

The Oregonian

Portland city council could afford to be more narrow-minded on fiscal matters: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
December 9, 2015*

For a moment, it seemed that Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick was injecting a hint of fiscal sobriety into a discussion with his colleagues about a new parental leave benefit for the city's nearly 6,000 workers.

Novick said he supported Commissioner Amanda Fritz's proposal to offer city workers six weeks of paid leave for use after the birth, adoption or foster placement of a child. But he warned his colleagues about the impact the new benefit might have. He noted that the Bureau of Emergency Communications has had to force people to work overtime due to staffing shortages, a problem in terms of cost and burnout that will likely get worse with the additional parental leave benefit. Moreover, the bureau would not be able to sustain the 5 percent budget cut that Mayor Charlie Hales is asking commissioners to prepare in order to free up funds for housing initiatives and to combat gun violence, as The Oregonian/OregonLive's Andrew Theen reported.

But Novick shook off any doubt and, along with Fritz and Commissioners Dan Saltzman and Nick Fish, the City Council unanimously added another benefit to the generous portfolio that the city offers its employees. Mayor Charlie Hales was not present for the vote.

It should be said – and many at last week's meeting said it – there are legitimate public policy reasons to support paid parental leave, such as encouraging bonding between parents and children and easing the transition to a new family dynamic. The problem is that city commissioners seem to be motivated almost entirely by the chance to be hailed as social-policy leaders. They seem to have little interest, meanwhile, in determining whether the benefit is actually needed, considering how taxpayer dollars already provide employees with generous amounts of paid time off.

It seems like such a small expense. The city estimates it would have cost only about \$217,000 to cover the 5,719 unpaid hours taken by its 185 employees on parental leave in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015. The city estimates costs of another \$195,000 to \$285,000 to pay for staff to backfill the positions held by those on parental leave.

But that \$217,000 figure is important for another reason. It's low because employees already have a bank of paid sick and vacation time that has been covering the bulk of their parental leave. City employees earn 104 hours – just over two and a half weeks – of sick leave a year, and they can roll over unused time without limit. In addition, new employees earn two weeks' vacation with the amount increasing modestly with years of service and can roll over a limited amount of unused time.

The city's impact analysis isn't complete, reflecting that the city did little research to establish what the actual need is. But the numbers that are included help explain the issue. The 185

employees took 7,000 hours of paid vacation, deferred holiday and comp time to help cover their parental leaves. The analysis, unfortunately, does not list the corresponding number of sick hours city employees took for parental leave. The analysis only provides that figure for police and fire employees, who took 9,113 hours of sick time for parental leave in the most recent fiscal year.

Why were police and fire employees' sick time totals provided when other city employees' were not? Because public safety employees are permitted to cash out a portion of any sick leave accumulated at the time of their retirement.

And that brings up another financial question: What will this new policy mean when employees leave the city and cash out either vacation or, in certain cases, sick time? The city's response in its analysis was that "it is difficult to predict these two long term impacts because there is a twenty-year gap between employee requesting parental leave and employee retiring and cashing out unused vacation." In other words, who knows, but that's a problem for a future generation.

In talking about the policy with The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board, Portland Human Resources director Anna Kanwit emphasized the benefits of providing paid parental leave, including the inducement of six more weeks of paid time to fathers, who often take less time off than they are entitled to, even if they have the paid hours to cover it. "My opinion is the fiscal piece is very narrow and small-minded," Kanwit told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board.

Perhaps, if the city's main objective is to establish itself as the most family-friendly employer in the region. But what about the emergency declared by City Council to address homelessness and affordable housing? Or the record levels of gang-related violence that Hales has called a crisis? Or the street maintenance backlog that has gone ignored for so long that commissioners want to ask taxpayers to fund a new gas tax? With so many priorities, commissioners must evaluate the level of need before committing resources. Portland could stand to be far more narrow and small-minded in its fiscal focus.

The Portland Tribune

East Portland to City Hall: help us prevent gentrification

By Steve Law

December 9, 2015

East Portland leaders, in a clarion call to prevent further displacement of residents and merchants, are mobilizing Monday to adopt a wide range of anti-gentrification strategies for a broad swath of the city east of 82nd Avenue.

People "downtown" — meaning City Hall — are saying there's a lot of "potential" for displacement in East Portland, but it's happening already, says Lore Wintergreen, a city employee who serves as an advocate for the East Portland Action Plan.

Portland boasts a lot of expertise in planning, Wintergreen says, in another reference to her colleagues at City Hall, “so we say please apply it.”

In recent months, she says, there’s been a migration of the Bhutanese immigrant community out of East Portland, on to Salem and other communities.

“That’s where people can find them housing,” Wintergreen says. “They cannot find them housing even in Gresham any more.”

Activists and community leaders who are united around creation and implementation of the East Portland Action Plan have been studying anti-gentrification strategies for the past year. Now they’ll gather at noon Monday, Dec. 14 at IRCO, 10301 N.E. Glisan St., to discuss the next steps in the effort.

A city-financed study of gentrification, released in 2013, predicted that neighborhoods south of Powell Boulevard and due east of 82nd Avenue were next in line to see gentrification pressure, among other Portland neighborhoods. As the Portland Tribune reported in August 2013, there had already been a spate of small homes knocked down in Lents, blocks from the city’s first Walmart store. They were being replaced by two-story homes snapped up by Chinese immigrants anxious to locate near the bustling pan-Asian Jade District centered on 82nd Avenue.

Recent Census data shows East Portland, which had been experiencing an influx of African-Americans displaced by gentrification of inner North and Northeast Portland, has actually “gotten whiter” since the economy started booming, Wintergreen says.

An anti-gentrification coalition lobbied to get the Planning and Sustainability Commission to include a passel of anti-gentrification policies in the revised city comprehensive land use plan. That plan is now being considered by the Portland City Council.

“The tipping point is now,” Wintergreen says. “We can still prevent a lot of displacement here.”

On Monday, there will be testimony from people displaced from their housing in East Portland.

Then East Portland leaders will roll out their anti-gentrification strategies.

Those include:

- Provisions that require “living wages,” such as in city contracting
- Provisions that require local hiring for construction and other development projects.
- Community Benefits Agreements, which require investments in the area when big projects are being approved.
- Just-cause eviction rules, which bar residential displacements for no reason.
- Homeownership assistance and retention programs.
- Acquisition of derelict multifamily housing and rehabilitation for use as affordable rental units.
- A no-net-loss policy for affordable housing.

- Requiring an anti-displacement impact analysis when big projects are approved.
- Rent stabilization policies for residential and commercial tenants.
- Inclusionary zoning policies, which require housing developers to build a mix of units for different income levels.
- Enforce Community Reinvestment Act requirements, which specify that banks and hospitals must dedicate resources to communities within three to five miles.

For more information

- East Portland anti-gentrification strategies: eastportlandactionplan.org/sites/default/files/2015.12.07%20EPAP%20Involuntary%20Displacement%20Prevention%20Recommendations%20for%20East%20Portland.pdf
- The 2013 city anti-gentrification study: www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/454027
- Tribune coverage of gentrification in Lents: portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/158551-next-wave-swamps-east-side

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor

Accessible Restrooms, At Last?

*By Dirk VanderHart
December 9, 2015*

TWO YEARS AGO, it was cutting edge to take a stand for more inclusive bathrooms.

With growing recognition of the many challenges and misunderstandings transgender people still face, elected leaders at Multnomah County and administrators at Grant High School moved in 2013 to mandate single-occupancy, gender-neutral restrooms in their facilities.

These days, they've got a lot of company. The city of Austin caught up last year. Seattle hopped aboard in August. Philly's got a gender-neutral restroom law. So does Portland Community College.

And now? Maybe the City of Portland's finally stepping in that direction, too.

"It's long overdue," says Commissioner Nick Fish, who'll put a resolution before city council later this month firmly transporting Portland into the modern era of public restroom policy. "To me it's a no-brainer. It's an equity and civil rights issue."

Fish's office shared a draft of the resolution with me, and it's got some interesting ideas.

Like many similar proposals, Fish is pushing the city to remove gender-specific signage on all city-run single-occupancy restrooms—including facilities in parks and community centers. Fish

wants a neutral insignia on these bathrooms within six months of city council passing the resolution.

Next, the policy would mandate that the city include these sorts of bathrooms in all of its new facilities or remodels going forward. That includes the planned full-scale renovation of the Portland Building, which houses around 1,300 city workers.

Most intriguing, though? The resolution Fish is putting forward would direct city staff to look into modifying some of the city's existing multiple-occupancy restrooms into gender-neutral facilities, open to anyone.

I asked Fish how that would work. "Don't know," he said. "Until we have a hearing, I don't know what the receptivity will be to that."

Fish isn't coming up with these ideas on his own. Beyond the forebears in other governments, his staff's been consulting with LGBT advocates at the Q Center, Basic Rights Oregon, and the Sexual & Gender Minority Youth Resource Center, along with others.

"Our stakeholder group thought it was quite edgy," Fish said of the idea to convert multi-person bathrooms. (Houston, Texas, it's worth noting, just rejected an anti-discrimination law because of fear-mongering around bathroom use by transgender people. This stuff can get controversial, quick.)

But if Portland's about to push where few (if any) have dared, the policy Fish is promoting is also sort of restrained. In Austin and Seattle, gender-neutral policies weren't confined to city-owned restrooms—they're mandated for any single-occupancy restroom in the city.

That's not so dissimilar from a council decision several weeks ago that will force all public places to use closed captioning on their TVs beginning later this month. But Fish says he's not ready to go there just yet. He'll work on proving the concept in city-owned buildings first.

At any rate, it's about time

"When you do this, the sky doesn't fall," Fish says. "It's a common sense change."

In Other News

*By Mercury Staff
December 9, 2015*

THE PORTLAND BUREAU of Transportation (PBOT) is quietly planning a long-coveted bike and pedestrian bridge over I-405—and is hoping state lottery fans will pick up half the cost.

As first reported by the Mercury, PBOT's applied for \$3 million in state grant funds pulled from lottery revenues and targeted toward transportation projects that don't benefit cars or trucks. The bureau hopes to add \$3 million of its own to build a 24-foot-wide steel bridge where NW Flanders dead-ends at the highway.

It's a big project at a time when PBOT's casting around for new funding for basic road maintenance, but spokesman Dylan Rivera says the money would come from developer-generated fees that can't be used for most maintenance.

The Flanders bridge has been talked about for years. In 2008, then-Commissioner Sam Adams came close to moving the old Sauvie Island Bridge to I-405, but the \$5.5 million deal fell through. DIRK VANDERHART

MAYOR CHARLIE HALES' plan to slap a \$25,000 tax on Portland home demolitions appears to have died on the vine—and with it, millions that might have gone toward building new affordable housing.

At the December 2 meeting of Portland City Council, Hales broke with protocol by bumping his proposal to the top of the agenda, then asking his fellow commissioners what they thought. Commissioners Steve Novick, Nick Fish, and Amanda Fritz quickly revealed they couldn't approve the proposal in its current form.

In several controversial hearings over the tax proposal, Hales attempted to sell it as an innovative way to slow home demolitions in the city, and to bank between \$1.25 million and \$3.75 million a year for affordable housing projects. But the tax met widespread opposition from developers and some homeowners, who feared they'd be penalized for building their dream homes.

Hales said he'd bring a new proposal to the table early next year. DVH

THE CITY OF PORTLAND is investigating Airbnb misuse at four Portland homes, after the Mercury highlighted potential abuse in a story last month.

When Airbnb started doing business in Portland, city council passed an ordinance requiring homeowners to be the primary residents of any rental listings. Homeowners are also supposed to purchase a \$180 permit from the city.

As part of a report on a home whose former owner felt duped by buyers who turned it into an Airbnb, the Mercury contacted Jen Clodius with the Portland Office of Management and Finance and gave her the addresses of four Airbnbs being hosted by a woman named Sydney Mead. Clodius, at the time, said the city had no record of the four homes as registered with the city—meaning they hadn't applied for the proper permits. Clodius now confirms the addresses are under investigation.

Hosts can be assessed a \$500 penalty for each violation of the city code, though Clodius declined to say how many penalties have been leveled on noncompliant hosts. SHELBY R. KING

WHILE SEASONAL city workers petitioned for a raise, Portland City Council last week sweetened the pot for most city employees.

In a unanimous vote, council extended six weeks of parental leave to full- and part-time city employees. The policy was pushed forward by Commissioner Amanda Fritz, and touted as a way to attract people to work for the City of Portland. (It also pales in comparison to the year-long leaves some private companies extend to their workers.)

The vote came with an interesting juxtaposition. Not long before commissioners approved the leave policy, dozens of Portland Parks & Recreation employees filled council chambers to demand better pay.

They pointed to statements by Parks Commissioner Fritz and Mayor Charlie Hales, who've each said they'd support an easier path for these so-called "casual" recreation workers to join a union, and receive better pay and benefits.

Neither Hales nor Fritz gave any indication they planned to offer up such a proposal in the near future, however, despite demands a plan be on the table by December 16. DVH

Portland Business Journal

Affordable housing projects planned for Boise, Goose Hollow

By Job Bell

December 10, 2015

With little fanfare, the Portland City Council approved three new private developments yesterday that will add 81 units of affordable housing in two Portland neighborhoods.

Two of the projects, proposed by Wilsonville's Marathon Acquisition & Development, will be in the Boise neighborhood of North and Northeast Portland, and one will be in the Goose Hollow neighborhood on the western edge of downtown.

The projects come about in part as a result of the city of Portland and Multnomah County recently revamping a tax exemption program aimed at creating more affordable housing in private market developments. That program, the Multiple-Unit Limited Tax Exemption Program, offers a 10-year tax exemption for projects that include affordable housing. The annual cap on the program was raised from \$1 million to \$3 million earlier this fall.

The total tax exemption for all three of the projects approved yesterday is \$1.2 million annually for 10 years.

"People wonder what we are doing to promote affordable housing in the city," said Commissioner Amanda Fritz during the meeting. "The city will forgo (\$1.2) million in revenue over the 10-year period for this tax exemption. That is one of the hidden ways that we are saying that, yes, this is really important."

The Goose Hollow project, known as North Hollow apartments, will be a six-story, 121-unit building at Southwest Taylor St. and 15th Ave. with an adjacent parking structure with 65 underground parking spaces. There will also be parking for 184 bikes, a dog washing station, a rooftop lounge and an outdoor terrace with a movie screen. Twenty-four of its units will be

reserved for households earning no more than 80 percent of Portland's median family income. The project is a partnership between Nevada-based Molasky group and Portland developer Liam Thornton of Trinity 3 Investments.

“This program allows us to provide affordable housing in the Portland Central City, and in particular in the Goose Hollow submarket, while maintaining a high quality standard of the built product,” Thornton said, in a release. “The structure of the program provides lower-income tenants the access to a high-quality location and building and allows the developer to still achieve the economics necessary to obtain financing, without any compromise to the design, construction, and operations of the project. As these types of programs are utilized by more developers in Portland, it will create access to a greater number and variety of Portland neighborhoods that were previously unattainable by lower-income residents.”

Marathon's project on North Vancouver Ave. and North Shaver St., called the Vancouver Apartments, will offer 136 units in two five-story buildings, 27 of which will be reserved for households earning no more than 60 percent of the median family income. It will have 69 off-street parking spaces and 182 bike parking spaces, as well as landscaped rooftop terraces and a bike repair shop.

Marathon's second project, Mississippi Ave Apartments, will be a mixed-use project in two buildings on North Fremont Street and North Cook Street. There will be 152 apartments and five commercial units. Of the 152 apartments, 30 will be reserved for households making 80 percent of MFI. The project will include 74 parking spaces and 255 bike parking spaces, along with the same kind of amenities planned for the Vancouver Apartments.

“We’re extremely pleased to have three projects moving forward, and more being considered, in just three months,” said Portland Housing Bureau director Kurt Creager, in the release. “This tells us that the changes we’ve made have produced the kind of nimble, streamlined tool needed to attract developers in a market boom and respond quickly to the current need.”

According to PHB, additional changes to the MULTE program eliminated the competitive application in favor of a rolling process to better align with construction and financing timelines, and clarified compliance requirements to create greater predictability for investors. In exchange for 10 years of tax relief, developers commit to restricting rents on 20 percent of their new residential units.

PHB expects to add roughly 200 to 300 new affordable housing units per year in the private market through increased participation in the program. The bureau continues to accept applications for the program and is expecting to reach the \$3 million cap by year's end.