

## The Oregonian

### Key questions remain on Portland Building renovation: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board  
July 25, 2015*

Before Portland's elected leaders proceed with an overhaul of The Portland Building at a cost now estimated to exceed \$190 million, they must do what they have not yet done and publicly state, in detail:

**Why it matters that roughly 1,300 city employees currently housed in The Portland Building remain situated there or in any building proximate to City Hall,** just one block south along Southwest 5th Avenue. At first blush, it would seem to make sense. But several questions loom: Are other locations possible for the city's employees? Are meetings between elected officials at City Hall and career bureaucrats presently conducted in person or by other means, such as conference calling and Skype? Is The Portland Building now the most convenient site for citizens and developers to visit to pay bills and seek permits? How is the city's business served most efficiently by having everyone under one roof in a downtown building? Several city employees already are in scattered locations – why is it important to retain this one?

**Why it matters that The Portland Building's postmodern design, a bold and influential ground-breaker for big-building design, remain intact.** It would seem worth saving. But at \$192 million or more for a building that cost less than \$30 million to build? Several questions loom: What is the building's value – aesthetic, economic, in reputation – to Portland and its taxpaying citizens? Does it represent something more than the sum of its many exterior parts, which create its iconic façade? Would architectural and design leaders here or nationally be affronted if the Michael Graves-designed building were to be demolished or repurposed or sold – and if so, should that matter? What is the value of historic preservation as it specifically relates to The Portland Building – in the event of demolition, are photographs enough? Among the intangibles of civic attachments to the built environment, does The Portland Building exert some ineffable hold upon Portlanders – perhaps as a brand of the city and to the country – or is it a design conceit that has become a burden of an elite?

**Why an overhaul of the building – at a cost exceeding that of new premium office tower construction elsewhere in Portland – best serves Portlanders over the next 50 years.** Again, several questions: As the city's downtown core endures greater congestion and as technology advances to make virtual transactions possible, does it make sense to require the increasingly expensive movement of people? Should anyone living near Interstate 205 in East Portland or at the far reaches of Southwest Portland or North Portland be forced to set aside the time to travel downtown, and then pay to park? Will most Portlanders, not to mention city employees who commute from outer regions, find The Portland Building a best setting for prompt service and operational utility?

The City Council has a tough task ahead. The Portland Building has been good to the city and Oregon: a happy spectacle since its completion, first as a wrecking ball into modernism's big box conventions nationally and an immediate source of civic pride; then, as a colorful, widely recognized, crowd-pleasing confection – is it Egyptian? a birthday cake? – so rarely associated with large urban structures. But now The Portland Building is better known locally for after-party blues. It's a colander defying expensive attempts to rainproof it; a seismically deficient structure that is poorly laid out within, with insufficient interior light and disliked by many who work within it; an above-ground basement, in the words of one Portland architect. The building is by now a money pit into which public dollars disappear and rectify little to nothing.

Earlier this year, the Council signaled a commitment to renovate the structure. That could be the right choice. But it's impossible to know in the absence of detailed, case-making information. The Council should immediately hit the pause button on Portland Building renovation and answer key questions to show that it is fully accountable for potentially very expensive choices. Only then will the Council's chosen course be legible and defensible and, in the event The Portland Building is to be renovated, go unchallenged by those in charge: Portland taxpayers and Portland voters.

## **Willamette Week**

### **East Portland Secessionists File Initiative to Create 9-Member City Council**

*By Anthony Macuk*

*July 24, 2015*

The East Portland secessionists are back, and they have a new plan.

WW reported in March that Gateway neighborhood residents Collene Swenson and Pat Edwards had petitioned to create a ballot initiative that would, if passed, allow the 13 neighborhoods east of I-205 to secede and incorporate as a new city.

Their latest petition abandons the secession idea and instead calls for a structural overhaul of the Portland City Council.

“What we found out was that you can’t de-annex East Portland,” Swenson told WW. “Any city within three miles of the proposed city can veto it.”

The existing commissioner system would be replaced by a City Council of nine officials, each elected to represent a district of the city. The new commissioners would be required to live in the district they represent.

Swenson and Edwards hope that the new system would provide more direct representation, particularly for areas like East Portland, which they say is neglected by the current city government.

“If you change the form of council, you get direct representation. It’s a game changer,” says Swenson. “You get a representative for each part of the city. We all have different needs, different wants, different kinds of people.”

Swenson had to refile the current version of the petition four times due to problems with the language and dates. The latest version has been accepted, and on Sunday will enter a seven-day period during which objections may be filed. If there are no objections, the petition will move on to the signature collection phase.

Swenson remains confident that they can get more signatures than they need.

“We’re overachievers,” she says.