

The Portland Tribune

Mayor, council move to combat housing crisis

By Jim Redden

October 6, 2015

The housing emergency to be considered by the City Council on Wednesday is set to last a year and can be extended every six months after that.

Among other things, the ordinance submitted by Mayor Charlie Hales would suspend some city regulations preventing “mass shelters and other short-term housing options from being located in appropriate zones.”

Kurt Creager, director of the Portland Housing Bureau, says such time is needed to open shelters and get housing options underway.

“Even if we suspend regulations, it takes time to act,” Creager says.

The declaration of a housing emergency is just the most recent action that city and county leaders have taken to address chronic homelessness and an increase in rents and no-cause evictions. Housing officials say the problems are exacerbated by more people moving to Portland to take advantage of the economic recovery, helping to push rents 30 percent over the past five years.

Vacancy rates are at 2 and 3 percent, which is about half of where they should be, says Martha McLennan, executive director of Northwest Housing Alternatives, the largest provider of affordable housing in Oregon.

“We need 100,000 more housing units in Oregon,” McLennan says.

During the past two weeks, city and county officials have announced around \$90 million in additional funds for shelters and affordable housing. Of that amount, \$30 million was pledged during a press conference last Wednesday attended by Hales, city commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman, Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury, and a number of housing officials. Portland will contribute \$20 million and the county will add \$10 million, much of it in next year’s budgets.

“We’re not rolling in money — we don’t have 30 million dollars in a desk drawer. But what we do have is the ability to reprogram some of the money in our general fund now that it’s healthy,” Hales said.

That same day, the housing bureau announced \$60 million is available for affordable housing projects. The money is coming from a variety of sources, including \$5 million from the city’s General Fund, \$2.5 million from the county’s General Fund, and \$46.1 million from various city urban renewal areas administered by the Portland Development Commission.

Also on Oct. 7, the council will consider an ordinance submitted by Saltzman to require landlords to give 90 days notice to tenants for non-cause evictions and when increasing rents by more than 10 percent a year. That is more than the 30- and 60-day requirements in the

state's Landlord-Tenant Law. Tenant advocates have called for a moratorium on no-cause evictions and rent increases. Organizations representing tenants say longer city requirements are preempted by the state law.

Hales says it's time for bold action.

"When I came into office, the single-night count of homeless told us we had 1,800 Portlanders sleeping unsheltered. That same count, two years later, barely budged. And yet we had spent millions of dollars and countless staff time," Hales said. "We've tried slow-and-steady. We've tried by-the-book. It's time to add the tools we currently lack.

Portland Business Journal

Portland council to hold 3-hour hearing on tenant woes, state of emergency declaration

By Jon Bell

October 7, 2015

Portland City Council chambers could be full this afternoon as disgruntled tenants seek city intervention in the rental and affordable housing crunch.

Following up on its declaration of a "Renter State of Emergency" from last month, the Community Alliance of Tenants has encouraged tenants, community partners and "victims of displacement" to turn out en masse and share their input at this afternoon's 2 p.m. Council hearing around several proposed measures.

The Council is scheduled to take up separate proposals by Commissioner Dan Saltzman and Mayor Charlie Hales that would respectively add protections for renters and declare a housing emergency. Saltzman's proposal would increase the notification time that renters have for "no-cause evictions."

As it stands now, renters who have rented for less than a year only receive 30 days notice if a landlord chooses to terminate their tenancy for no cause. The proposed policy would increase the notice to 90 days.

Saltzman's proposal would also extend the notification time required when a landlord intends to raise rents more than 10 percent in a 12-month period.

Hales' declaration would allow Portland, Multnomah County and the state of Oregon to move quickly to address a lack of housing and to create emergency shelters. The state of emergency would allow the city to waive zoning codes and convert city-owned buildings into shelters through an expedited process.

It would also enable the city to work with Multnomah County, which can request that Gov. Kate Brown declare a state of emergency in Portland, as well. That would waive portions of the state building codes, which would allow for the conversion of buildings to shelters.

"Given the scope and urgency of the emergency, we continue to believe that renters need a one-year moratorium on no-cause terminations and one-year extended notice period for rent hikes over five percent," said Justin Buri, CAT's executive director, in a release. "We need both immediate and long-term solutions."

Hales' proposal also includes marshaling \$30 million to help address homelessness and affordable housing, an amount that Buri suggested comes up short of what is needed.

"...(E)ven an additional \$30 million will not be enough to keep up with the rate of displacement that we are seeing right now," he said. "If Oregon state law is preventing Portland and other cities from enacting needed tenant protections, then it is time for our local leaders to demonstrate the political will and courage that tenants are asking for."

The Council has budgeted at least three hours for today's discussions on the housing emergency.

GoLocalPDX

Novick's Gas Tax Proposal Gains Momentum, Will Be on May 2016 Ballot

*By Brendan Murray
October 7, 2015*

Portland Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick's planned gas tax proposal is gaining momentum, and will most likely be a ballot measure this May.

"For decades, City Hall has known we have a transportation funding problem, but has kept sweeping it under the rug," Novick said in a statement. "The voters recognize that if we keep kicking the can down the road, there won't be any road left. We need to act as soon as possible - and that means we should send a four-year ten cent gas tax for street repair and traffic safety to the ballot in May 2016."

As GoLocal reported last month, Novick is planning to propose a ballot measure for a gas tax, which would be used to fund desperately needed street repairs in the city. Novick is pushing for a 10 cent per gallon tax, which he said would raise more than \$58 million over the tax's four-year lifespan.

The City Council will be asked to formally refer the tax to May's ballot in December or January.

Polls Show Promise

When Novick first floated the idea of a gas tax in September, critics doubted whether a tax increase would fly with voters, who must approve the plan via a ballot measure. Novick presented evidence on Monday that those naysayers may have been wrong.

According to a poll of 400 Portland residents conducted from September 24 to September 28 by Lake Research Partners, 55 percent of respondents said they would vote in favor of a gas tax. 37 percent said they would vote against the proposal, and 8 percent said they were unsure.

Jim Moore, Director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University, told GoLocal that while those poll numbers are encouraging, they are far from a guaranteed victory for Novick's proposed tax.

"With a poll of 400 people 55 percent of the people in favor of it translates to something like 50 to 60 percent in an election, which is definitely a majority, but it could be a razor-thin one," Moore said. "The numbers he really should have confidence in are the fewer 'no' responses. 37 percent translates to about 40 to 42 percent of voters who said they were against it, and that is very good news for the tax."

Endorsements Incoming

The proposal has also gotten endorsements from influential groups around Portland. The City Club of Portland said they found the gas tax to be "the most feasible" proposal to repair the city's streets. The Portland Business Alliance, the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance also have indicated they support a gas tax.

Moore said that while early endorsements like those are "significant."

Both of Portland's candidates for Mayor have also pledged their support to the tax. Ted Wheeler told GoLocal last month he was in favor of the gas tax and believes it can help fund the street fees. Charlie Hales, current Mayor of Portland, initially told GoLocal he was not in favor of the tax, before changing his tune later that week.

Novick said the support from the public and city leaders was "extremely encouraging."

"It gives me enough confidence to say we've got a good shot at passing it if we work hard," Novick said.

How The Money Would Be Used

Novick asked the Portland Bureau of Transportation to draft a list of possible projects that could be funded by the tax. It includes major street repair projects, funding for safe routes to school throughout the city, and traffic safety improvements in high crash corridors.

In that breakdown, \$32.5 million would be used for paving projects, including more than 30 lane miles of busy street paving. \$7.2 million would be used for safe routes for school projects, which including school crossings, paths and missing connections, sidewalks, traffic calming, and bicycle route connections. \$6.3 million would be used to repair the city's busiest sidewalks.

The remaining \$12 million would be split among other projects, including improvements to bike lanes, crosswalks and high crash areas.