

The Oregonian

Plan to protect Portland trees pushes four to quit committee

By Brad Schmidt
November 5, 2015

UPDATED: This story includes comments from Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

Portland's ongoing conflict over tree-cutting and infill buzzed through City Hall on Wednesday when four of 12 members of a city advisory group – each with ties to the construction industry – abruptly resigned in protest.

The resignations came just hours after city officials released a memo with recommended policy changes meant to strengthen tree protections. The proposed changes, requested by Commissioner Amanda Fritz, are the first since Eastmoreland neighbors in September successfully rallied against a developer's plan to ax three giant sequoia trees.

City officials acknowledged that the proposal is in direct response to situations such as Eastmoreland. But some members of Portland's Tree Code Oversight Advisory Committee said city leaders are overreacting and ignoring their input.

"Any sense of (a) balanced approach to the issues before us seem to have taken a backseat to special interests or citizen pressures surrounding certain select trees," wrote committee member Phil Damiano, who works for Johnson Air Products, a distributor of HVAC systems.

Damiano said the city's proposal left him "questioning the value" of the committee. Then he joined others by quitting.

Messages left late Wednesday for Fritz, who oversees Portland Parks & Recreation, were not immediately returned.

Update: In an email sent to committee members after midnight, Fritz said she and Commissioner Dan Saltzman considered proposing a moratorium on development when large trees would be cut down. She also asked parks employees for an alternative to the moratorium -- which prompted Wednesday's proposal.

Fritz told members she hoped to speak with them to clarify and discuss the proposal.

"It is a proposal for discussion and refinement, not a done deal," Fritz wrote. "There may be an alternative solution, or perhaps consensus will emerge that we should wait to make any amendments or additional Administrative Rules."

Wednesday's revolt began when a city employee emailed committee members just after 11 a.m. with a proposal to revise the city's tree code.

The changes, proposed by city Forester Jen Cairo, all but called on developers to protect trees that are 48 inches in diameter or larger.

Under existing rules, developers building a new house are supposed to try to maintain at least one third of all trees at least 12 inches in diameter. In instances when that doesn't happen, developers must pay \$1,200 for each tree below the one-third minimum.

Under Wednesday's proposal, those rules would still apply – but costs would increase for a developer who knocks down big trees.

Instead of a flat fee, developers would be required to pay on an inch-for-inch basis when removing a tree at least 48 inches in diameter.

The memo didn't specify a cost. But the city separately charges a fee of \$300 per inch for trees along city streets. If that rate is applied, removing a 48-inch tree would run \$14,400.

Beyond higher costs, developers also would be required to post a public notice for at least seven days before removing the tree.

Jessica Fuller, the city employee who sent the memo to committee members, wrote that the proposed changes are a "stop-gap measure" to address situations such as Eastmoreland while a more sweeping review continues.

Fuller wrote that the proposal "does not contradict or diminish" the work of the committee. And she urged members to respond via email because "we will not have a lot of time" at a meeting Monday to discuss the proposal.

The first resignation came about an hour later.

Justin Wood, who represents the Homebuilders Association of Metropolitan Portland, wrote that committee members' input is requested only "when it is convenient." Wood also noted that Portland hopes to add 125,000 housing units over 20 years but no one is coming to terms with what that means for tree preservation.

Wood's father-in-law, Jeff Fish, a homebuilder who also sits on the committee, quit too. He said Fritz was impeding their work.

"I am done with playing this charade that the City of Portland, and their elected leaders, continue to play," he wrote.

The group's co-chair, Susan Steward, also quit. Steward is the executive director for Oregon's Building Owners and Managers Association.

"After committing almost a year to this, it has become apparent my input, as well as the input of others is not valued," she wrote.

Taxi companies want to do away with 'taxi companies' under city code

*By Elliot Njus
November 5, 2015*

A group of Portland taxi companies wants to do away with taxi companies — at least as far as city code is concerned.

Facing new rules that would permanently sanction their disruptive new competitors, Uber and Lyft, local cab companies have offered an eleventh hour proposal that strikes references to

"taxi companies" from the city code and lumps all "private for-hire transportation companies" together.

The plan would increase the costs and regulation for Uber, Lyft and their drivers to levels currently faced by taxi drivers and companies, including per-car permitting fees and greater insurance requirements.

The proposal comes as the Portland City Council meets Thursday afternoon to consider a regulatory scheme proposed by Commissioner Steve Novick, who oversees the city transportation bureau. His proposal does away with permitting fees in favor of a per-ride surcharge, and it allows Uber and Lyft to provide less insurance coverage when a drivers are waiting for a fare.

The counterproposal aims to level the playing field without lowering standards, said Michael Schultz, a lawyer for a taxi industry group called the Transportation Fairness Alliance.

"This proposal recognizes that technology has made it more efficient for people who seek rides to request them," he said. Novick's proposal, he says, is rooted in the idea that Uber and Lyft provide different services than taxis.

While Novick's proposal would ease regulations on taxi companies, the taxi companies argue that restrictions for Uber and Lyft drivers should be increased to levels closer to that of cab drivers.

For example, taxi companies say Uber and Lyft should have to pay a per-car annual permit fee as the taxi companies have historically, and that they should require Uber and Lyft to carry bigger insurance policies for their drivers.

Uber and Lyft have argued that most of their their drivers aren't full-time professionals and shouldn't be regulated as such.

The proposal would maintain certain exclusive competitive advantages for marked fleet vehicles — that is, the ones that work for taxi companies. Only vehicles with taxi markings and outfitted with cameras could pick up street hails or wait for fares in taxi stands, and they would have to be part of a fleet of 15 vehicles or more.

That's necessary to maintain passenger and driver safety because street hails are inherently anonymous, Schultz said. (Novick's proposal makes similar distinctions, and Uber and Lyft have not campaigned for the right to pick up street hails.)

"It's mostly intended to provide for public safety," he said. "But to be clear ... there's nothing to prevent any company from utilizing fleet vehicles."

Taxi companies also want Uber and Lyft drivers to meet additional hurdles to get permits in Portland. They would, for example, have to show the city an endorsement from their car insurance company acknowledging they're using their care for commercial use part-time — an effort to avoid uncertainty over who's responsible for in the event of a crash.

The Portland City Council meets at 3 p.m. Thursday at City Hall, 1221 S.W. Fourth Ave.

The Portland Tribune

Bill Naito's dream gets closer to reality

By Steve Law

November 5, 2015

More than two decades ago, Portland developer Bill Naito would talk to anyone who'd listen — city officials, reporters, and others — about why the city should relocate the sprawling mail distribution complex in Northwest Portland so the site could be redeveloped.

Now Naito's dream is getting closer to reality.

On Thursday the Portland City Council approved the outlines of a plan for the city to buy the U.S. Postal Service property on Northwest Hoyt Street, find a new home for it with city funds, then redevelop the site for offices, parks, public plazas and housing, including affordable apartments. The council also granted preliminary approval to an interim financing plan so the Portland Development Commission can afford to pay some \$80 million to buy the 14-acre regional mail facility and relocate it elsewhere. (Naito suggested it move near the airport, since much of the mail now goes by plane.)

The financing arrangement, which requires final approval from the City Council next week, will enable the PDC to move negotiations with the Postal Service to the next stage.

This is a "once in a generation opportunity," PDC Executive Director Patrick Quinton told the City Council.

Mark Edlen, one of Portland's top developers and now a member of the PDC board, predicted the city could eventually sell the Postal Service property for more than it has agreed to pay for it, an estimated \$135 million to \$177 million.

Any reluctance shown by city commissioners in a work session several weeks ago seems to have vanished, especially after Commissioner Dan Saltzman prodded the PDC to put \$20 million more into the project for affordable housing.

"It's been of those elusive dreams of this City Council and the PDC to finally get ahold of the Post Office site," Saltzman said.

Now Portland's hot real estate market, a willing seller, and active pursuit of the project by Mayor Charlie Hales is making that dream come to fruition, Saltzman said.

Commissioner Nick Fish even suggested the PDC hold onto an ownership stake in the property, and use that to help fund the urban renewal agency in the future, to supplement its dwindling tax-increment financing, its primary funding source.

The framework plan includes the 14-acre Postal Service site on Northwest Hoyt Street and 24 acres of surrounding land, including Union Station, the Greyhound Bus terminal, the Broadway Bridge and other PDC-owned parcels.

A team of visionary architects devised a preliminary plan that includes a highrise rivaling the U.S. Bank Tower in height, expansion of the North Park Blocks, a civic plaza next to Union Station and other features.

Those are not written in stone, but the plan showed that the city could provide space for several thousand new jobs and several thousand new residents there.

Growth is coming to Portland, Hales said, and the Postal Service property will enable the city to help shape some of that growth. The site may be the largest undeveloped property in any central city in the U.S. right now, he boasted.

“This is a great opportunity to go where we want to go in the city,” Hales said.

Naito, who helped preserve many Old Town historic buildings from the wrecking ball, is long gone, though Portland honored by naming a major downtown parkway after him. But it’s safe to say he would be proud.

(Reporter Steve Law was one of the people that Naito spoke to about his dream back in the 1990s, when Law was a real estate reporter for the Portland Business Journal.)

Daily Journal of Commerce

Map app’s latest version performing ‘especially well’

By Stephen Alexander

November 5, 2015

Before the Comprehensive Plan Map App existed, if someone had questions or concerns about the plan he or she would need to attend a public meeting, a Portland City Council meeting or a Planning and Sustainability Commission meeting to provide public testimony.

“This is a pretty high bar to participation, and often leads to us talking to the same individuals or groups repeatedly,” said Kevin Martin, technical services manager for Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

The original version of the Map App was launched in October 2013. This past August, version 3 went live. It’s more streamlined and modern to improve ease of use by citizens.

Martin said that the Map App, since inception, has been “pretty successful,” gaining approximately 100,000 page views and 4,000 individual comments by 20,000 to 30,000 people. He said that the new version has been doing “especially well,” producing as many as 5,000 visits a day.

“We’re hoping that we’re also reaching a broader demographic,” he said.

Another goal is for the updated app to make the planning process more understandable. Martin said that a lot of effort is put into the “About” page and into content that explains in as simple a way as possible how land use, infrastructure and zoning proposals move from internal concepts

to City Council adoption, what happens with feedback and what the planning jargon means to the average Portlander.

Martin hopes the Map App helps get Portlanders interested and invested in the 2035 Comprehensive Plan.

“The Comprehensive Plan may not sound very exciting, but it is really the vision for the future of Portland,” he said. “Given the challenges we now face as a growing, destination city, we need input from all Portlanders to help make the kind of tough decisions to get us to a more equitable, sustainable and livable future. The Map App is just one tool for participating in the Comprehensive Plan, but it has a very low barrier to entry for those who have access to a computer or a smartphone.”

While Martin considers version 3 a success, he said the city will continue to do more.

“We have a list of improvements that we will be trying to tackle over the next six months,” he said.

Portland Business Journal

Portlanders leerier of city government as services ratings drop

By Andy Giegerich

November 6, 2015

Portlanders are feeling a bit meh about their city.

The 2015 Community Survey, from City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero, "shows that less than half of Portlanders feel positive about the city's overall job in providing services."

That's the second lowest rating in 20 years.

"Portlanders report an increase in residential and commercial development in their neighborhoods, while they rate housing affordability as less affordable than five years ago," Hull Caballero's office wrote.

The city's Fire, Parks, 9-1-1, Recreation, Housing Inspections and Water departments showed no significant change over ratings posted five years ago. "Police, Sewers and storm drainage showed significant improvement in positive ratings. Planning and street maintenance showed significant drops in approval," according to the report.

One other note: "Congestion on major streets compared to five years ago is worse during all hours – not just rush hour – according to residents.