

Willamette Week

City Hall Plans April 15 Vote to Let Uber and Lyft Pick up Passengers in Portland

*By Anna Walters and Aaron Mesh
March 19, 2015*

Portland city officials are preparing rule changes to allow ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft to begin picking up passengers in the city by mid-April.

Documents released this afternoon show the City Council is scheduled for an April 15 vote to give Uber and Lyft formal approval to operate in Portland with a "pilot program." That vote is expected to confirm much of the informal deal Mayor Charlie Hales cut with Uber officials in December.

The April 15 vote will kick off a three-month trial period for the two companies to operate, while Portland City Hall tweaks the rules they'll have to follow.

Documents show the task force created by Hales and City Commissioner Steve Novick will set preliminary rules by April 9 for driver training and permits, background checks on drivers, and service for people with disabilities. It will then finalize those rules on July 15.

But the city does not appear to have reached a consensus on the crucial issue of what rules Uber will have to follow on commercial insurance.

The task force is considering a plan that would require Uber and Lyft to carry a \$2 million insurance policy when they begin Portland service—but officials may wait on state officials to direct a decision on what times that insurance policy will apply.

A bill currently in Salem, backed by taxi companies, says Uber and Lyft must carry insurance for its drivers at all times, including when waiting for fares and driving to pick up customers.

Cab companies have argued that Uber and Lyft should play by the same rules currently applied to taxis.

City of Portland Threatens Airbnb and Rivals with \$503,000 in Fines

*By Anna Walters
March 19, 2015*

Portland officials have set another deadline in their slow crackdown on Airbnb and other companies that aren't following city rules.

As first reported by the Portland Tribune, the City Revenue Division sent letters on March 5 to five vacation rental companies that have been lax about making hosts get a city permit. The message: Have your hosts get permits by April 5 or pay up.

Collectively, the five companies face an estimated \$503,000 in fines if they don't comply. The city's last deadline for having short-term rental hosts display permits was Feb. 20. But the city let that date pass without issuing its promised penalties of \$500 per day.

"Revenue is taking a graduated approach to short term rental enforcement, consistent with what we told City Council we would do when they passed the ordinance," says Revenue Division director Thomas Lannom.

Up until this point, the city has welcomed Airbnb and other short term vacation rental companies—most recently updating city code to allow rentals in apartments and condos. Although the city requires all hosts that rent out space on a short-term basis get a permit and submit to a safety inspection, less than 5 percent have bothered.

If the warned companies are still unresponsive by the April 5 deadline, Lannom says Revenue will "update and finalize" the fines.

The Portland Mercury

Portland's Park Rangers Will Get Training From Right 2 Dream Too

By Dirk VanderHart

March 19, 2015

Commissioner Amanda Fritz—a longtime friend to the homeless rest area Right 2 Dream Too and a booster for expanding parks ranger service—has found a way to bring the two together.

In a discussion last week over the lack of attention Portland's small band of rangers gives the city's east side, Fritz casually let it drop that Portland Parks and Recreation is "going to be having a contract with Right 2 Dream Too to further improve our training."

Staffers say the word "contract" might be a bit premature—there's only one training session in the works so far, and no money changing hands. But the arrangement could go further than that, and may produce important results at a time when parks rangers are logging hundreds more contacts with homeless portlanders every year.

Fritz hasn't been available to discuss the arrangement, but Right 2 Dream Vice Chair Brad Gibson confirms the commissioner recently requested his group's input. Gibson says he's forming a committee to draw up suggestions in advance of an April 1 "academy" for parks rangers.

"A lot of their protocols are not written down," Gibson tells the Mercury. "I think they're getting a little foggy on who's following what, and what the protocol is to actually engage the homeless."

Portland's parks are already more open to the homeless than they have been in the past. In a memo issued in August, Parks Director Mike Abbaté announced people were permitted to sleep on parks land until 8 a.m.—a step taken at the urging of Fritz. The wake time has since been changed to 7 a.m. (also at Fritz's direction) but remains policy, according to spokesperson Mark Ross.

The guideline formally allows people to sleep, for example, beneath the bridges of Waterfront Park in the evening. And the rangers service is already often seen by advocates as having a lighter touch than police or contracted security guards.

Still, Gibson says he hears stories of homeless people being unfairly singled out by parks authorities, and hopes to change that attitude.

"Some [rangers] treat the situation with kid gloves, some harass," he says. "These are citizens who are using the park. In our view, it shouldn't be deemed any other way."

The Portland Business Journal

Date set for big Portland Uber vote — will the Mayor let it ride?

By Mason Walker

March 20, 2015

Are you excited for tax day yet? Here's a new reason to be.

On April 15, that holy day when accountants pass out in a heap of exhaustion following months of 80-hour work weeks, Portland City Council will vote on whether to allow Uber and Lyft to pick up ride-hailers inside the city.

Uber and Lyft, app-based startups that seek to replace the common taxi, have been fighting for years to operate in Portland, one of the last cities on the West Coast that has explicitly banned their services due to tight cab rules.

As Willamette Week reports, the vote will likely be a formality as Mayor Charlie Hales in December struck an informal deal with Uber to run a pilot test this year. The deal followed a rogue move by Uber when it began operating in Portland in direct violation of several city rules.

Portland, like many cities, keeps a cap on the number of taxis allowed to operate. In February, that number was increased by 63 percent, the largest single jump in city history. It's unclear how the pilot of Uber and Lyft will work with the taxi limit.

Portland approves 51 licenses for Tesla-driving EcoCab

*By Wendy Culverwell
March 19, 2015*

Under pressure to expand Portland's undersized taxi fleet, the Portland City Council unanimously approved a request from a Longview-based company to launch the city's first all-electric taxi service.

The council voted 5 to 0 Wednesday to grant 51 licenses to EcoCab.

Ronald Knori, a Longview, Washington entrepreneur who launched successful painting and taxi services in his hometown, applied for a taxi license on Oct. 31.

Knori plans to launch with two Tesla Model S vehicles — the same vehicle he operates in Longview. His fleet will also include 10 Nissan Leafs and several handicap accessible vans.

Over time, the fleet will expand to 50, with Teslas expected to form the backbone of the operation.

Knori said he will treat his drivers as employees rather than independent contractors and will pay not only wages but provide paid time off and health insurance.

He'd hoped to begin operating in January, anticipating \$2.1 million in revenue in its first year.

"I expect to be profitable in the first month," he said last fall.