, Gateway and David Douglas School District areas more desirable places to live.

"Portland is the only major city on the West Coast where a young family can still buy a starter home in an established neighborhood just a few miles from downtown, and we need to keep it that way," Hales said.

At the same time, Hales said poverty was an increasing problem in Portland. He pointed to a September 2014 study by local economist Joe Cortright titled, "Lost in Place," that found the number of census tracts in town with 30 percent or more of the people living below the poverty level increased from just three in 1970 to 11 today.

"We have to make sure that everyone is included in the economic recovery," said Hales, explaining that is why he supported raising the minimum wage paid to city employees to \$15 an hour. Hales said he will soon be launching a dialogue with private employers in Portland to do the same.

Hales also admitted disappointment over his inability to enact a new street fee to pay for more maintenance and safety projects.

Hales said he and Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick suspended their push for the fee during the 2015 Oregon Legislature at the request of former Gov. John Kitzhaber and House Speaker Tina Kotek. At the time, Hales hoped the Legislature would approve a major transportation funding package, reducing the amount of new funds the city needs. Now Hales thinks the Legislature will only approve a modest package, increasing the pressure on he and Novick to restart the discussions this fall.

"The need is not going away and I'm still committed to doing something about it," Hales said.

Portland expects \$31.1 million in additional funds

*By Jim Redden
March 10, 2015*

The most recent revenue forecast suggests the City Council could have \$31.1 million more to spend next year — \$11.5 million in ongoing funds and \$19.6 million in one-time funds.

"Nearly every economic factor is moving in the right direction," says Mayor Charlie Hales. "Now is the time to prudently invest the additional one-time revenue in basic services."

Commissioner Steve Novick is already suggesting the council dedicate some of the money to renovate the aging Portland Building, which needs nearly \$100 million in upgrades and earthquake protection.

"From an emergency preparedness standpoint, ensuring that a building that houses over a thousand employees survives the earthquake is absolutely critical," says Novick. "But I fear it's the kind of can that, in the normal course of events, is too easy to kick down the road. So if unexpected revenue gives us a chance to address it, we should take it."

The independent City Budget Office will release the March economic update on Tuesday, March 17. The final forecast for next year's budget will be released in late April, and the projected numbers likely could change between then and now.

Hales says there are several reasons for the good financial news. They include: cutting more than \$20 million in ongoing expenses in the previous fiscal year; paying off some of the city's debt; and restructuring the Urban Renewal Areas to add \$1.5 million to this year's budget.

"This news comes about due to a combination of a booming economy plus prudent decisions made by this council at the tail-end of the last recession," Hales says.

Andrew Scott, budget director for the city, and Josh Harwood, city economist, cited several positive trends that influenced the new projections, including:

- Inflation and health benefit costs remain low.
- Business license and transient lodging taxes are growing rapidly and likely will reach record highs this fiscal year.
- Housing values continue to grow, undoing some of the property tax compression the city experienced over the last few years.

The city's budget breaks down into two general categories: ongoing funds and one-time funds. Ongoing funds are expected to recur every year and most often are used for expenses such as personnel and programs. One-time funds are available only once and most often are used for discrete projects such as construction and renovation.

Willamette Week

Air Invasion

Newly available data on Airbnb shows the company's impact on Portland.

*By Anna Walters
March 11, 2015*

Airbnb is all for sharing—except, of course, when it comes to its own data.

The vacation-rental site has been under scrutiny in Portland and other U.S. cities for its effect on neighborhoods, its impact on local housing markets and the fairness of offering de facto hotels that don't follow the same rules as the traditional lodging industry.

Airbnb is under pressure from the city of Portland to make sure its hosts are following city rules, which include getting a license to operate and submitting to fire and safety inspections. About 94 percent are not (Murmurs, WW, Feb. 25, 2015). As WW has also reported, many Airbnb rentals appear to violate city rules requiring hosts to live in the units that they rent out ("Hotel California," WW, Feb. 18, 2015).

With more than 1 million listings worldwide, Airbnb's vast database provides a window into its markets, its customers and the people renting out their homes. Yet the company has been loath to cough up information on hosts who aren't following the rules.

In Brooklyn, technologist Murray Cox decided to meet Airbnb's reticence in his own city with a wily hack. He had wondered about the impact of Airbnb on his neighborhood, Bedford-Stuyvesant, but couldn't get the answers he wanted from the company's website.

Cox wrote a script to "scrape" thousands of Airbnb's New York City listings from the company's website. With designer John Morris, Cox built an interactive site showing every Airbnb rental in the city. The result was a sea of dots representing Airbnb rentals—and according to Cox, more than half might be in violation of New York's rules.

"Airbnb is not truly acknowledging how people are using their service or the negative impact on housing and the community," Cox says.

WW asked Cox to adapt his project for Portland. Cox scraped Portland's 1,959 listings as of March 1 and has published the results at insideairbnb.com/portland.

The site produces maps to show where rentals are in each neighborhood, what type they are (complete homes, single rooms, etc.), general availability and average rates. Users can click on the dots to learn about individual hosts and their properties.

Cox's research confirms what WW has already reported: Airbnb appears to be rife with rule breakers. Using the site's data, Cox found that 75 percent of hosts make their entire homes or apartments available for at least half the year. That appears to violate the city rule requiring hosts live in the homes they offer for rent at least nine months out of the year.

Airbnb wouldn't answer questions about Cox's findings. "We don't comment on public scrapes of our information, because, like here, they use inaccurate information to make misleading assumptions about our community," says company spokesman Christopher Nulty.

Portland officials still won't commit to a full-on enforcement of its rental rules. Dana Haynes, spokesman for Mayor Charlie Hales, says the city has issued warning letters but has yet to levy fines. "We don't really micromanage the bureaus to the degree people think," Haynes says.

Cox says he had been approached by housing advocates around the world and is considering expanding Inside Airbnb to other cities.

"I hope I can contribute to the debate," he says, "by providing some facts and invite Airbnb to be open and provide more."

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor

Finally, Zero Visibility

By Dirk VanderHart

March 11, 2015

LAST YEAR, Valentine's Day weekend packed a brutal one-two punch on Portland's streets.

On Friday, February 14, a pickup driver ran down an elderly couple attempting to cross SE Division near 84th, killing a 78-year-old woman.

The next day, a 60-year-old man was struck and killed near SE Powell and 124th.

East Portland's known to be treacherous for pedestrians, but the deaths—rapid-fire as they came—got active transportation types especially enflamed. That weekend, some advocates started a petition to Portland leaders: a clear signal that deaths on city streets are simply not acceptable.

Hundreds signed on, and now—just over a year later—the city's agreed.

Last month, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) released a new two-year plan called "Portland Progress," and my god is it shiny. The \$150,000 document lays out all the fondest hopes and dreamiest dreams PBOT could cram into 96 pages.

Still, in some ways, it's a \$150,000 re-hash. There are the familiar pledges—around 170 in all—to take care of streets and fix bridges, to make neighborhoods more "livable" and improve conditions for truck traffic.

PBOT Director Leah Treat defends the price tag, saying no one's ever seen the bureau's priorities so clearly defined.

The thing catching everyone's eye, though, is what Treat calls "a whole new conversation" for PBOT (one she's had in former posts in Chicago and Washington, DC). Like cities around the country, the agency will embrace "Vision Zero," a movement to bolster road safety—via crosswalks, speed limits, sidewalks, and whatever else works—so that, 10 years from now, there will be no road-related tragedies in Portland.

It's an easy idea to embrace, right? Just the type of big effort we all expected to see from Treat when she was hired back in June 2013.

But this is Portland, and it's transportation, and if the floundering conversation around the "street fee" over the last year has taught us anything, it's that these things are far, far more complicated than just setting goals.

While advocates are cautiously cheering PBOT's newfound allegiance to their cause, it's not hard to find similarly sparkling bits of goodwill that have lost their way. (Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030, anyone?)

Treat and other PBOT staff also readily concede we don't have anywhere near enough money for certain "stretch goals," like eliminating road deaths.

And, as ever, the city's business interests have their own ideas for PBOT's competing priorities. The Portland Business Alliance has railed against suggestions that new money should go to "safety" improvements. They want it spent on better roads.

The PBA's not alone. Corky Collier, the executive director of the Columbia Corridor Association, has spent years on a citizen board that helps PBOT work out its budget. He called the plan a "great new educational tool," but sort of scoffed at the Vision Zero part.

"Any time that you're making a strong point, it can easily verge on hyperbole," says Collier, who spends his days vying for better conditions for trucks. "Vision Zero is kind of walking that line."

Treat laughed when told of the comment. But if Portland's going to eliminate more Valentine's Day massacres, she'll have to do much more.

We Have Our First Challenger! Nick Caleb Says He's Running Against Commissioner Steve Novick

By Dirk VanderHart

March 11, 2015

As we noted earlier this morning, all three city council incumbents who stand to lose their jobs next year are planning to fight for them.

Now a challenger has emerged.

Nick Caleb, the Concordia University professor and attorney who briefly challenged Commissioner Dan Saltzman last year, says he'll be running against Commissioner Steve Novick in the May 2016 primary.

"As of now we're in full campaign mode," Caleb, 31, tells the Mercury.

Even if you don't know who he is, you're probably aware of Caleb's handiwork. After deciding, just before filing deadline, to run against Saltzman last year, he helped focus the city's attention on wage inequality and—using the blueprint of Seattle City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant—railed for Portland to adopt a \$15 minimum wage. Aided by groups like Jobs with Justice and 15 Now PDX, the resulting momentum forced Saltzman to hop on board with a wage increase.

Saltzman went on to easily win the primary, but kept up on the pay issue. That led to a history-making, if relatively modest, decision last month to pay all full-time city employees and contractors at least \$15 starting in July. City officials are studying further raises, too.

Caleb, in a conversation earlier today, says it's not enough.

"The council has done something—not much," he says. "We've gotten a little stale in our progressive culture. We're celebrating the small victories while we leave a pretty huge crisis intact."

Caleb tells the Mercury he's known for a while he'd be running, but was waiting on making a formal announcement. It wasn't until this morning that he learned Novick was definitely planning a re-election campaign. (We wrote about those intentions earlier today, after the commissioner sent an email to the Tribune, but the O snuck the tidbit into a story in January.)

In his race against Saltzman, Caleb ran a "right to the city" campaign, prioritizing police accountability, fair housing, and wage inequality. He says to expect much of the same this time, though he's still tweaking his platform.

"You can't go anywhere in the city without hearing the stress people are enduring," he says. "People can't even afford to live in the city anymore."

But there's a more intriguing undertone to Caleb's candidacy. As we noted earlier today, Novick's calling card in his first term has been the pursuit of new money for roads, via a new fee or tax. In that pursuit, he both heartened and alienated some transportation and environmental groups—first by voicing support for a tax-the-rich option that polled better than others, then by not fighting to put that option before voters. In November, eight organizations signed a letter pledging to go to bat for an income tax on Portlanders making more than \$125,000, and were left disappointed.

If Caleb's able to snatch some of those groups' progressive support away from Novick—who's on the left side of a lefty city council—it could give him momentum. He's clearly thinking along the same lines.

"I think me and a lot of people were scratching our heads," Caleb says. "If I was running a street fee and my polling told me people supported taxing the rich, that's like a license for a progressive."

Caleb has more time to make his case this go-round. In 2014, he entered the race with two months until election day. It was a hopeless prospect against an incumbent as entrenched as Saltzman, the longest-tenured politician in city government. This time, Caleb will have a year longer. He's already organized a campaign and begun soliciting support. He even sat down with Commissioner Amanda Fritz yesterday to solicit advice for a run. And, unlike 2014, he's not capping donations at \$50.

"Until we get publicly financed elections, it's impossible to compete on that level," he says. Still, he's vowed to refuse objectionable corporate contributions, should any come calling.

And like his last race, Caleb pledges to eschew the \$100,000-plus salaries paid to city council members in favor of the salary of an average Portland worker, which was less than half that in 2012.

Commissioner Steve Novick Says He'll Run Again Next Year

By Dirk VanderHart

March 11, 2015

No surprises here, but worth noting: No one's giving up their chair on the Portland City Council dais willingly, if at all, next year.

Commissioner Steve Novick told the Portland Tribune yesterday he, like Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz, plans to run for re-election in 2016.

"There are a number of issues I'm working on, any one of which could keep me busy until 2017 and beyond," Novick wrote in an email to a Tribune reporter.

You can easily guess the first one Novick listed. Since he was handed the Portland Bureau of Transportation in mid-2013, he's had to pour much of his energy into the debate over finding millions in new money to help fix Portland roads. When we talked to Novick at the outset of his tenure as transportation commissioner, he shied from claiming much expertise but had clearly been boning up. He's since become a chief evangelist for the city's cracked roads—it's pretty clearly the issue most voters will remember him for, come election time—but has struggled to gain enough believers to make the sermon count.

Beginning last spring, Novick and Hales put forth several options for new taxes or fees that would salve the city's roads, but repeatedly withdrew them amid questions and dissatisfaction from different camps. Then, earlier this year, they put the whole process on hold while the legislature considers increased transportation funding. The street fee discussion won Novick both affection and frustration from lefty groups, who liked that the commissioner was touting the benefits of a progressive income tax to fix roads, but were rankled when he didn't follow through.

Anyway, the street fee's the biggie. But Novick this term has also delighted in chastising the Oregonian's editorial board. He's gone against the grain by advocating slashing police funding (including *gasp* a suggestion we chop the mounted patrol), and as the commissioner in charge of emergency management he badly wants you to bolt your house to the ground.

Read Novick's lengthy, far-ranging (later school start times?) list of things he hopes to tackle in a second term after the jump.

There are a number of issues I'm working on, any one of which could keep me busy until 2017 and beyond. In no special order:

(1) We need to figure out a way to pay for transportation maintenance and safety. If we do not, the city will gradually die as the street network crumbles. And we need to build sidewalks and safer crossings in areas where it's now dangerous for kids to walk to school and seniors to walk to transit stops. I obviously hope that we will adopt a transportation tax or fee by the end of 2016, but assuming we succeed, I would want to be around to make sure the money goes to the right places.

(2) we need regulations requiring that unreinforced masonry buildings, which are major safety hazards in an earthquake, be retrofitted. And we need to help identify some ways for owners of such buildings to access the money they need to do this expensive work. We have task forces working on those issues now, and I hope we will have something in place by next year, but if we don't I'd like to see it through.

(3) this is outside the city's control, but the city has a keen interest in it: I am spending some time trying to build support for the school districts to start high school classes no earlier than 9 a.m. Research shows that teenagers just can't get to sleep until at least 11 and need 9 hours of sleep. When they don't get enough sleep, they have a hard time learning; they overeat (which makes them less healthy, which drives up health care costs, which hurts the economy) and they get into more car accidents (which concerns this transportation commissioner). Some researchers also believe that later start times would reduce crime. (Less time in the afternoon to get into trouble, and sleep-deprived people do dumb things). This could require a long community conversation; being on the Council gives me a bully pulpit.

(4) assuming the legislature allows us to use inclusionary zoning as a tool to require developers to build some affordable units, I want to be sure we take advantage of that. Crafting the rules would take time.

(5) we are working toward having either bus rapid transit or light rail in the southwest corridor and on Powell / Division out to Gresham, both of which are critical to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, but I don't know that we will be assured of success by late 2016. (One reason I really want inclusionary zoning authority is that I don't want the new transit lines to just be tools for gentrification.)

(6) we need to fix up the Portland Building (see my email earlier) so that it doesn't leak and will survive an earthquake.

(7) hope that by 2016 we will have a system in place to better coordinate public and private utility work in the streets, but it would be nice to see that in action for a while and see how much money we save.

(8) right now when 911 gets a medical call we send fire and ambulances out as a matter of course and most times the ambulance takes people to the emergency room (and insurance pays them to do so, which gives them an incentive to maximize the number of ER trips). In some jurisdictions - including Reno, Nevada, where I'm going tomorrow morning - when a medical call comes to 911, they ask a couple questions to determine if the person is in immediate danger, and if not, they might put you on the phone with a nurse, who might conclude that you would be well served by taking a cab to urgent care or something. We are interested in exploring that kind of system in order to get people appropriate care and reduce health care costs by avoiding unnecessary, expensive ER visits. It's something we'd need to develop in partnership with the County, and it could take a while.

Boom Times Redux: Now The City Might Have \$30 Million Extra to Play With Next Year

By Dirk VanderHart
March 10, 2015

Remember how in December we reported Portland's going to have a bunch more money next year? It turns out we're probably going to have a bunch more than that, and Commissioner Steve Novick has wasted no time staking a claim to it in the media.

A half hour before Mayor Charlie Hales' office announced the City of Portland might have at least \$10 million more next year than anticipated, Novick—as is his wont—sent a note to reporters on how it should be used. From Novick's message:

Gentlefolk of the press – FYI, the word on the street is that the revenue forecast will improve significantly, both ongoing and one-time. I am recommending that we set aside a significant portion of any one-time revenues for the Portland Building. From an emergency preparedness standpoint, ensuring that a building that houses over a thousand employees survives the earthquake is absolutely critical. But I fear it's the kind of can that, in the normal course of events, is too easy to kick down the road. So if unexpected revenue gives us a chance to address it, we should take it. More later, but I wanted to put this bee in your collective bonnets.

(Novick later clarified he actually meant ongoing money—the stuff that (semi-)reliably fills city coffers each year, not one-off, Scrooge-McDuck-money-pit cash that comes and goes as it pleases—since that money would need to pay down project debt into the future.)

The Portland Building, of course, is the beloved, be hated city bunker where a significant portion of our civil servants spend their workdays. It also needs repairs that could reach up to \$100 million.

Just a short-while after Novick's email, the actual financials came in from the Mayor's office: surging business license taxes, tourism dollars, and property tax revenues have made the picture look a lot rosier even than December, when the city announced a likely \$19 million surplus. Now, number crunchers say we may be looking at more than \$30 million, roughly \$20 million of it in one-time funds.

Rest assured other city commissioners will have ideas what to do with this windfall. None of them had the quick-trigger instinct to put them out to the press, though. (Yes, I realize I'm falling prey by writing this post.) Not even Hales, who formally announced the new money, offered specifics.

“Nearly every economic factor is moving in the right direction,” the mayor said in a statement. “Now is the time to prudently invest the additional one-time revenue in basic services.”

This isn't necessarily done, by the way. The City Budget Office makes a point of being reserved in its forecasts, meaning we may have even more next month, when more-solid business tax info comes in. Or less.