

The Oregonian

Homelessness as a crime? Finally, someone speaks the truth (Letters to the Editor)

*By Letters to the Editor
February 9, 2016*

Homelessness as a crime: Regarding [Steve Weaser's letter to the editor \(Feb. 7\)](#) suggesting that homelessness is a crime: It is all true; finally someone has spoken the truth. If you asked for opinions on this topic, you would find that city residents (especially downtown residents) have had enough of those who are breaking the law. We've had enough of [the mayor and his partners](#) enabling them. Let's get on with something in which the efforts and resources of the citizens will be appreciated and will make a difference for everyone. The homeless do not appreciate it. In fact, they don't care — or even know — that anyone is trying to help them. Enough is enough.

Portland's homeless strategy must match options with enforcement: Editorial Agenda 2016

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
February 9, 2016*

Portland residents could be forgiven for thinking the city had no strategy for dealing with homelessness as tents sprouted up downtown, in city parks and around trails in the past several months. [After all, it largely didn't.](#)

Rather, the city's scattered approach seemed driven by a [look-the-other-way philosophy](#), much to the [chagrin of businesses and residents](#) who wanted help curbing drug use and cleaning up sanitation problems that, not surprisingly, result when you have a homeless crisis in a city with no plan.

So it's a step in the right direction that Mayor Charlie Hales and his staff are finally [articulating a blueprint for dealing with today's on-the-ground reality](#), even if their plan of outdoor shelters and night-only camping in public space might not seem tremendously different from the picture we have today. But residents' tolerance and support for the city's strategy must be matched by a strong commitment from Portland leadership that these measures are temporary and that the city will step up enforcement against those who refuse to avail themselves of the options the city plans to provide.

The plan, as outlined for city commissioners on Monday, calls for as many as 10 organized outdoor camps to shelter the homeless, [according to The Oregonian/OregonLive's Brad Schmidt](#). The camps must be affiliated with a nonprofit service provider, and the city will work with neighborhoods to identify suitable locations. An organized camp also means that

service providers will be able to connect with clients at the camp more reliably and regularly with a goal of moving them out.

In addition, the city would allow people to sleep on sidewalks with a sleeping bag and tarp or set up tents on patches of city owned land between the hours of 9 p.m. and 7 a.m.; help identify lots for those to sleep in their cars or RVs and search for more shelter space to add beds in a city that has roughly 1,900 homeless people a night. The idea is to help provide places for safe sleeping, Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff who has been spearheading the planning, told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board.

None of these ideas are viewed as permanent solutions. But, Alpert noted, they will help bridge the gap until the city can provide more long-term affordable housing.

"It is merely a way to try and create some stability on the streets for people to wait comfortably and safely while we build for tomorrow," Alpert told commissioners.

While certainly not ideal for anyone, the proposals offer a humane, pragmatic and cost-effective way of addressing a crisis that is not going away on its own. By giving people clear options of places to stay, providing toilet, garbage and storage facilities, and helping people find a path to a long-term solution, the city is sending a clear message about what is acceptable and what is not.

In fact, one of the advantages, Alpert told the editorial board, is that police and city bureau staff can more quickly identify those who are willfully ignoring options. "That's a red flag for us," he said, indicating a need for enforcement, or, in some cases, a mental health provider.

Portland's bureaus and leadership must be willing to back up their words with enforcement action. If the city doesn't intervene when people are ignoring the 7 a.m. decampment rule or if it lets them overtake parks, it will lose the support of residents who are funding these measures, and will once again cede control of the problem.

Too often, the debate about homelessness has devolved into a narrative of the compassionate versus the NIMBYs. But compassion toward those who are homeless doesn't mean having to cheerfully ignore drug use outside schools or accept human feces in doorways as just another part of the urban setting. Compassion doesn't mean ignoring the fact that homelessness encompasses a wide range of people — families priced out of housing, teen runaways, people with untreated mental illness, and "travelers" who don't want a permanent address. Some follow the law and some flout it. It's up to the city to show that it will act on the distinction.

Why we invited only two mayoral candidates to this month's debate

*By the Oregonian Editorial Board
February 9, 2016*

No sooner did we invite readers to register for this month's debate between mayoral candidates Jules Bailey and Ted Wheeler than other candidates and their supporters began to ask, "what about us?" If we were in their place, we might ask the same question. Our goal, however, is to make the best use of the time available (one hour) to familiarize those in attendance with the candidates who are both reasonably likely and highly qualified to become Portland's next mayor. There are currently two such candidates: Wheeler and Bailey.

They are far from the only people to file for the position, of course. In all, a dozen people with a wide range of backgrounds have filed to run for mayor. There's a community organizer, a dish washer, a college student, a business employment specialist, a college instructor and even an attorney with the state Department of Justice. Ten of these 12 have one thing in common: They've never held elective office. The other two, between them, have spent years serving in the following capacities: Multnomah County commissioner, Multnomah County chair, state legislator and state treasurer.

The latter two, in other words, clearly stand out from the crowd. And when it comes to serving as mayor of a major city, with authority to propose budgets and assign bureaus, a track record in elective office matters.

We could have invited all of those who'd filed for office to this month's debate, but this would have involved a significant tradeoff. The audience might come away knowing more about a handful of candidates with little chance to win and limited ability to serve effectively. In exchange, though, they'd know less than they would otherwise about Wheeler and Bailey. That's a bad trade.

Alternatively, we could have chosen a small number of additional candidates to join Bailey and Wheeler. But this would have required a rational and defensible basis for picking some candidates and not others. The 10 remaining candidates, however, are far more alike than they are different in terms of their qualifications and relevant experience. (Feel free to review [all candidate filings here](#).)

That leaves us with a two-person debate. You can [find out more here](#).

The Portland Tribune

Residents question venue choice for mayor's speech

By Jodi Weinberger

February 9, 2016

The city of Gresham's decision to partner with the Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce and change the location and time for the mayor's annual State of the City address has some residents scratching their heads.

This year's address is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 17, at Persimmon Country Club, 500 S.E. Butler Road. Traditionally, the city holds the address in a public venue after 9-to-5 work hours.

The city is asking residents to register before the event. There is a fee of \$20 for those who want lunch. Free seats are also available.

Elizabeth Livingston, land use chairwoman of the Northwest Neighborhood Association, typically goes to the address event every year but can't this time because of a scheduling conflict. She said she wouldn't have paid for lunch even if she could go.

"I'm concerned about why they made the change," Livingston said. "A lot of people couldn't afford to go who might be interested in going. Affordability isn't my issue, but it's the principle of the thing."

This is the first year the city has partnered with the chamber for the event. Last year, Mayor Shane Bemis delivered his address in the City Council Chambers at 1333 N.W. Eastman Parkway, where the city served free refreshments.

In 2014, the address was at Gresham High School and the year before was at Mt. Hood Community College.

Elizabeth Coffey, spokeswoman for the city of Gresham, said the change was made in the spirit of collaboration.

"Over the past year we've been working to strengthen our relationship with the chamber, and we thought that partnering with them at this event would be a good way to bring the business community into the event a bit," she said.

But some residents were surprised at the departure from tradition.

"It just doesn't seem community friendly," said Lee Dayfield, a longtime Gresham volunteer. "I thought (Persimmon) was an awkward place to have it. The community is going to have difficulty getting there, and it costs money. You don't have to pay for lunch, but then you have this whole section of people who aren't eating with anyone."

Carol Rulla, president of the Gresham Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, echoed the sentiment.

"I support the city working with all groups and trying to strengthen relationships, but I don't think the State of the City address is the way to do that," Rulla said. "It's unfortunate

because I think the motives were good but the effect is negative in my eyes, and I think a lot of people will view it as exclusive.”

John Vandermosten, former chairman of the Gresham Citizen Involvement Community, also criticized the city’s choice of time and venue. He said he and his wife, Shirley, go to the State of the City address every year. He was unsure if he would pay for lunch.

“That’s a pretty expensive lunch,” Vandermosten noted. “The city council, by and large, is very, very closely connected to the chamber. If you want to see a member of our city council in public, usually you have to go to a chamber meeting.”

Vandermosten is retired, so the time of the event isn’t an issue for him, but he does think the time shuts out a lot of people.

“The city council, they’re elected by the 40 thousand some-odd voters, but it doesn’t seem like they really want to get connected with those people. They’re very oriented toward the business community.”

With no community center in the city, Mayor Shane Bemis said Persimmon Country Club was the only option to hold that many people for a lunch event.

“We partner with the chamber all the time,” Bemis noted. “They have a built-in lunch event, and we wanted to do a lunch State of the City and they were a natural fit.”

“This isn’t anything different than any large city has done,” the mayor added. “This is being held as a lunch event to see if we can get more people. I want everyone to see the State of the City.”

Lynn Snodgrass, the chamber’s chief executive officer, was not available for comment.

The entire speech will be recorded and posted online for those who can’t make it, and city staff will be live-Tweeting and posting highlights from the address on Facebook.

Last year, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales delivered his annual State of the City speech at the Portland City Club at 11:30 a.m. Jan. 30, at the Sentinel Hotel, 614 S.W. 11th Ave. Tickets cost \$23 for club members and \$30 for non-members. A similar event is scheduled for March this year.

In neighboring East Multnomah County cities, the events are generally held at public venues.

In Troutdale, the mayor’s State of the City address is set for 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 25, in the Sam Cox building at Glenn Otto Park, 1106 E. Historic Columbia River Highway.

Fairview’s State of the City address will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 16, at Fairview City Hall, 1300 N.E. Village Street.

The Gresham mayor has delivered these annual speeches since at least 2004, Coffey noted, and the city tries to move the event around to different venues each year to connect with different groups in the community.

“We like to try something different and mix it up and see how that works,” Coffey said.

As of Feb. 4, more than 50 people had registered. To register for the event, visit greshamoregon.gov/SOTC/.

Willamette Week

Bailey-O-Meter: Tallying the Price Tag on Jules Bailey's Promises: His arts pledge alone could cost up to \$2 million

By Beth Slovic
February 9, 2016

Multnomah County Commissioner Jules Bailey is challenging Oregon Treasurer Ted Wheeler in the May primary for Portland mayor.

Since jumping into the race in January, Bailey, a former state legislator, has made numerous pledges—including several with annual price tags for City Hall.

The Big Number: 6, Maximum number of people allowed to sleep in a single location on the sidewalk

By Karina Buggy
February 9, 2016

Six: That's the maximum number of people allowed to sleep in a single location on the sidewalk in Portland between the hours of 9 pm and 7 am, under [a new homeless policy](#) unveiled Feb. 8 by Mayor Charlie Hales' office.

Tents won't be allowed on the sidewalk, but Hales will allow a maximum of six tents in clusters on public property, again between the hours of 9 pm and 7 am.

The mayor's office is also seeking to open nonprofit-run campsites in neighborhoods—but hasn't found a first location.

The Portland Mercury

Portland's Now Expecting A \$20 Million Surplus Next Year

By Dirk Vanderhart
February 9, 2016

As everyone expected, the city's budget outlook is getting better. Portland's City Budget Office is revising its estimates for the upcoming budget year to include a general fund surplus of more than \$20 million, up from a forecast \$11.1 million last year.

That money is largely a one-time thing, the office says, but \$4.4 million is "ongoing" money that bureaus can count on for years. And it'll be snatched up in a heartbeat. As part of this year's budget process, Mayor Charlie Hales asked most bureaus (except Housing) to identify 5 percent in cuts they might be willing to make—some \$20.2 million potentially off the books all told.

The bureaus complied, suggesting some big shifts. The cops, improbably, have proposed cutting the entire Traffic Division (though police brass have reason to believe their relatively slim staff will be spared the knife). Parks—wrestling with millions in additional expenses made necessary by a recent labor ruling—toyed with the notion of slashing community center hours and cutting popular events like Movies in the Park, among other things.

It was never a sure thing any programs would be axed, but Hales wanted to see where bureaus had identified potential fat. At the same time, of course, bureaus have clamored for more money. Coincidentally, they've requested \$20.2 million per year in new costs—the same amount as the cuts they'd proposed—and an additional \$74 million a year in one-time requests (half of those from the Portland Bureau of Transportation, which is also hoping you'll pass a 10-cent-per-gallon gas tax in May).

Today's revamped numbers, which may swell even more when the budget office revises its forecast in April, help ease a dire outlook [Commissioner Amanda Fritz has repeatedly raised](#). And, coming a year after Portland found it had nearly \$50 million extra to spend, they're a further signal that the local economy is booming.

But as Portland CFO Ken Rust [recently warned](#) City Council, those rising revenues go hand in hand with rising costs. The city's pension obligations are underfunded, its parks and roads have funding shortfalls, and its employees are growing more expensive.

Like city Budget Director Andrew Scott told me in December: "Revenues are increasing fast, but our obligations and needs are rising faster."

The budget process gets serious in March, with a series of five council work sessions that will tweak whatever proposals Hales comes up with for all this cash. The budget year, remember, stretches from July to June.

The Portland Business Journal

Nick Fish: We won't know the city's Superfund bill until at least 2020

*By James Cronin
February 9, 2016*

The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), in town this week for a visit with city officials, expects the Portland Harbor [Superfund cleanup to cost about \\$1.4 billion](#). I'm guessing readers want to know who's on the hook and what they're paying for — if they agree to pay at all.

Apologies, dear readers, but we're all out of luck. No one knows the answers you seek. But here's what we do know.

Earlier today, I reported that officials for EPA Region 10 put together [what it calls its optimal plan](#), a \$1.4 billion effort including seven years of active construction along the polluted Willamette River from the southern end of Sauvie Island to just past the Fremont Bridge.

But it will be a long time until we know how much anyone involved will finally be asked to pay. Portland Commissioner [Nick Fish](#) said he doesn't expect to know how much of the bill the city could potentially be asked to foot until 2020.

The city would likely issue a bond secured against a revenue stream to help, but in the end, tax and ratepayers will end up bearing the brunt, Fish said.

So don't expect a resolution to the blame allocations ... er, cost allocations ... anytime soon. More than 150 parties, including NW Natural, Port of Portland and Schnitzer Steel, have been identified as potentially responsible for the bill. Their lawyers are currently hashing out what a fair share of the cost might look like.

In a worst-case scenario, if enough of those companies and agencies decide they don't want to contribute to the cleanup process and the EPA is forced to bring them to court, it could create lengthy delays for the cleanup. In the meantime, we'll keep tabs on the plan as it unfolds.