

The Oregonian

Portland City Council signs off on new bike-share program

By Elliot Njus

September 23, 2015

The Portland City Council approved a new bike-share contract on Wednesday, clearing the way for a bicycle rental program to roll out next summer.

The council on Wednesday approved an amended contract with Motivate 4-0, with Commissioner Dan Saltzman off for the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

Under the deal, the city will buy \$1.5 million in equipment using mostly federal grant money. Motivate Co. of New York will operate the program, covering costs with the revenue it generates from user fees and sponsorships.

Motivate operates municipal bike-share programs across the country, including New York's Citi Bike and Capital Bikeshare in Washington, D.C. It's the operator for 75 percent of the nation's bike-share fleet.

The council gave its approval for a three-year agreement with Motivate, though the terms of the federal grant paying for the bike-share equipment commits the city to five years of bike-share operations — even if the program proves unprofitable.

That's complicated by the fact that Motivate and the city haven't yet found a sponsor for the program, who would pay much of the operating costs in exchange for advertising on hundreds of bikes and stations.

The city's transportation bureau, however, says there's little risk of having to bail out the bike-share program at the end of the three-year contract. Instead, it said the program could be scaled back to make do with whatever revenue it's generating.

"I think we were linking our fate to an operator who gives us a great chance at being successful," said Commissioner Nick Fish before voting for the program.

If the program is profitable, revenue beyond the cost of operation would be shared between the city and Motivate.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz had not made up her mind about the program as recently as last week, citing safety concerns. Voting for the program Wednesday, she said she looked forward to working with the city transportation bureau and Motivate on education campaigns around helmet use and safe cycling on streets.

A bike rental will cost about \$2.50 for 30 minutes of use, with monthly memberships available.

After six months, Motivate could begin to experiment with pricing that changes to help aid even distribution of bikes. It could be cheaper to rent a bike in areas where they're piling up and more expensive to rent them in areas with high demand.

The bikes, supplied by Social Bicycles Inc. of New York, are equipped with computers and locking systems that will allow users to end a bike rental without returning the bike to a marked kiosk. But locking up elsewhere will cost an extra fee, which will be used to discount the rental for whoever returns it to a kiosk.

Portland mayor wants 'housing emergency,' others want to see his plan

*By Brad Schmidt
September 23, 2015*

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales on Wednesday said he wants to declare a "housing emergency" next month with the hope of providing shelter for all homeless women by the end of the year.

Hales' announcement, which comes on the heels of a similar declaration in Los Angeles and a mayoral challenge from State Treasurer Ted Wheeler, would let Portland bypass its zoning code when siting shelters for the homeless.

Officials estimate about 1,800 homeless people lack shelter on any given night, nearly one-third of them women. Portland leaders hope to convert city-owned property into a temporary shelter before the winter.

"We're not solving the problem fast enough to make the difference that Portlanders expect," Hales said. "And that's why I think this move is appropriate."

But Hales' directive offered no financial commitment. Nor would it impact soaring rental prices or create more affordable housing. And city rules limit an emergency declaration to just two weeks, although it could be extended.

The surprise announcement drew criticism from Wheeler, who has made housing and homelessness an early part of his campaign to unseat Hales next year. The rollout also rankled some city and county leaders who weren't told of Hales' plan until moments before he announced it.

"We need a mayor that will address the major problems facing the city every year – not just during an election year," Wheeler's campaign consultant, Jake Weigler, said in a statement.

The emergency declaration will head to the City Council for consideration Oct. 7. Officials are already looking at several sites for a women's shelter, although they declined to identify them.

Hales' chief of staff, Josh Alpert, said the emergency will not impact Right 2 Dream Too, the high-profile Old Town homeless camp that Portland officials have tried unsuccessfully to relocate for two years.

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish said he expects the City Council will help define broader efforts beyond temporary shelter for women. If that doesn't happen, he'll be disappointed.

"Now the question is, can we use this exercise to swing for the fences and do some meaningful things to address the crisis?" Fish said.

After working with leaders from Multnomah County and the local housing authority to eradicate homelessness among veterans by year's end, Hales said he is emboldened and wants to do more.

Shifting the focus to homeless women is arbitrary, he said, but a worthwhile effort. "When I see a homeless woman on the street or in a doorway, my heart is touched," he said, "and I know Portlanders' hearts are touched."

Hales said he hopes the emergency declaration will ensure temporary shelter for hundreds of women this winter.

"It's a little bit of a back of the envelope strategy, frankly ... but I think it'll actually work," he said.

Hales' office organized a tour this week at possible sites in Southwest Portland. But he didn't make clear to Multnomah County Chairwoman Deborah Kafoury his plan to seek an emergency declaration.

Kafoury on Wednesday said she wants to see "specific action steps coupled with a clear financial commitment from the mayor."

"I'm not going to play political football with an issue that affects the lives of so many people and that I care so much about," she said. "If this discussion leads to action that gets people into housing, then I'm all for it. We just need to see the plan."

Hales, asked about a financial commitment Wednesday, made none.

"That's a good question," he said. "And that's something that the City Council ought to take up when we get the declaration in front of them."

Hales also offered no new solution to rising rental rates in Portland -- which have reached an average of \$1,243 a month -- although he said costs could flat line when more units come on line.

"This is a market problem, not a natural disaster," Hales said of rising rents. "So I don't think we actually have the legal authority to impose rent control."

Beyond city action, Hales wants the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners to seek an emergency designation from Gov. Kate Brown. That would allow officials to waive portions of the state building code, enabling shelters at buildings that otherwise would not be approved.

Alpert, Hales' chief of staff, said the city's self-imposed zoning code has created siting obstacles. The only place officials could locate a shelter is in Gateway, he said, miles from the city center.

Alpert said he couldn't provide a specific example of a proposed shelter that ran into zoning obstacles since Hales became mayor in 2013, other than Right 2 Dream Too. But he cited several general examples.

Some people regularly ask why the never-used Wapato Jail can't be used for shelter purposes, he said, and officials previously considered using city-owned parking garages as shelter.

"The zoning code gets in the way of that every time," he said. "Those are specific examples but we haven't actually gone for it, saying, we're going to fight right here, right now."

Hales' announcement came one day after leaders in Los Angeles declared a public emergency and pledged \$100 million toward housing and services.

Alpert said Portland officials had been working on their effort "for a little while."

Asked how long, he said: "Five or six days."

The Portland Tribune

Sources: Petition drive to reform City Council begins

By Jim Redden

September 24, 2015

Portlanders could vote to change their form of government at the November 2016 election.

Eastside activists have begun gathering voter signatures on petitions to expand the City Council to nine members, with seven elected by geographic districts. It also would transfer control of all bureaus to the mayor, who would be one of two members elected citywide.

Supporters must collect 31,758 valid Portland voters' signatures by July 8 of next year for the measure to appear on the general election ballot. For now, supporters are mostly collecting signatures on

Saturdays and Sundays at locations announced on their committee's Facebook page, Portland Community Equality Movement. Co-petitioner Collene Swenson says they hope to recruit enough volunteers to avoid having to raise funds and hire paid signature-gatherers.

"We've never done anything like this before, and it's arduous, but we're finding a lot of support," says Swenson, an insurance adjuster who says she became an activist because City Hall was not responsive to problems in her eastside neighborhood.

Brown makes news her way

Once upon a time, practically all candidates for major offices announced the start of their campaigns with rallies or news conferences. Not anymore. Today, candidates frequently announce on Facebook or Twitter.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is even less formal than that. In response to a question from East Oregonian newspaper reporter Antonio Sierra, Brown said she will run to fill the remainder of former Gov. John Kitzhaber's unexpired term.

Brown was visiting the Pendleton Round-Up. The story was quickly picked up by practically every other news outlet in the state. The East Oregonian publishes the Capital Insider subscription newsletter with the Pamplin Media Group.

Mayor Charlie Hales announced he was running for re-election by answering questions during an interview with the Portland Tribune last March.

Battle of the big bucks

Although Hales has been raising campaign funds for much of the year, it doesn't look like state Treasurer Ted Wheeler will have any trouble competing against him. Since he announced for mayor on Sept. 9, Wheeler already has raised more than \$30,000, almost a third of the nearly \$110,000 Hales has raised this year.

Major contributors to Wheeler include: \$5,000 from brother Thomas Wheeler, president of the Full Circle Recycling Co. in California; \$2,500 from Karla Chambers, owner of Stahlbush Island Farms in Corvallis; and \$1,500 from Chris Mongrain of the Emerson Hardwood Co. in Portland.

Wheeler also is wealthy enough to support his own campaign if he wants. His committee is still carrying a \$50,000 personal loan to his Multnomah County chair campaign that he has no intention of paying back any time soon.

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Downtown Portland park receiving repairs

*By Beverly Corbell
September 24, 2015*

Work began this week to correct a problem at Director Park in downtown Portland. Wooden beams holding up the glass canopy at the park will be replaced with steel ones.

The canopy, 26 feet above the ground, covers about one-quarter of the half-acre park at 815 S.W. Park Ave. The park includes seating areas, a children's splash area and a bigger-than-life chess set. An Elephants Delicatessen location, situated under the canopy, will be closed during the project.

The city learned last fall that the wood beams supporting the glass canopy had moisture damage and would require replacements, according to Portland Parks and Recreation spokesman Mark Ross.

Miller Consulting Engineers informed the city that the current system of wood beams was not suitable for the environment at Director Park, Ross said.

“Steel beams will be easier to maintain and will last for decades,” he said.

The total cost for replacing the beams is \$790,000. The park’s architect, ZGF Architects, will pay \$602,000, Ross said, and the city will pay \$188,000 for the work, which is expected to finish by the end of the year.

The repairs are being handled by R&H Construction.