

The Oregonian

North Portland homeless camp: State, Union Pacific Railroad will evict campers

By Andrew Theen

10/09/2015

Homeless people camping on state land in North Portland could be evicted starting next week, according to a state transportation spokesman.

For the second time in less than a month, the Oregon Department of Transportation posted eviction notices telling homeless campers sleeping on public land along a bike path adjacent to North Greeley Avenue they had to go.

The campers are next to a nonprofit garden whose leaders had hoped to organize a camp with services, along the lines of Right 2 Dream Too. The site, long popular among homeless campers, covers a patchwork of city, state and private land.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' office, meanwhile, said it might let campers use city property in the area, despite complaints from the Overlook Neighborhood Association.

"It's not the opportune site," said Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff, "but honestly, at this point, there are very few opportune sites.

"Homelessness is happening and it would be amazing if it happened in an orderly fashion," Alpert said. "It doesn't work that way."

While the state transportation agency decided, at the city's behest, not to evict the campers during a window that closed Oct. 3., this time is different.

"This enforcement action will take place," agency spokesman Don Hamilton said Wednesday. The agency posted written notices Tuesday that said the department would start clearing the area between Oct. 15 and 24. Alpert said Portland police would "be there only to make sure nobody gets hurt."

In the meantime, Alpert said, the city started working to add a trash bin, deliver trash bags or find some other way to get garbage service to the area, and to add portable toilets.

The site is relatively inaccessible to vehicles, Alpert said.

More homeless people have started camping on other property north of the site.

More than a half dozen tents and a recreational vehicle popped up on Union Pacific Railroad land in recent days. On Thursday, sleeping bags and clothing hung to dry from trees along the road. Piles of trash were everywhere.

Late Wednesday night, the railroad's private police warned 11 campers and left notices on about 10 tents that everyone needed to leave by Friday or face a \$6,250 trespassing fine.

Francisco Castillo, a railroad spokesman, said the Portland Police Bureau alerted the railroad Saturday of the growing campsite.

"Whether it's one person there or 10 or 15 or 20 people there, it's a liability to the railroad," Castillo said, citing the Greeley traffic and nearby Albina Yards.

On Wednesday, the City Council declared a housing emergency in Portland, with the goal of placing hundreds of homeless women and people with disabilities in shelters. It's part of a \$30 million pledge from the city and Multnomah County, but no funding has been directly approved.

Alpert said the city is asking people sleeping on public land to "minimize complaints" and to be respectful. That means the focus is on curbing open drug and alcohol use, visible trash and "aggressive behavior," and breaking up camps into smaller groups if possible. Alpert said the city will have a new complaint hotline available soon.

This week, the Overlook Neighborhood Association sent a letter to the City Council opposing a "temporary or permanent homeless camp" in the area.

"Both Interstate and Greeley Avenues carry high traffic volumes," chairwoman Dannielle Herman wrote. "Encouraging people to live there in an unregulated, ad hoc manner puts both pedestrians and motorists at risk of a tragic accident, especially at night under poor illumination."

Alpert said the city appreciates hearing from the neighborhood association and that the city will monitor the situation.

"Nobody should be under the impression that we're doing nothing," he said, citing the housing emergency.

Portland joins Indigenous Peoples' Day movement

*By Andrew Theen
10/08/2015*

Portland officially joined a growing movement Wednesday by formally recognizing the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples' Day.

The City Council voted unanimously to approve the resolution. The second Monday in October is historically celebrated as Columbus Day, a federal holiday. But as of next Monday, Portland will celebrate the people who called the state home for centuries.

"I'm just really overwhelmed by this first step," said Se-Ah-Dom Edmo, a Native American and Portland Human Rights commissioner whose family is from Celilo Village in the Columbia River Gorge.

Advocates of Native Americans have pushed the movement for nearly four decades.

President Franklin Roosevelt first recognized Columbus Day in 1937, and Richard Nixon made it a holiday in 1972. In 2010, the United Nations acknowledged the suffering and lost land and resources of Native people, according to a city statement.

Mayor Charlie Hales said Wednesday that Portlanders have a responsibility to "remember and to learn" about the region's history. "We can remember, we can repair, and we can respect," Hales said.

Berkeley, California, was the first major U.S. to abandon Columbus Day, in 1992. Seattle and Minneapolis adopted similar resolutions in 2014.

In an email, Hales' spokeswoman Sara Hottman said city employees don't have the holiday off. Portland has the ninth largest urban Native American population.

Reyn Leno, chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, said the community is elated.

He told the City Council that indigenous people took great honor in the naming of the Tilikum Bridge, and enjoyed last month's opening ceremony.

But Leno said more could be done. "You can't erase history and culture with a piece of paper and pencil," he said. "But you can do things like this."

The Portland Tribune

Metro: No regional transportation funding yet

*By Peter Wong and Jim Redden
10/08/2015*

Congress, the Oregon Legislature and the Portland City Council are all struggling with raising more money to pay for transportation projects. It turns out, so is Metro, the elected regional government.

Since January, a high-powered Metro study group has been discussing the need for more transportation funds. But the conversation is expected to continue into next year — and possibly beyond with no deadline set for recommending potential additional sources.

"A lot of discussions around transportation funding are happening throughout the region, but there's not one path forward that's emerged yet," says Metro Communications Director Jim Middaugh.

Metro administers the Regional Transportation Plan that determines where federal and state transportation funds will be spent in the region. It is prepared with the help of a 17-member Joint Policy Advisory Transportation Committee that includes representatives of cities and counties in Metro's jurisdiction.

Metro has issued numerous reports over the years saying billions more dollars are needed for the regional transportation system to accommodate the 400,000 more people expected to move here over the next 20 years. For the past nine months, a finance subcommittee created by JPACT has studied whether a new regional funding source could help meet those needs. But no recommendations have been forthcoming, and no schedule has been set for making any.

The subcommittee was created in August 2014 to review the transportation funding package expected to be considered by the 2015 Oregon Legislature. It is chaired by Metro Councilor Craig Dirksen, a former Tigard mayor, and includes other elected officials ranging from Portland Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick to Beaverton Mayor Denny Doyle.

After recommending Metro endorse the package in January, the committee continued meeting to study potential regional funding sources for transportation projects. Several meetings with other elected and transportation officials were held, including a March workshop on how to define “a regional transportation system of mutual funding interest.” The work was discussed at length by JPACT at its Sept. 10 meeting, but the only decision made was to continue the discussions.

The discussions are continuing as Portland area traffic congestion is increasing. Although congestion decreased during the Great Recession, it has increased substantially since the economy began to improve.

On Monday, Novick said he would ask the City Council to place a 10-cent-a-gallon gas tax on the May 2016 ballot. Novick admitted it would not raise nearly enough to fix all of Portland’s streets, even if it passed, however.

Economy drives congestion

State lawmakers were informed of specific statewide indicators — and how they affect the movement of goods by truck — at a meeting last week of the Senate Transportation Committee.

Fuel consumption by motor vehicles in Oregon, as of July, rose 4.1 percent over the same period in 2014. Heavy-truck traffic increased by 3.9 percent, and vehicle miles traveled statewide by 5.8 percent — nearly double the national average of 3 percent for the same period.

“An improving economy means more trucks are moving goods to market, more jobs mean more people driving to work, and lower gas prices make driving more affordable for more people,” says Rian Windsheimer, Portland regional manager for the Oregon Department of Transportation.

“All of these factors mean more congestion on Oregon’s roads, which is being felt around the state, but most acutely in the Portland metropolitan area.”

In addition, the flow of people moving to Oregon has resumed. Windsheimer says 75,000 people yielded their out-of-state licenses in the past year, a 29 percent increase from the depths of the economic downturn in 2009.

A study released earlier this year at the Oregon Business Summit, not connected with ODOT, says that vehicle miles traveled daily on arterial streets in the Portland area during 2014 have now exceeded their 2010 levels, although miles traveled daily on freeways were still about 900,000 below 2010.

The same study concluded that unless there is action, the number of hours spent in traffic delays in the Portland region will increase three-fold to 69 by 2040 — but could be held to 37

hours with action. For other Oregon cities, such delays could be reduced from 18 hours to six hours.

Windsheimer says that some improvements have been made in recent years, tied largely to a 2009 boost in state funding for earmarked projects such as the widening of U.S. 26 in Washington County and the extension of the Sunrise Corridor east of Interstate 205 in Clackamas County.

“But given the size and scope of our ongoing maintenance needs ... it is unlikely we are going to have the funding necessary to construct significant new capacity-enhancing projects without additional funding at the federal and state levels,” he says.

Lawmakers failed in the 2015 session to agree on a state funding plan for highway and bridge work and other transportation projects, largely because of a partisan dispute over Oregon’s low-carbon fuel standard.

Three other panelists told lawmakers that such delays go beyond annoyance and lost time to commuters.

“Congestion increases the cost of business operations and reduces our competitive ability,” says Jana Jarvis, president of the Oregon Trucking Associations.

Jarvis says trucking companies are reaching the limit of alternatives, such as shifting more of their operations to off-peak hours.

While she estimates that 800 to 1,200 additional truck trips have been added each week because of shipping disputes at the Port of Portland, Jarvis says, “at some point, everything Oregonians consume comes in on a truck.”

D.J. Vogt, speaking for the Oregon Business Association, says the effects of congestion go beyond Portland.

“Congestion in Oregon’s urban centers will make the goods produced in other parts of this state less competitive, just because they have to move through places like Portland on our major highways,” he says.

He described the problems faced by Portland-based Columbia Sportswear in moving goods.

“It is just an example of how its expansion potential and hiring plans are being hindered by congestion,” Vogt says.

Jeremy Rogers, a vice president of the Oregon Business Council and the person in charge of the Oregon Business Plan, says congestion also affects Oregon’s small and mid-size businesses that rely on shipments.

In a report drawn from the Urban Mobility study by the Texas A&M University Transportation Institute, the Portland area ranked 23rd in 2014, compared with 25th a decade ago — but it ranked 12th in traffic delays per commuter, up from 25th, and 11th in the cost of those delays per commuter, up from 23rd.

“We are headed in the wrong direction,” Rogers says.

Troutdale asks Portland to pay to relocate post office

By Katy Sword

10/08/2015

The Portland Development Commission is talking to Troutdale and Port of Portland officials about moving the downtown Portland U.S. Post Office to the Troutdale Reynolds Industrial Park.

Troutdale officials are interested but want Portland to pay a replacement property tax fee to their city if the move takes place, according to Port of Portland Executive Director Bill Wyatt, who is familiar with the discussions.

“The post office is a federal agency and doesn’t pay property taxes. Troutdale would collect property taxes if a private business moved there,” Wyatt told the Portland Tribune.

Troutdale Mayor Doug Daoust confirmed discussions about the potential move took place on Sept. 21, but would not disclose details.

“Where I’ll leave it is when we know more about this, we’ll bring it to the council for further direction. It will be the council’s decision on the development of our prime industrial land to a federal agency that does not pay property taxes,” Daoust said. “The Port of Portland has agreed numerous times that it will support whatever the city of Troutdale wants to do. So we’ll see how it goes.”

The current plan is for the PDC to pay \$80 million to buy the 14-acre Post Office complex on Northwest Hoyt Street and fund a new mail distribution center elsewhere, then at least \$35 million more to build parks, sewers, water lines and roads and subsidize affordable housing. Then the city would offer sites to developers to build 3,100 multifamily units — including 645 affordable apartments — and office space for up to 4,000 workers, including a 400-foot-high office tower that would rank among the city’s tallest.

The 350-acre Troutdale Reynolds Industrial Park is owned by the Port of Portland, but is within the Troutdale city limits. It is home to a FedEx regional distribution center. Most of the rest of the property currently is being prepared for further development.

PDC spokesman Shawn Uhlman would not confirm or deny that such a fee is being discussed.

The PDC has long advocated for the post office’s relocation, as the center currently occupies 14 acres of valuable real estate in Portland’s Pearl District.

“The PDC has been working with USPS for quite some time on their central facility in downtown Northwest Portland,” said Shawn Uhlman, PDC public affairs manager. “It’s long been identified as a site for tremendous redevelopment potential.”

Daoust said during the meeting, further details were discussed of the potential venture. The post office is eyeing lots seven and eight, just south of the FedEx center, to construct a 789,000 square foot facility.

“There’s a quick budget cycle that we talked about, meaning a lot of things happening next year in 2016,” Daoust said.

Uhlman said the meeting was intended to answer any lingering questions, and because the project is still in the negotiation period, it's tough to determine the project's specific direction. He added similar meetings are happening with a few other potential sites, both in and out of Portland, but that the list has been narrowed down to a small handful of potential locations.

"From what I understand, the meeting went well," he said. "It was meant to understand what Troutdale's priorities are."

Go Local PDX

More Protections on the Way for Portland Renters?

By Brendan Murray

10/09/2015

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council heard arguments for increasing rental protections in the city, which is facing a state of emergency for its housing and homelessness problem.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman, head of the Portland Housing Bureau, proposed the extending of notice periods for no-cause evictions and rent hikes. Under Saltzman's proposals, landlords would be required to give renters 90 days, rather than 30 or 60 days, notice before issuing a no-cause eviction. Landlords will also have to give 90 days notice if they raise rent prices by five percent or more in one year.

"Portland is facing some of the highest rental increases in the nation. People are afraid they will be priced out or otherwise displaced from their neighborhood," Saltzman told GoLocal. "They are wrestling with Portland's growth and the impact of infill development on their daily lives. Their stories are living proof of how the lack of housing or housing instability affects mental health and well-being."

Tenants Tired

Justin Buri, Executive Director of The Community Alliance of Tenants, said that Portland's rental population has waited too long for further protection. He called on the City Council and other city leaders to extended help to Portland's renters.

"Tenants are tired of being silenced out of fear, retribution or a bad reference from our landlords," Buri said.

Buri also said that increased notice periods for rent spikes and evictions are crucial to low and median income renters in the city. He said the continuously rising rental prices for apartments in Portland coupled with a lack of available units puts enormous pressure on those who are forced to move out of their apartment with little notice.

"If you received a no-cause eviction today, how long would it take you to move," Buri asked.

"Now, imagine if you had bad credit, a foreclosure, medical debt or student loans. What if you received the eviction after asking for a repair—would you list that landlord as a reference? Imagine if you had a criminal record after being arrested for sleeping outside during one of the homeless sweeps, or from the war on drugs, which racially profiles people of color."

Landlords Say No Way

Cindy North, a lobbyist with the Rental Housing Alliance of Oregon, said that the changes in notice time are unfair to building owners. She said that the measures will not have an effect on the continuously rising rent in Portland, as the price of rent is determined not by landlords or building owners, but by the demand for housing as new residents flood into the city.

"Changing the rules on landlords does not lead to more housing," Robert said.

Robert also said that the longer extension times for evictions will cause problems for renters who are not being forced out of their homes. She said that often, tenants being evicted are "bad actors" who other residents want removed quickly.

"30 days is not a short time," Robert said. "To neighbors of bad actors, 30 days seems like an eternity."