

The Oregonian

'Critical' shortage of patrol officers force Portland police to pull from other divisions

By Maxine Bernstein

December 15, 2015

Portland's police chief is assigning officers from specialty units to fill patrol vacancies and restricting travel and outside training to control mounting overtime costs.

He's also requiring managers to approve any discretionary overtime.

"The bureau is currently short of staffing and continues to suffer from the reduction of 55 positions that were cut two years ago," Chief Larry O'Dea wrote in a memo to supervisors this fall.

Retirements and resignations have further cut the number of sworn police officers faster than the bureau can recruit, hire and train new ones to fill the jobs. The bureau now has 41 officer vacancies, with close to 90 officers eligible to retire by April in a force of 950 authorized sworn officers. Of those, there are about 355 patrol officers.

The bureau spent \$3.1 million in overtime through October of this fiscal year, about half of its \$6.9 million in budgeted overtime spending, according to bureau figures. That's about \$723,000 more than the bureau spent at the same point last year -- about a 37 percent increase.

"The rate of spending places the bureau in danger of exceeding its budget, and requires that expense control strategies be put into place effective immediately," the chief wrote.

About 120 officers from the Family Services, Drugs and Vice, Youth Services, Training, Traffic, Gang Enforcement, Criminal Intelligence and Personnel divisions, as well as precincts' Neighborhood Response and Street Crimes units, are rotating to fill vacancies on patrol shifts.

| Portland Police Bureau overtime | Overtime hours | Overtime paid | Overtime budgeted |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Fiscal year 2010-11 | 122,367 | \$6,357,488 | \$7,110,903 |
| Fiscal year 2011-12 | 163,441 | \$8,910,428 | \$7,649,040 |
| Fiscal year 2012-13 | 121,522 | \$6,868,713 | \$7,306,762 |
| Fiscal year 2013-14 | 96,713 | \$5,437,990 | \$6,928,592 |
| Fiscal year 2014-15 | 132,270 | \$7,654,791 | \$6,857,000 |
| Fiscal year 2015-16 (July 1st-present) | 52,075 | \$3,129,088 | \$6,900,000 |

» [Download an Excel table with all the Portland Police Bureau's overtime costs for the past five years.](#)

Because some of the officers haven't worked patrol for months or even years -- and aren't familiar with mobile data computers in patrol cars or the relatively new police data reporting system -- they're pairing up in patrol cars with other officers.

Several patrol officers privately have called the officers with little experience on the street: "ride-alongs with badges." While precinct commanders typically assign one patrol car with one officer to cover a neighborhood district, the two-officer cars often are dispatched to cover two districts.

"We recognize people have varying degrees of experience. But they all go through annual review training and have to qualify three times a year with a firearm. While not being on the street certainly diminishes some of their skill sets, the core abilities should remain," Assistant Chief Bob Day said. "We're reducing overtime which is our primary reason. There's always going to be bumps in the road."

While detectives aren't being reassigned to patrol, the Detective Division still faces challenges because it can't promote patrol officers to fill three detective vacancies until staffing stabilizes, Detective Division Cmdr. George Burke said.

"We're at a critical stage here when it comes to staffing," Day said. "We're just trying to find a way to live within our means."

The police chief also has told officers that starting in February he intends to expand patrol operations from three to five shifts, moving more officers to afternoon and evening hours that draw more calls for service and reducing staffing during quieter hours.

The two new shifts will run from noon to 10 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. That's in addition to the three shifts that run 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., 4p.m. to 2 a.m. and 10 p.m. to 8 a.m.

O'Dea said the move "will allow us to have more bodies when we need them, and less when we don't."

"This is about using our existing resources more efficiently and effectively to better serve the call load," O'Dea said.

The Portland Police Association, which represents rank-and-file officers, calls both major changes harebrained ideas that fail to address the underlying problem: an understaffed police force.

Officer Daryl Turner, police union president, drew on a baseball analogy to criticize the bureau's use of officers from specialty units to fill patrol shifts.

"If you are short a player on a baseball team, you don't put a catcher in to play shortstop," he said.

The officers assigned to Drugs and Vice or Family Services may not be familiar with the neighborhood districts they're being assigned to help cover, he said. They're also being pulled away from their assigned investigations.

"It doesn't help us to be proactive with the community or be proactive against crime," he said. "The people who we serve are the ones who will suffer."

Instead, officers in the precincts' Neighborhood Response and Street Crimes units should be permanently assigned to shag patrol calls, instead of just being rotated in to assist patrol, Turner said.

The union also has filed a grievance contesting the move to five patrol shifts, arguing that the chief needed to negotiate before changing officers' working conditions. Officers are concerned that reducing staffing from 7 a.m. to noon to eight officers to cover all of Central Precinct's districts, for example, won't be sufficient if something major was to occur. Now, the staffing during those hours runs between 15 and 19 officers.

Meanwhile, the bureau and the union are negotiating a plan to allow retired Portland officers to be hired back to help deal with the staffing problem. The bureau also is trying to recruit experienced officers from other agencies, known as lateral hires.

The chief also has ordered all division managers to review their budgets and find savings and evaluate if certain officers now paid to be on call when off duty truly need to be.

Portland's \$1.2 million housing pledge: 'shell game' or 'tough choice'?

*By Brad Schmidt
December 16, 2015*

For more evidence that housing has surpassed road maintenance as Portland's political priority du jour, look no further than the City Council's decision Wednesday to earmark \$1.2 million for affordable rental units.

In Aug. 2014, Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick voted against the same sort of plan.

Sixteen months later, both voted in favor.

"This is an extraordinary situation," Hales said, "and it requires extraordinary means."

In a turnabout, the City Council voted 4-1 to earmark taxes collected from short-term rentals to help pay for affordable housing. The decision creates dedicated revenue for a housing investment fund, with \$1.2 million estimated for the next fiscal year and presumably more in the years ahead, as services such as Airbnb grow in popularity.

Officials say they may borrow \$12 million to \$30 million to create new units, repaying the debt over time from annual tax collections. That could pay for 120 to 300 affordable units, according to the Portland Housing Bureau.

City leaders estimate an existing shortfall of 24,000 affordable units for low-income renters.

"We've gotta increase the supply, and we've gotta start somewhere," said Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees housing programs. "And this is a good start."

On its face, \$1.2 million is decimal dust in a projected discretionary general fund budget of \$478.4 million. But the tax money is already included in that projection, meaning a shift to the Housing Bureau may require cuts elsewhere, such as to police, fire or parks.

Amanda Fritz, the only commissioner to vote against the plan in 2014 and 2015, said Wednesday that the decision was "irresponsible" and likened it to a budget "shell game."

"I don't know where the council thinks this money is going to come from," she said. "I'm really worried."

Fritz noted that the City Council has increased its annual general fund commitment to housing from \$6.1 million in fiscal year 2012 to about \$18 million. To suggest that short-term taxes would be the first dedicated money for affordable housing is "not true," she said.

The City Council's vote marks its latest commitment to housing. Officials declared a housing emergency this fall and Hales pledged \$20 million in the upcoming fiscal year, although it's not clear where that money will come from.

Hales and Novick originally opposed Saltzman's plan last year. At the time, both were championing a controversial street fee to pay for road maintenance. They wanted to maintain spending flexibility and emphasize roads.

Fish, who along with Saltzman voted in favor of the plan both times, said the money will help address a pressing need in the community.

"What one colleague might call a shell game," he said, "another colleague might call making tough choices with limited resources."

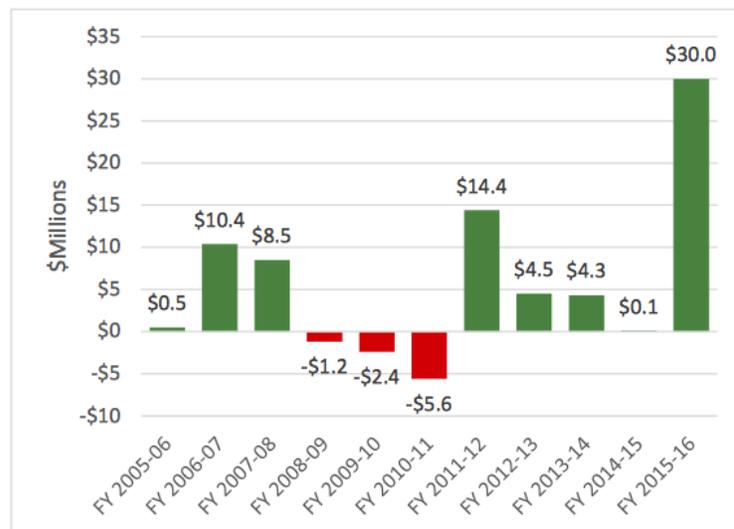
Portland could have \$11.1 million to spend next year

By Andrew Theen
December 15, 2015

The City Council could have at least \$11.1 million in one-time money to spend during the budget year that begins July 1, thanks to a strong business climate and robust hotel industry, according to a forecast released Tuesday.

Next year's surplus falls well short of the \$36 million in one-time cash Portland spent this fiscal year, but economists say the boom times are continuing. The surplus could also increase when budget officials release their final forecast in April.

FIGURE 1. Historical Changes from December to April Forecasts



"This year will likely end up being the fastest year of local economic growth since the tech bubble in the late 1990s," city economists wrote in the report from the City Budget Office. "Job growth has been widespread and income growth is finally ramping up after years of stagnation."

The City Council already has tough budget decisions to make that could cut into any surplus. Fire officials want money for 13 firefighter jobs that will no longer be paid for through an expiring grant. The City Council is also expecting to pay potentially millions of dollars to parks workers as part of an ongoing labor dispute

Portland also must decide whether to follow a policy it approved in January to dedicate half of any budget windfalls to transportation, parks or emergency management maintenance.

The strong outlook comes almost two months after Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said he wouldn't seek a second term, allowing him to focus more attention on leading the city and focusing on crises rather than hitting the campaign trail.

The budget outlook would have been even stronger had the City Council not approved \$10 million in November for its recently declared housing emergency plan.

Half of that \$10 million is one-time cash, according to City Budget Director Andrew Scott, while the other half is factored into ongoing expenses.

Hales previously directed city bureaus to prepare 5 percent budget cuts, in part to help pay for promises made to address the city's homeless and rental housing crises.

Sara Hottman, Hales' spokeswoman said city bureau will still be asked to prepare cut scenarios. "But that does not mean definitive, across-the-board cuts to General Fund bureaus," she said in an email. "Just like in 2013, the mayor will weigh all of the budget options bureaus propose — both cuts and adds — and will make decisions to achieve a balanced budget."

Commissioner Steve Novick said the City Council must "as a matter of principle" put money into transportation. "It's very important that we stick to our commitment to put some of the one-time surplus into transportation," said Novick, who teamed with Hales in 2014 in the unsuccessful push to find more money for transportation.

Budget officials project the economic growth will eventually slow down sometime during the next five years. But for now, unemployment rates remain at the lowest levels since the economic peaks of the last expansion and Portland's hotel taxes are producing record revenues and leading to several new projects near downtown.

Dedicate Airbnb lodging taxes for housing but better data is needed: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
December 15, 2015*

What a difference 16 months can make. When Portland City Council considered a proposal in August 2014 that the city dedicate a portion of lodging taxes from short-term rentals to an affordable housing fund, commissioners rejected the idea 3-2.

Since then, rents have continued to skyrocket and the clamor from residents for the city to do something has similarly hit a fevered pitch. And so when Commissioner Dan Saltzman reintroduces the idea to commissioners on Wednesday — which would dedicate even more money than last year's proposal — he expects to have the votes to pass it. Mayor Charlie Hales, at a minimum, plans to add his support to Saltzman's and Commissioner Nick Fish's endorsement to address housing, despite his general stance opposing earmarking of funds, his spokeswoman, Sara Hottman, said in an email.

The idea of dedicating taxes collected on the short-term rental of spare bedrooms, duplexes or similar units to visitors makes sense. Renters and others have been sharing stories of housing, once available for long-term rental, now being reserved for more profitable renting on Airbnb

and other platforms that connect homeowners with visitors, said Brendan Finn, Saltzman's chief of staff. The amount of \$1.2 million – the estimated tax revenue for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015 – is a modest sum for a need so great that the mayor recently declared a housing emergency. The funds come with the flexibility to allow for a range of uses, such as rental assistance and home ownership programs.

Most significantly, the commitment of tax revenue to the Housing Investment Fund would provide the account with its only dedicated source of funding – allowing the city to issue bonds for construction of new projects, if desired. "Having a steady source of predictable income for affordable housing development is very valuable," Saltzman told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board.

But the city also needs to shore up its data and practices to make sure it is addressing the problem accurately and effectively. First, the city needs a better handle on just how many properties are being used for short-term rentals and how they affect the supply of housing that would otherwise go to long term rentals. The most recent "State of Housing" report, completed in October, does not even mention the word "Airbnb" or the issue of short-term rentals. The next report won't be completed until the spring, Finn said. The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability also will look at the issue, but that report isn't expected until September, said spokeswoman Eden Dabbs.

Anecdotal evidence certainly suggests a link, but the city should be able to back up that notion with research that determines the size of the problem and whether it lies with property owners who are following the short-term rental requirements or with those who are violating them.

Along those lines, the city also needs to beef up its enforcement of the short-term rental law, which requires that property owners or residents who rent out a room or unit actually live there, with absences of no longer than 95 days a year. However, media stories have identified multiple properties whose owners appear to live out of state. And while Airbnb deserves credit for collecting the lodging tax on behalf of property owners and passing it along to authorities, other companies have left the responsibility to the homeowners themselves – many of whom are failing to do so. The city isn't completely sitting back, however, recently filing a lawsuit against VRBO and its sister site, HomeAway.com on a number of issues, including their failure to collect lodging taxes.

Saltzman's proposal deserves support, but the urgency to act needs to be coupled with good data.

The Portland Tribune

Tourists will help pay for affordable housing

By Steve Law

December 17, 2015

Out-of-town visitors staying in Airbnb rentals will help replace some of the affordable housing stock those short-term rentals have removed from the market.

By a 4-to-1 vote, the Portland City Council agreed Wednesday to dedicate at least \$1.2 million a year in lodging taxes from short-term rentals to the city's Housing Investment Fund. That will

triple the amount of annual funds dedicated to the fund, which has a current balance of only \$1 million.

The Portland Housing Bureau hopes to leverage the new revenue stream to sell a bond measure next year that could raise \$12 million to \$30 million for new affordable housing, says bureau Director Kurt Creager.

The city has an estimated 24,000-unit shortfall of affordable housing, and this is one of several initiatives being undertaken by the City Council to address that.

“Today we add one more important piece to the tapestry of resources we require,” noted Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the housing bureau.

Saltzman and Commissioner Nick Fish lost a previous bid to dedicate lodging taxes from short-term rentals into the Housing Investment Fund. But Mayor Charlie Hales, who has made addressing the city’s housing affordability crisis a top priority, changed his mind, assuring it would pass this time.

Hales said he ordinarily hates to dedicate the city’s discretionary revenues into a specific program. “Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures,” he said.

Airbnb now lists about 2,500 Portland homes, condos and apartments for short-term rentals, and several other companies also list properties here. It’s possible that hundreds of affordable units have been taken off the market, such as rooms for rent in homes, accessory dwelling units or entire homes, because renting those with Airbnb has proven more lucrative than traditional long-term rentals.

“We know that market-affordable units have been taken out of service,” Creager said. The bureau is trying to determine how many.

Supporters of the ordinance said there’s a “nexus,” or connection, between short-term rental taxes and the affordable housing fund.

“We’re taking revenue from an activity that is making the current problem worse,” said Fish, who earlier raised the strongest objections to the city’s legalization of short-term rentals.

The city collected about \$1.2 million in short-term rental lodging taxes, mostly from Airbnb-listed properties, in the fiscal year that ended June 30. The figure this year could easily be higher, as some of Airbnb’s competitors had not been collecting the 11.5 percent lodging tax, 5 percent of which goes to the city.

The resolution passed Wednesday dedicates at least \$1.2 million a year, rising each year with inflation. If revenues top that, the addition money would go to the Housing Investment Fund as a “one-time-only” move.

Jes Larson, director of the Welcome Home Coalition formed last year to address the housing crisis, praised the decision, though she said it is far from enough to solve the affordable housing shortfall in Portland.

“By our estimation, we need \$50 million dedicated annually in this fund,” Larson said.

The housing crisis is the “elephant in the room,” said John Miller, director of the Oregon Opportunity Network.

“How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

The City Council previously raised the amount of urban renewal money dedicated to housing, and granted additional money to the Housing Bureau. Saltzman noted he is working on a density bonus incentive, which would give developers a carrot to build taller buildings if they include some affordable apartments or pay a fee in lieu of that. He also is working on what he now terms a “developer fee,” earlier called a “linkage fee,” a new idea of raising property taxes where past city investments or zone changes have helped make properties more valuable.

Commissioner Steve Novick, concerned the decision might mean less for transportation spending, approved the resolution but said he might seek reductions in the Housing Bureau’s budget to compensate when the council adopts the next city budget.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, casting the lone “no” vote, is concerned the move takes general fund money that could otherwise go to the parks bureau she oversees, or other priorities such as retaining 13 firefighters now being paid with short-term funds.

“This is irresponsible,” Fritz said. “This vote means that some of those cuts will happen.”

The Housing Bureau received \$6.1 million in general fund money in 2012-13, but is set to get \$18 million in ongoing funding in 2016-17, plus \$5 million in one-time money, said Andrew Scott, city budget director.

“This is a budget shell game,” Fritz said.

Scott noted that his latest budget forecast, issued this week, projected there won’t be any more money available for new or expanded city programs in the next city budget, beyond the \$5 million already approved for the Housing Bureau and other must-fund items, such as rising pension contribution costs.

Dedicating \$1.2 million from lodging taxes into the Housing Investment Fund means there is, in theory, now a projected \$1.2 million shortfall for the next budget, Scott said.

Hales argued the city economy is booming, making it an apt time to address the housing crisis. He expects the next budget forecast, due in April, will show even more city revenues coming in than this week’s forecast.

“I do not think we’re up against it here,” Hales said. “This is a city that is financially strong.”

The Portland Mercury

The City Will Use Airbnb Money to Build Cheap Housing—But Not Without Controversy

*By Dirk VanderHart
December 16, 2015*

More affordable housing is coming to Portland, courtesy of your friends at Airbnb. Or something like that.

As we previewed last week, Portland City Council took up a resolution today that will scoop up a minimum \$1.2 million in "short-term rental" lodging taxes collected by Airbnb, VRBO, and similar services, and plop them into a flexible fund for cheap housing.

That has the potential to create some progress—fast. Portland Housing Bureau Director Kurt Creager said this morning that the city could borrow against that steady income, leveraging between \$12 million and \$30 million relatively quickly.

It's no surprise, then, that the resolution's passage this morning on a 4-1 vote was cheered by advocates and housing officials, who noted Portland's one of the first cities to put short-term rental revenues toward housing. That's important, they say, since services like Airbnb can take would-be rental units off the market.

But the resolution also inspired dire predictions from commissioners Amanda Fritz and Steve Novick, who worry about what the \$1.2 million yearly hit to the city's general fund will mean when it comes time to craft a budget next spring.

"This is a budget shell game," said Fritz, the resolution's lone dissenter. "I don't think the council knows where this money's going to come from. I'm really worried."

It's not everyday the Merc gets brought up in council chambers, but Fritz did us the courtesy of scoffing at my short post yesterday detailing the \$11 million surplus the city expects it'll have next year. Fritz thought it was off base, it sounded like, making the budget picture sound overly cheery when in reality there are many, many demands for cash in city government. (She'd probably like my more considered take on the surplus forecast in this week's Hall Monitor column?)

"We're talking about closing community centers," Fritz said this morning. "This is irresponsible."

Novick, who actually voted for the resolution, voiced similar concerns—noting that 13 firefighter positions need to be funded, that the city needs to show a continued commitment to fixing roads (particularly if it asks voters to implement a local gas tax, as planned), and that his bureaus can't afford cuts.

"We do not have a good budget situation," he said.

Novick and Fritz are worried for a couple of reasons. First, Fritz just doesn't think it's good for the city to be allocating money like this. She said this morning it's more appropriate to make these kinds of decisions during the budget process. She even said she'd likely have supported an extra \$1.2 million to the housing bureau if it had been brought up last month, as part of the city's budget adjustment process.

More pressing, though, is the fact Portland isn't forecasting any new ongoing money next year—largely because all the ongoing money that would have been forecast (around \$5 million) was already dedicated to the housing bureau. As things stand today, the council just dedicated \$1.2 million in ongoing money it doesn't have to play with, which means that money will have to come from somewhere else. (It's also possible—likely, even—that the forecast will grow sunnier next spring, so maybe that's not the case).

Meanwhile, there's other competition for ongoing funds—like parks workers who need to be paid more, or those firefighters, or freshly hired police background checkers that cops say are necessary if Portland is going to hire enough officers to fill looming holes at the bureau.

So that's the downside of today's vote—a side that a majority of council agreed with last year, when a similar proposal from Commissioner Dan Saltzman was shot down. The upside, as I said up top, is millions more in flexible funds for housing, in a city that needs a bunch of it.

"The money can be used anywhere in the city," said Creager, differentiating the new money from millions in urban renewal dollars that are restricted in where they can be spent. "This is jet fuel."

Among advocates on hand was Jes Larson, director of the Welcome Home Coalition, which is working to find more dedicated funding for housing in Portland. "It's necessary in order to combat the affordable housing crisis," she said, noting her group wants to find \$15 million a year in new housing money.

And, unsurprisingly, the move was praised by Mayor Charlie Hales and commissioners Saltzman and Nick Fish, who brought forward the resolution together, and touted it as a positive first step in easing the city's housing crisis.

"What one colleague might call a shell game another colleague might call making tough choices with limited resources," Fish said. "That's our job."

That inspired a quick riposte from Novick, who noted: "None of us is actually making a tough choice today. None of us is actually saying what we'd cut in the upcoming budget in order to fund this."

Hall Monitor

Portland's Nonexistent Surplus

By Dirk VanderHart
December 16, 2015

THE BUDGET PICTURE keeps getting rosier in the Rose City.

The City of Portland Budget Office revealed December 15 that the city should have at least \$11 million more than expected to play around with in its general fund next year, a year after its coffers swelled with \$49 million in unexpected cash.

Turns out tax revenues, from property taxes and businesses and hotels, are shooting up even faster than expected in these boom times.

"This year will likely end up being the fastest year of local economic growth since the tech bubble in the late 1990s," the city economist, Josh Harwood, wrote in the forecast.

It's good news—particularly three years after the city was forced to cut more than \$20 million to plug a gaping deficit. But here's the catch: that \$11 million? It's one-time-only money. And it's already sort of spoken for.

"Revenues are increasing fast," says Budget Director Andrew Scott, "but our obligations and needs are rising faster."

Here's how \$11 million can melt away:

- First, slash the forecast money in half, since Portland City Council has a policy of spending half of one-time surplus money on the city's growing list of maintenance projects. The city could always elect to override that rule, Harwood notes, but it might not be likely at a time when the city's roads are hurting.

- From the remaining \$5.5 million, chop \$1.4 million to fund 13 firefighter positions that are currently being paid with grant money that's set to expire. Now you've got \$4.1 million.
- But you've also got dozens upon dozens of parks workers you've been underpaying for years, who've now won the right to union protections. That's a minimum \$2.3 million extra a year—and could well be twice that much, depending on what happens in ongoing negotiations.
- There's more: police body cameras, new police background investigators the city just voted to hire, an upcoming proposal to snatch \$1.2 million from Airbnb taxes to build affordable housing.

And these are just the existing commitments the city will either have to fund or axe. There will also be millions of new requests from city bureaus.

All of which gets to Mayor Charlie Hales' approach to next year's budget. Last month, Hales issued a directive to every city department except the Portland Housing Bureau to figure out how to hack 5 percent of their expenses next year.

"Portland is in the grips of an affordable housing and homelessness crisis that requires additional resources to invest in the most effective approaches," Hales wrote. "We are experiencing an increase in gun-related violence that requires a robust response."

Hales said he'd "address these issues head on" and that that might take trims—even in a prosperous year.

It might not be as tough as all that. Harwood concedes the city forecasts conservatively, and that there will likely be more money to play with when the carving knives come out for next spring's budget work.

Will it be enough to satisfy Portland's ever-raging fiscal thirst?

Is it ever?

Think Portland's Homelessness Problem Is Bad? Talk to the Mayors of Other West Coast Cities.

By Dirk VanderHart

December 16, 2015

IN ITS ONGOING struggles with homelessness, Portland can take solace in one thing: It's not us—it's the West Coast.

According to a new report from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Oregon's homeless population rose by nearly nine percent over the last year. Washington saw an uptick of 5.3 percent. California's population grew by 1.6 percent (which amounts to nearly 1,800 people—greater than the increases in Oregon or Washington).

Meanwhile, nationwide homelessness fell by around 2 percent.

"The West Coast data is different than the national data," says Matthew Doherty, executive director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, a coalition of high-ranking federal officials that works to fight the problem.

"You're seeing increases in unsheltered homelessness," adds Ann Marie Oliva, a HUD deputy assistant secretary. "That's alarming."

This won't exactly be news to Portlanders, who've watched Multnomah County's homeless population grow slightly even as more people than ever are being helped off the streets ["Cutting Homelessness in Half," Feature, Nov 18]. Right now, the city's in the midst of a self-described housing "state of emergency," and is pledging to work with county leaders to spend an additional \$30 million on fighting homelessness in the next year.

But here's the problem—highlighted by a meeting of prominent West Coast mayors that took place in Portland last week: Our neighbors throwing a ton of money at the issue aren't having much success.

"We are mayors of the most innovative cities in America, if not the world," Seattle Mayor Ed Murray said December 10, appearing with Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and the mayors of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Eugene at a West Coast mayors' summit in Portland. "Despite that, we are all facing incredible challenges."

The case Murray presents should worry Portland. Seattle's the 20th largest city in the country, but ranks far higher in the amount of shelter capacity it provides, its spending on homelessness, and the number of units it's built in the last decade—things Portland is working hard to increase.

According to Murray, Seattle and King County are third in the nation for all three measures. Even so, homelessness in King County rose 21 percent in the last year.

"The problem only grows greater," Murray said at a press conference. "Despite being leaders in homelessness, something's not working."

The notion was echoed by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, whose balmy city has the largest homeless population in the country—more than 41,000 people. Los Angeles has proposed spending \$100 million on its own housing emergency.

San Francisco spends \$220 million a year fighting homelessness, but struggles to decrease the 6,775 homeless people living there, said the city's mayor, Ed Lee.

"One of the things we understand is we don't understand enough," Garcetti said. "We don't have a lot of deep work to understand the nuance of the population."

That's potentially set to change. One of the relatively few concrete things to come from the first-of-its-kind mayors' summit was a pledge that the cities will pool their resources to research the homeless people on their streets.

The project, as envisioned, goes beyond figures tabulated at the direction of HUD. Those federal reports can tell you approximately how many veterans or families are on your city's street, for instance, but not how they became homeless, or if they struggle with substance abuse.

The effort announced last week comes with more questions than certainties. Hales and the mayors he'd gathered couldn't say when it would occur, or where, or how much it might cost—just that they wanted to do it.

"There's something here that we don't know," Murray said. "Unless we understand it better, I don't think we're going to be able to get a handle on the solution."

That's perhaps not the most-heartening thing to hear when Portland local governments are getting ready to throw tens of millions more at easing homelessness. Even as Hales announces Portland needs more data, he's relying on a local coalition—A Home for Everyone—that says it's used the most data-driven approach in Portland's history to come up with a new plan for slashing homelessness.

Marc Jolin, who directs A Home for Everyone, says that plan's valid. Sure, the group could stand to learn more about the city's homeless people, Jolin says—particularly how they enter the system in the first place—but nothing that arose from the mayors' summit changed the basic facts: Portland needs more affordable housing, and more housing options that provide social services.

And to get it, both Jolin and the mayors fall back on a timeworn refrain: We need more money from the feds.

"We're all adopting what we regarded as best practices," Jolin says. "As good as that can be, we're not going to get anywhere if there's not some significant increase in federal investments."

According to numbers provided by the Portland Housing Bureau, money coming to the city from several crucial HUD programs decreased by nearly 33 percent since 2001, to a little under \$12.5 million. Other funding has increased in recent years—most notably rental vouchers for homeless veterans. But if there was any one (predictable) theme to emerge from the mayoral summit, it's that it's not nearly enough. Particularly not in this part of the country.

"This was really a historic moment," Garcetti, the LA mayor, said during his visit. "We can definitely say that the West Coast is leading now in pushing the urgency of this problem."

A New Hope for Affordable Housing

Will Oregon Lift the Ban on Inclusionary Zoning in 2016?

By Shelby R. King

December 16, 2015

EARLIER THIS YEAR, affordable housing advocates had high hopes for House Bill 2564, which would have squashed a 16-year-old law prohibiting local governments from requiring developers to include affordable units in large residential projects.

The bill made it through the Oregon House of Representatives, passing 34-25 in April. But just days before the 2015 legislative session ended in July, Senate leaders admitted defeat, saying they didn't have enough votes to legalize affordable housing mandates, known as inclusionary zoning (IZ).

Now, as the City of Portland clamors for more tools to increase the city's cheap housing stock, it looks like we'll see another attempt.

In February, the Oregon Legislature reconvenes for a short session, and advocates say they expect Senator Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, to introduce another IZ bill—a better IZ bill. The legislation being talked up would allow cities to force affordable units in apartment buildings, not just for-sale housing like condos and homes.

"The lack of affordable housing is a statewide problem, and we need to make sure the bill is broad enough to include everyone, while still having provisions that address the problems we're having in Portland," says Vivian Satterfield, deputy director at the group OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon. "We didn't get the benefit of having a vote in the Senate last session. This is us picking up where we left off."

Satterfield and Diane Linn, executive director of the housing advocacy group Proud Ground, have been working on an updated version of the IZ bill they hope Dembrow will introduce. Though the senator hasn't fully committed, both Linn and Satterfield say they're "reasonably confident" he'll do so. Dembrow wasn't reachable for comment by the time this story went to press.

"We're missing an opportunity in Oregon over and over again with the statewide ban," Linn says. "If we don't get it passed this time, we won't have another chance until 2017, and our communities can't wait that long."

In the late '90s, when leaders in Portland began talking about requiring developers to include affordable units in new construction, homebuilders took action—fighting for and winning a preemptive ban on IZ. Since then, affordable housing advocates like Linn and Satterfield have tried, unsuccessfully, to lift the preemption. They were just a few votes shy in the Senate five months ago, though, and Linn thinks they can use the momentum from last session to push a new bill through during the 36-day sprint in 2016.

"Inclusionary zoning isn't a silver bullet and it won't solve the entire problem, but it's one tool and we need all the tools we can get," Satterfield says. "We need the ability for control at the local level."

That's precisely what city officials are saying.

On OPB's Think Out Loud last week, Mayor Charlie Hales talked up IZ, saying: "Give us the authority to do our job, and we'll make it."

Housing Commissioner Dan Saltzman told the Mercury that he's "very supportive" of lifting the IZ ban, and is hopeful Dembrow will introduce a bill. Saltzman says he's received strong indication that the senator's interested, and says he intends to speak with Dembrow directly to express his support.

"It's particularly good for Portland to include rentals in the bill, considering about 80 percent of the new housing over the next 20 years is expected to be multifamily," Saltzman says. "If we can get the preemption lifted then we will have the power to make rules that will work for us."

State Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, D-Portland, an IZ supporter who was one of HB 2564's co-sponsors, believes it's imperative that the state lift the ban, allowing Portland to start requiring developers to help solve the problem next year, while the construction market is still booming.

"It needs to be up to the cities to figure out what works for them, because every place is going to have different needs," she says. "But of course we're not going to prevent developers from making a profit, or they will go somewhere else to build."

Keny-Guyer says that there would likely be incentives that sweeten the deal for developers, such as fee waivers, permission for increased density, or other concessions that would help offset potential financial losses from including affordable units.

Not everyone is supportive of the concept. Justin Wood, who works for Portland's Fish Construction, says he worries that if the IZ ban is lifted, the homebuilding industry will be footing the bill for fixing Oregon's affordability problem.

"Everywhere up and down the I-5 corridor would immediately enact some form of mandatory inclusionary zoning if they lift the preemption," Wood says. "And the problem is that many jurisdictions will rely solely on that method to fix the problem."

Saltzman says he's heard Wood's argument, and disagrees.

"The homebuilding industry are the ones producing the housing," he says. "So they should be required to help fix the shortage of affordable housing."