

The Portland Tribune

City holds Wednesday open house for more Street Seats

By Jennifer Anderson

December 1, 2015

Portland has 15 active Street Seats — is there room or desire for more?

The Portland Bureau of Transportation hopes so, and will hold their annual info session and open house on Dec. 2 to answer applicants' questions.

Now three years old, Portland's Street Seats program lets businesses extend their outdoor seating and nonprofit organizations provide a public space for people to stop, sit and take in the street scene.

Two of the city's newest Street Seats are at Bonfire Lounge (2821 S.E. Stark St.), and Lompoc Brewing (1620 N.W. 23rd Ave.

Most of the 15 locations are in the city center — downtown, Northwest Portland, inner Northeast or inner Southeast. The furthest east is at Songbird Cafe, 6839 S.E. Belmont St.

Applicants whose proposals are accepted are allowed to build a temporary platform in the curb zone, extending the sidewalk space.

The info session for prospective applicants is set for 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Dec. 2 next to one of the city's newest Street Seat installations, at Bunk Bar and Water Ave Coffee, 1028 S.E. Water Ave.

Program leaders will discuss design requirements, costs and timeline of the process.

The deadline for submission of concept plans is Feb. 1.

The city will select no more than 10 new locations to move through the design development and review process.

They'll be given priority for creativity of design, public seating proposals (rather than a business' outdoor seating), and demonstration of community support.

Professional design assistance is encouraged.

For application materials and more: PortlandOregon.gov/Transportation/StreetSeats.

For photos of current Street Seats: flickr.com/groups/pdxstreetseats.

Council to vote on \$25,000 demolition [sic] tax

By Jim Redden

December 1, 2015

The Portland City Council inched closer to adopting a tax intended to slow home demolitions and help fund affordable housing last week. The final vote on the proposal by Mayor Charlie Hales was postponed until this Wednesday, however, after it repeatedly was amended to address issues raised by the commissioners and witnesses.

As amended, the proposal would levy a \$25,000 tax on all viable homes demolished and replaced with one or more new homes, but would exempt homes being purchased by the city to restore floodplains and affordable housing replacement projects.

Hales says he hopes the tax will prevent as many as 100 demolitions a year and raise \$1 million or more annually for affordable housing.

“Growth is creating a lot of positive things in Portland, but I’m less happy with the demolition of great old houses that are being replaced by more expensive ones,” Hales said at the Nov. 25 hearing.

Although Hales introduced the proposal in response to neighborhood complaints about a “demolition epidemic,” not all those concerned were pleased with it. Several witnesses said the tax will only be passed on to homebuyers, further increasing the cost of housing. And a representative of United Neighborhoods for Reform argued for a moratorium on all residential demolitions, saying other issues, like mitigating hazardous materials during the demolition process, have yet to be resolved.

The council defeated an amendment by Commissioner Steve Novick that would have reduced the tax for less-expensive replacement houses. Hales said the council could revisit the idea in the future, however, as the tax plays itself out and other housing-related issues come before the council, such as recommendations by the task force he appointed to study residential infill problems.

The discussion came as the Portland housing market continues to heat up.

Average home sale prices in the metropolitan area rose to \$353,400 in October, an increase of 6.1 percent over the previous year, according to the Regional Multiple Listing Service. The hottest areas included West Portland, where the average sale price was \$427,000 in October, and Lake Oswego/West Linn, where it was \$450,000.

“Activity has been higher in 2015 than in 2014 across the board,” according to the RMLS October Action Report. “Pending sales (30,453) are up 23.4 percent, closed sales (28,096) are up 20.6 percent, and new listings (36,966) are up 8.5 percent for the year thus far.”

Rents are rising even faster in Portland. The average of all rents in the city, including studios, one or more bedroom apartments, and single-family houses, was \$1,674 in October, an increase of 11.2 percent over the previous year, according to the Zillow real estate and rental tracking service.

“It’s tough in Portland, which is still one of the nation’s hottest markets,” says Zillow chief economist, Svenja Gudell. “It ranks in the top five among the 35 largest metros for home value and rental appreciation — both are still rising at a double-digit pace,” she says.

The City Council blames such increases for creating a housing crisis in Portland. It declared a state of housing emergency in early October, in part to speed the opening of more emergency shelters, like the Sears Armory in Southwest Portland that began housing homeless women late last month. Hales also has directed the police to reduce homeless camp sweeps, contributing to the growing number and size of camps in the Overlook neighborhood and other parts of town.

And the mayor has raised the possibility of the city spending more general fund dollars to build affordable housing.

Until this year, the city's contribution to affordable housing projects has come primarily from dedicated funding sources, such as urban renewal dollars or pass-through federal housing funds.

The city spent several million dollars of its surplus funds on affordable housing in the current budget. Hales wants to go further in next year's budget, shifting money from other bureaus into affordable housing.

On Nov. 19, Hales sent a memo to all general fund bureau heads asking them to prepare budget requests for next year with 5 percent reductions. The memo says one reason is to identify money that could be spent to address a number of pressing issues, including "an affordable housing and homelessness crisis that requires additional resources to invest in the most effective approaches."

The only general fund bureau spared from the requirement is the Portland Housing Bureau.

In the memo, Hales says the council already has set aside \$10 million of additional money to respond to the housing state of emergency it has declared, adding, "I will call on every bureau to help us find solutions to the housing crisis."

The council has the most discretion over how general fund dollars are spent. Because of that, it historically has been reluctant to spend that money on programs for which there are dedicated sources of funding, such as the housing and transportation bureaus. Top priorities for general fund dollars are traditionally the police, fire and park bureaus.

In the memo, Hales says he plans to continue those priorities.

"I will look to preserve core public safety functions so that we can respond to the epidemic of gun-related violence and proactively engage with the community. And I will continue to ensure that City resources are allocated to programs that have a direct impact on the lives of our citizens and that we focus on maintaining our assets and infrastructure," it reads.

Although new revenue projections will not be available for a few more weeks, the memo says the city's financial outlook is good, but some difficult budget decisions will still need to be made.

Willamette Week

Sexism Runs Deep at Portland's Bureau of Development Services, Study Finds

*By Beth Slovic
November 25, 2015*

Female employees in Portland's Bureau of Development Services say sexism permeates the culture, according to an outside consultants' report on the city's permitting agency.

"Many women find BDS to be a challenging workplace," the 48-page report from the Coraggio Group finds. "[T]hey see men given preferential treatment, and they see women treated poorly."

The finding comes more than five months after Mayor Charlie Hales yanked the bureau from Commissioner Amanda Fritz and assigned oversight to Commissioner Dan Saltzman. It also comes after a period of massive layoffs, followed by significant re-hiring as Portland's economy has gone from bust to boom in recent years.

That whipsawing —both in terms of political leadership and finances—was also a focus of the report, which sought to assess employee morale and suggest improvements.

Through interviews with employees, the consultants found other themes:

- Employees are afraid to speak up and offer contradictory opinions.
- Communications from supervisors are often inadequate and/or unclear.
- Employees lack trust in their leaders.
- Departmental silos run deep.
- Codes and regulations are applied inconsistently.

The consultants also highlighted a few positive aspects of work at BDS:

- BDS employees are focused on doing the right thing for the city.
- BDS has a highly capable staff.
- BDS employees have high hopes for the city's new paperless permitting system.

Sexism, the consultants wrote, "was one of the strongest themes we encountered."

"Although some of our findings may be challenging," they wrote, "no agency submits itself to such a detailed assessment if it isn't dedicated to making meaningful change."

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor

Lame-Duck Charlie and the PBA

By Dirk VanderHart

November 25, 2015

FOR A GLIMPSE of the good that can happen when your mayor goes lame duck, look no further than the Portland City Council meeting on November 18.

At that meeting, a provision that Portland equity advocates have been pushing hard popped back up after more than seven months in the cold. It's called "ban the box," and it would limit most employers' ability to learn about an applicant's criminal convictions until after they'd offered the person the job.

You know about ban the box if you read the Mercury regularly. We wrote about the policy in April, when Mayor Charlie Hales—who'd been itching to ram the law through—suddenly pulled back amid concerns from the Portland Business Alliance (PBA).

And we wrote about it again in August, when it became clear the proposal maybe wasn't on its way back to council, like Hales said it would be. The state had passed a version of ban the box by then—one that was far more watered down than the policy Portland had considered—and the mayor's office seemed to believe that it would be best to give the statewide law a spin before getting hasty and enacting our own.

On November 18, that notion had disappeared altogether. The statewide law won't kick in until January, but city council appears ready to adopt its own far-stronger ban the box policy as soon as Wednesday, November 25 (it'd go into effect in July).

What changed? Well, the mayor's career plans, for starters.

When Hales took ban the box off the council calendar in August, he was busy soliciting campaign cash to keep strong political challengers at bay. He'd angered the PBA over the course of the year—most notably when he reversed course on inviting a mammoth propane terminal into North Portland—but there wasn't all-out animosity.

It might have made sense, at the time, to hold off on a measure advocates said would vastly improve ex-convicts' chances of getting a job—especially since the state had already taken a half-step.

Then Ted Wheeler happened. After months of speculation, the state treasurer and former Multnomah County chair announced in September that he'd go toe-to-toe with Hales, and it became clear that city business leaders had helped recruit Wheeler.

A little more than a month later, Hales decided not to run. At around the same time—voilà!—ban the box came back up on his radar.

At an event in late October, Hales told me that's because it became clear to him that the state law didn't go far enough, and that he thought Portland needed something stronger. But nothing had changed in the state law. It was the same legislation his office had cited when putting ban the box on ice in August.

What changed, instead, was Hales' relationship with business leaders, and his need for their support.

He doesn't have to worry about the PBA much anymore, and Portlanders with a record—often unfairly cast aside because of past misdeeds—stand to win big.

GoLocalPDX

REACH Begins Home Repairs for Displaced Residents

By GoLocalPDX News Team

December 1, 2015

Thanks to a \$110,000 grant from the Portland Housing Bureau, REACH's Community Builders Program began work on Monday provide critical home repairs to help twelve longtime homeowners retain their homes and remain in their communities.

"REACH is excited to advance the City's plan by supporting existing homeowners through critical home repairs in an area that is gentrifying rapidly," said REACH CEO Dan Valliere. "This

important award will help longtime residents of North and Northeast Portland to remain in their homes for many years to come."

The grant is part of Portland's North/Northeast Neighborhood Housing Strategy, a five-year plan addressing the ongoing threat of displacement and gentrification in the neighborhoods that comprise inner North and Northeast Portland.

According to REACH, lack of funds to make a critical home repair can often lead to someone losing their home. Through the grant REACH hopes to keep homeowners retain their homes and remain in the city of Portland.

All homeowners currently enrolled to receive critical repairs under this grant have lived in their homes for at least 25 years; 82% are African American. These homeowners will receive up to \$9,500 worth of repairs to help them retain homeownership and, for many, remain in the community that provides them with an important gathering place for friends and family.

For 33 years, REACH has built innovative and affordable housing for low-income families and individuals in the Portland metropolitan region. REACH develops and manages affordable housing and provides supportive services to our residents, as well as free home repairs to senior homeowners. Today, REACH's portfolio includes 2,073 units including single family homes, apartment buildings, and mixed-use developments located across the region. REACH has won numerous state and national awards for its creative approach to building healthy communities and its innovative housing projects