

The Oregonian

Right 2 Dream Too: Despite plan to move, homeless camp will mark 4th anniversary in place

By Andrew Theen

September 28, 2015

In April, Portland politicians proclaimed they'd found Right 2 Dream Too a new home.

They identified property on the Central Eastside with great views of Tilikum Crossing – far from the hubbub of downtown but close to transit. Commissioner Amanda Fritz said if all went according to plan, the homeless camp could move by the end of the summer.

That didn't happen.

Now a camp organizer doesn't expect to move until 2016.

That means R2D2 will mark its fourth anniversary at the base of the Chinatown gate, despite more than two years of city efforts to find it a new home.

Fritz still hopes the camp can move "before the cool, wintery situation sets in." Mayor Charlie Hales, who last week said he would declare an emergency to find shelter for all homeless women by the end of this year, said Friday that he'd like to see the camp move in 2015.

But Ibrahim Mubarak, R2D2's co-founder, doesn't expect to move before 2016. "It's frustrating," Mubarak said, saying the city moves quickly to address problems for business owners, but not for the homeless.

Portland signed a purchase agreement last year with R2D2's landlord, Michael Wright. The \$1.5 million agreement includes a stipulation that R2D2 will be gone by October 2016.

Portland has made some progress, but many steps remain.

The city bought the eastside property at Southeast Third Avenue and Harrison Street from the Oregon Department of Transportation for \$254,055 -- \$21,724 above the market value. Portland tapped into the \$846,000 it received in February 2014 as part of a complex deal to prevent R2D2 from moving to a Pearl District parking lot.

The city also paid for an environmental and air quality analysis of the property, which is surrounded by industrial businesses. The air quality is better than at the Old Town site, and no pollutants or contaminants were found that would pose "immediate health concerns" to healthy adults who stayed less than a year.

That raised some worry in Hales' office because R2D2 residents aren't necessarily healthy.

"Absolutely it's a concern," Alpert said. "All the more reason for us to be diligently moving people inside."

Portland will probably pave the site, following a recommendation from a separate assessment to cap any chemicals in the earth.

The city still needs to finish zoning plans that would allow the camp or a shelter with small modular buildings.

Fritz said previously that the city would hold a public hearing on the move. The city is still working on the site plan. As of Friday, no hearing appears on the council's long-range calendar.

Debbie Kitchin, president of the Central Eastside Industrial Council, said she waited for more than a month to hear any update. That changed last week, when Hales' chief of staff, Josh Alpert, addressed her group.

Kitchin said Alpert seemed optimistic that the process is on track. "I think that's what the city would like to do," she said of a 2015 move. "But we're still opposed to it."

Charlie Hales says he now supports a 10 cent gas tax, could raise \$14.5 million annually

*By Andrew Theen
September 25, 2015*

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said Friday that he would support sending a gas tax to voters next year.

Hales said he met with Commissioner Steve Novick and told him he would support Novick's plan. Hales then went on OPB's "Think Out Loud" radio show Friday and said he would support a gas tax.

"It raises enough money to make a difference," Hales said Friday in an interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive. "It doesn't raise enough money to solve the problem."

The mayor's announcement comes two weeks after the City Club of Portland issued a report on street funding that recommended a gas tax. Also that day, Sept. 9, state Treasurer Ted Wheeler announced a campaign to challenge Hales in 2016. In his kickoff speech, Wheeler said a gas tax was his "first choice" to pay for street maintenance.

Novick said that day he was exploring a four-year, 10-cent-a-gallon gas tax, which would raise an estimated \$58 million.

A gas tax may be more politically viable than other financial options, especially considering the price of gasoline, according to information gathered by Novick.

The commissioner asked Portland neighborhood coalitions to poll members on transportation-funding options. The Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods received 102 responses, and the gas tax beat other options such as a street fee, income tax or miles-traveled charge. More than one-third of respondents listed the gas tax as their top option.

Novick said he's "delighted" Hales is supportive. "I think that something is better than nothing," Novick added, saying he doesn't want to continue the past 30 years of "futility."

Ten days ago, after the City Club report was published, Hales' spokesman Dana Haynes was quoted in the blog GoLocalPDX saying the mayor was "not prepared to support a gas tax."

Hales said Friday that "Dana got that wrong."

Haynes said in an email that he explained three years of street funding history to the GoLocalPDX reporter, who asked: "So is he calling for a gas tax vote?" I said not at this time," Haynes wrote.

Hales said the City Club report convinced him that Portland should send a gas tax to voters.

When asked why the mayor waited two weeks to support the plan, Haynes said, "It wasn't the only thing going on in the city."

Wheeler's campaign, meanwhile, characterized Hales' announcement as a direct response to Wheeler's jump into the mayor's race.

"It is good to see that in less than 20 days, Ted Wheeler has gotten the Mayor to finally take on challenges that have been left largely unaddressed for years," spokesman Jake Weigler said in an email, citing street funding and Hales' surprise call Wednesday for an urgent push to shelter homeless women.

"We need leaders that will jump at the chance to make progress on the issues that matter, not be backed into confronting them out of political necessity," Weigler said.

Novick said he actually met with Wheeler prior to the state treasurer entering the mayor's race. Novick said he told Wheeler he was thinking of a gas tax. "He said, 'That sounds reasonable.'"

Hales and Novick spent much of 2014 trying to raise more transportation revenue through a controversial street fee.

"I'm happy that we stuck our necks out because we addressed this problem," Hales said Friday. He said the city has been "patiently waiting" for the state and federal governments to do something to raise more money for road repairs.

"The state still needs to act," Hales said. "The federal government still needs to act."

Hold the applause for fossil fuels divestment: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
September 26, 2015*

The mood was celebratory in Portland City Council chambers Thursday as the City Council voted 4-0 to place the top 200 fossil fuel companies on the city's do-not-buy investments list. (Commissioner Amanda Fritz was absent.)

But, as Eric Means of the Portland chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby pointed out, it was a largely symbolic move. So was the other event trumpeted by Mayor Charlie Hales: introduction of the bicycles to be used in Portland's new bike-share program. Neither action will make a dent in climate change, though they might add to the city's green image and perhaps win a few votes for a mayor seeking re-election.

The financial dynamics of the oil and gas industry are a lot more complicated than the vote taken by the Council, and a similar one earlier Thursday by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners. Some of the people who testified at the Council hearing mentioned that more than \$2 trillion has been re-directed from fossil fuel companies through divestment efforts.

Portland's initial contribution to the cause will be about \$55 million, the amount it has invested in Chevron Corp. and Exxon Mobil Corp. bonds. The city does not invest in stocks, which limits its influence. The real payoff for the divestment movement comes when pension funds, loaded with stock investments, agree to divest. To influence large public corporations, you need to affect their stock price. By the way, just the 10 largest oil-and-gas companies have a combined market value of more than \$1.6 trillion.

The value of most fossil fuel stocks is down these days, but ironically that's mostly because supply has grown faster than demand. Decreasing the use of gasoline might actually increase the value of companies like Exxon Mobil and Chevron in the short run as prices go up. If the future of the planet depends on climate action, government bodies probably have a better chance of making a positive impact if they try an approach other than attempting to outmaneuver large corporations in the investments market.

Fortunately, Thursday's action likely won't do any harm – to the planet or the city's finances. Investment-grade bonds trade in a narrow range, so removing fossil fuel companies from consideration will have minimal financial impact on the city. In fact, only about one-fourth of the companies placed on the do-not-buy list have investment grade bonds. It should be noted, though, that if the city sold bonds before maturity, as some climate advocates suggested Thursday, it could take a small loss on some of them.

Also worth noting: A growing number of cities worldwide – including nearby cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Eugene, Corvallis and Ashland – already have taken steps to divest. So there probably won't be much of a hit on the city's image as a place to do business. Certainly, the mayor's Pembina flip-flop, where he welcomed the Canadian propane company and later pulled the rug out from under it, did more damage.

But, likewise, the divestment policy won't do much good – other than making supporters feel better. Comparisons have been made to divestment's role in ending South African apartheid. But withdrawal of investments was one of several political tools used to bring pressure on South Africa. And corporations operate differently than governments. In order for pension funds to sell fossil fuel stocks, there has to be someone else who wants to buy the stocks. So far, that doesn't seem to be a problem, and it likely won't be so long as companies are able to produce oil and gas and find customers who want it.

That's the end game for climate activists, convincing the public to stop using fossil fuel products. A few suggested during the hearing that the city wasn't doing its share to help that cause. Commissioner Steve Novick in his comments before voting for the resolution addressed those who might consider Council members hypocrites because they still use fossil fuel products. "This is obviously just one of the steps we need to take," he said.

Novick was right to say Council members aren't hypocritical if they do things like fly on airplanes or heat their homes with fossil fuels. They're being practical, and that should be encouraged – especially on a Council that often is driven more by ideology than pragmatism. A pragmatic approach to climate change – like increasing the use of propane and decreasing the use of coal in China as Pembina wants to do, or creating larger park-and-rides so commuters could drive for part of their commute and ride light rail trains for the rest instead of driving the entire distance – would do more to reduce carbon emissions than idealistic, symbolic gestures such as putting fossil fuel companies on a do-not-buy list.

The Portland Tribune

Council briefed Tuesday on citywide growth plan

By Jim Redden

September 28, 2015

Portland's City Council will get its first briefing Tuesday morning on the recommended comprehensive land-use plan update that is expected to guide future growth.

A work session on the update has been scheduled from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Sept. 29, in City Hall's Council Chambers. It can be viewed online on the city's website at www.portlandoregon.gov/28258.

State land-use laws require all city to have comprehensive plans that include enough residential and employment land to accommodate 20 years of projected growth. The draft was prepared by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and recommended by the Planning and Sustainability Commission.

Among other things, it envisions the construction of 123,000 new housing, the vast majority of which will be in multifamily buildings. Most are expected to be built downtown, along major corridors or in designated urban centers.

The first public council hearing on the recommended update is scheduled for Nov. 19 at City Hall.

More information on the recommended update can be found at www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/57352.

Willamette Week

Mayor Charlie Hales Says He Supports a Gas Tax

Ted Wheeler had previously announced his support for the gas tax.

By Beth Slovic

September 25, 2015

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales told OPB's Think Out Loud on Friday afternoon that he supports Commissioner Steve Novick's idea for a local gas tax to support road repairs.

"I'll vote for it," he said, "because a lousy ten cents, when the gas prices have fallen by a dollar, it seems like a reasonable thing to do if we want to take care of our streets."

A spokesman for the mayor, Dana Haynes, said 10 days ago that the mayor was not prepared to support the tax.

Haynes, though, says the mayor's announcement is not a reversal. In response to a request for a phone interview, Haynes responded by email:

"He didn't reverse his position. That would have required him to oppose the gas tax proposal, and he did not. But he also didn't commit to it either way. He went to the City Club meeting and

watched the debate. He read the City Club report. And this morning he met with the Transpo Commissioner to talk about the proposal. Out of that meeting, the mayor announced his position. Which is to support Steve Novick on a gas tax."

The announcement comes as mayoral challenger Ted Wheeler, Oregon state treasurer, has continued to blast Hales for his failure to address Portland's huge backlog of street repairs. At his Sept. 9 announcement that he would run for Portland mayor, Wheeler also said he supported a gas tax.

Novick, through his chief of staff, sent an emailed statement to WW: "I very much appreciate the Mayor's statement. Before I ask anyone else on the council to make a commitment, I think I've still got to do some more work to demonstrate broad community support."

Commissioner Amanda Fritz previously told WW she was open to the idea if it went to a public vote after a good public process.

The Portland Mercury

Commissioner Steve Novick Is Doing Street Fee Polling Again— On the Cheap This Time

*By Dirk VanderHart
September 25, 2015*

Last year, City Commissioner Steve Novick spent nearly \$45,000 on a pair of polls (see here and here) that attempted to divine how Portlanders felt about various options for funding streets.

Now, as he weighs whether to put a gas tax before voters, Novick's going the budget route. The transportation commissioner is asking neighborhood associations to send quick surveys to members to get a read on where they stand.

"Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick has requested that Neighborhood Associations to conduct a short survey of their members to find out what priorities they have regarding transportation funding and how to obtain these funds," Forest Park Neighborhood Association President Jerry Grossnickle wrote in an email to members earlier today.

The effort is a further sign that the commissioner is serious about re-igniting the "street fee" discussion in earnest. It's estimated Portland's roads need more than \$1 billion in workover the next decade if they're going to get up to snuff. The 10-cent gas tax Novick says he's considering would capture a small fraction of that. And it would almost certainly face fierce opposition at the polls from the petroleum lobby—still furious about Oregon's rejiggered clean fuel standards.

That means a gas tax will need to have a solid measure of public support before a campaign even kicks off, experts say. What little polling data we have suggests something like 58 percent of Portland residents could get behind a tax, but that number's by no means rock solid.

One apparent booster Novick seems to have scooped up? Mayor Charlie Hales, who appeared on OPB's Think Out Loud this afternoon, and signaled support for a gas tax.

"A lousy ten cents when gas prices have fallen by a dollar seems like the right thing to do," Hales said during the appearance.

It's more supportive than Hales has been in recent weeks. On September 15, his office sent the Mercury this statement regarding his stance:

Mayor Hales says it's dangerous to think a 5- to 10-cent gas tax will cover all of the transportation need. Gas tax could be part of the solution, but it would have to be part of a larger package. "A gas tax is regressive, but so is passing the problem on to the next generation," he says.

Hales primary competition in next year's mayoral race, Ted Wheeler, gave tentative support for a gas tax on September 9, hours after the City Club of Portland released a report supporting the concept.

Update, 3:35 pm: Novick reached out to the city's neighborhood coalitions about a month ago, he says, asking them to poll their member neighborhood associations. He's heard back from just one of the seven coalitions to date—the North East Coalition of Neighbors, which reported 102 respondents favored a gas tax, followed a miles-traveled charged based on vehicle weight.

While Hales told the Oregonian he expressed his support for a gas tax to the transportation commissioner before announcing it on Think Out Loud, Novick's only saying he "had an inkling that [Hales] was leaning in that direction."

"I just heard what he said," Novick said earlier this afternoon, regarding the mayor's on-air comments.

Update, 3:53 pm: Novick now confirms the mayor said he was supportive of the concept. The commissioner was unaware Hales was going to announce it publicly.

Also: It's sounding like Novick probably isn't casting aside expensive, scientific polls after all. Asked whether he's commissioned a new effort, the commissioner said: "Uhhhhhhhh.... If I did I wouldn't tell the press."