

The Oregonian

Will Uber and Lyft drivers be able to unionize?

By The Associated Press
December 13, 2015

SEATTLE — Seattle may soon become the first city to let drivers of ride-hailing companies such as Uber and Lyft collectively bargain over pay and working conditions, a move opposed by the companies and one seen as a test case for the changing 21st century workforce.

The city council is to vote Monday on whether to extend collective bargaining rights for drivers of taxis, for-hire transportation companies and app-based ride-hailing services that are part of the growing on-demand economy.

Councilmember Mike O'Brien says for-hire drivers as independent contractors are excluded from such protections so he wants give them a say in their working conditions. Independent contractors aren't covered by the National Labor Relations Act, which allows for collective bargaining.

San Francisco-based Uber and others say federal labor law prevents cities from regulating collective bargaining for independent contractors, and the ordinance would violate federal antitrust laws.

The Portland Tribune

Mayors want more research on homeless causes and solutions

By Jim Redden
December 11, 2015

In a surprise admission, West Coast mayors meeting in Portland said information is lacking on the causes of homelessness in their cities and best approaches for reducing it. They agreed to fund a West Coast Mayors Alliance to fund research into the reasons why people become homeless and the most appropriate programs to help them lead productive lives.

According to Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, the research will clarify how issues like failures in the foster care system or the current heroin epidemic contribute to homelessness.

“If there’s 40 percent of the folks we learn are addicted to heroin, we’re probably going to start our programs a little bit differently. That gives us real specificity of where to start first,” he says.

Garcetti and the other mayors, including Portland Mayor Charlie Hales, announced the alliance during a Thursday press conference at the end of the first day of a two-day West Coast Mayors Summit in Portland. Topics discussed that day included homelessness and affordable housing. The Friday schedule focused on fighting climate change.

Also attending the summit were Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy, and San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee.

All of the mayors lead cities grappling with increases in homelessness. They have supported hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending for creating homeless camps, opening emergency shelters, and building more affordable housing. But the admission underscores the current lack of in-depth research into the homeless population, raising questions about whether the money is being spent efficiently -- and what other programs might be proposed.

The mayors also signed a joint statement to the federal government seeking support to increase funding for affordable housing development, increase federal rental assistance for homeless households, increase access to critical support services, and to increase regulatory flexibility and alignment. It was signed following discussions with U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro and Matthew Doherty, Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, who attended the summit.

“Up and down the West Coast we are facing a crisis of unaffordability in housing,” says Hales. “Each of our cities has taken unprecedented steps to respond to the urgent issues of homelessness and housing affordability; in Portland, for example, we opened a shelter for women in just over one month. But we need federal support to address root causes and help protect our most vulnerable community members.”

The Portland Mercury

Hate Airbnb? At Least It's Going To Help Pay For Affordable Housing

*By Dirk VanderHart
December 11, 2015*

For all the controversy, and occasional shadiness, surrounding Airbnb's emergence in Portland, the service—and those like it—have produced a reliable income stream. Last year, the City of Portland reaped an estimated \$1.2 million from short-term rentals that are dotting the city.

Now the city's going to use that money building affordable housing. Mayor Charlie Hales and commissioners Dan Saltzman and Nick Fish are putting forward a resolution next week that will direct the City Budget Office to dedicate a baseline \$1.2 million to a Housing Investment Fund every year going forward, with that number indexed to inflation. If the city receives more tax money than that in a given year, it'll be transferred into the housing fund as part of the city's twice-yearly budget monitoring.

The resolution notes "the legalization of more short term rentals in certain circumstances may be impacting the availability of long term rental housing," and notes Portland's got "one of the tightest rental markets" in the country. (We looked at Airbnb's effect on the housing market in October.)

This isn't a surprise. When Fish, Saltzman, and Hales called a press conference to address the city's newly-declared housing state of emergency in September, Saltzman promised to push something in this vein. But the resolution—guaranteed to pass, since it's already got the support of at least three-fifths of city council—offers a rare glimpse at how much business short-term rentals are drumming up. That \$1.2 million amounts to five percent of revenue services like Airbnb drum up locally.

It's also a move that might give the city's budget staff pause. The office has a history of recommending against putting money into funds that don't have highly defined spending plans—especially with a wide variety of competition for that money.

But at a time when Portland's scrambling to get cheap housing built, a million a year doesn't hurt.