

The Oregonian

Mayor Charlie Hales wants opinions on Soul District: Portland City Hall Roundup

*By Andrew Theen
March 20, 2015*

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales is one of a handful of U.S. mayors attending a Los Angeles conference this week on urban design.

Hales and seven other mayors are in Southern California for the multi-day Mayors' Institute on City Design.

Eric Garcetti, Los Angeles' mayor, invited Hales.

The conference is a workshop session for mayors, where they bring a policy topic to debate and discuss and bounce off their urban colleagues and a group of design and planning experts.

Each mayor was expected to bring a particular case study that presented development challenges. Hales chose to focus on Portland's so-called Soul District, the inner North and Northeast stretch of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

According to Hales' spokesman, the mayor will discuss the Soul District and workshop ideas for how to bring more businesses, housing and investment to the area using city funds.

Hales made "livable neighborhoods" a focus of his 2015 priorities. This is what the mayor said on his website:

"All along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the not-too-distant future, we'll see the results of a newly energized housing strategy, a new grocery store, smaller businesses owned by residents. This is all the work of community leaders who have a vision for development on MLK. A vision for supporting African-American-owned businesses, and promoting a cultural home on that great street."

MICD dates back to 1986, and is backed by the National Endowment for the Arts, American Architectural Foundation and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, according to its website.

United Technologies, a Hartford Connecticut-based company, also funds the mayoral workshop.

Dana Haynes, Hales' spokesman, said the mayor left for the conference on Wednesday and will return this weekend. MIDC paid for Hales' trip, Haynes said.

The Portland Tribune

City staff micro grants could fund solutions

*By Kevin L. Harden
March 21, 2015*

A rubber sidewalk.

A better way to trap and remove restaurant grease.

A plan to enhance the Peninsula Park Rose Garden as a prime spot in the Piedmont neighborhood.

Those are a handful of the 17 city employee micro grants worth \$195,700 to be funded next week by Portland's City Council. The grants will be considered during the Wednesday, March 25, council meeting at City Hall, 1221 S.W. Fourth Ave.

This is the second year of the city's innovation grants. Last year, city officials established a \$1 million fund to pay for staff-suggested projects or recommendations designed to solve problems or improve city services. A four-person panel reviewed 46 proposals submitted in February by 13 bureaus and offices, all at \$20,000 or less, and whittled the list to 17 that will be presented to the City Council.

In 2014, the city spent \$699,500 for 12 projects.

Among this year's grants, an \$8,000 project would allow Portland's Bureau of Transportation to use a product made from recycled tire rubber to repair sections of damaged sidewalk. The material — Rubberway — is a flexible material designed to replace concrete sidewalks buckled by tree roots that could become a hazard.

Last year, the city required about 1,900 property owners to repair hazardous sidewalks. The grant would fund a pilot project that could be monitored for five years to see if it holds up.

Bureau of Environmental Services staff is asking for \$15,000 to provide grease trap cleaning coupons for businesses — mostly restaurants and food service companies — that need the service. City inspectors would distribute the coupons to businesses trying to keep their grease traps clean.

The city has about 130 businesses that hire pump services to clean their grease traps. The coupons would be good for one free cleaning. Without the cleaning, grease can flow into the city's sanitary sewer system and cause problems in pipes.

Parks and Recreation staff is seeking \$6,000 to help develop a strategic plan with the Friends of Peninsula Park Rose Garden for the park's garden. The goal is to increase volunteer help to maintain and improve the garden as a landmark in the Piedmont neighborhood.

Other projects to be funded:

- \$14,000 to review the city's community garden policy.
- \$11,100 to install monitoring equipment at six of 10 city park water feature splash pads.
- \$5,000 to help the Portland Housing Bureau collect citywide housing data.
- \$10,000 to purchase an electric utility cart for Parks and Recreation.
- \$15,000 to create a Bureau of Planning and Sustainability anti-litter campaign toolkit.

Council to consider 'banning the box' on Wednesday

*By Jim Redden
March 23, 2015*

The City Council will consider preventing employers from asking about a job applicant's criminal history until after making an employment offer on Wednesday.

The so-called Ban the Box ordinance is part of a national movement intended to reduce barriers to employment to those with criminal histories. Local business leaders say they support the idea, but are opposed to delaying criminal background checks until after making an employment offer.

The ordinance was introduced by Mayor Charlie Hales. He worries that people are not being hired for jobs that are qualified to perform because of prior conviction that have no relation to the work.

"Many people with criminal records can be valuable employees. Employers who have hired people with records often find that they are excellent employees who are highly motivated to create better lives for themselves," reads the ordinance, which says the routine use of criminal background checks by employers disproportionately affects "historically disadvantaged communities and communities of color."

The proposed ordinance would not apply to businesses with six or fewer employees, or any governments except the city of Portland.

Read the proposed ordinance [here](#).

Leaders of the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs, the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber and the Portland Business Alliance oppose delaying the criminal background check until the very end of the hiring process, however. In a joint March 9 statement, they endorsed the idea but opposed that restriction.

"We absolutely agree with the goal removing barriers to employment individuals with criminal backgrounds, and we agree that banning the box makes sense," Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber Gale Castillo said in the statement. "However, pushing any opportunity for a criminal background check to the very end of the process, coupled with a private right to legal action if the applicant is not selected, 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.”

Read the statement here.

The proposed ordinance lists circumstances employers must consider when deciding whether to disqualify someone from employment because of the results of a criminal background check. They include the nature and gravity of the offense, the time that has elapsed since the offense took place, and the nature of the employment sought.

Under the ordinance, if an employer withdraws a job offer because of the results of a criminal background check, the applicant can request that it be reconsidered. If that happens, the employer must then consider more circumstances, including the applicants age at the time of conviction, whether the applicant has performed similar work with other employers without incident, the applicants successful participation in education and rehabilitation programs, and character references.

If the employer still withdraws the job offer, the applicant can appeal the denial to the city. If the city finds the withdrawal was not justified, it can fine the employer \$1,000 for each violation.

The ordinance creates a .75 position in next year's city budget and seeks \$500,000 to educate employers and applicants about the new policy.