

The Oregonian

Nick Fish concedes greenway didn't get 'sunshine it deserved'

*By Brad Schmidt
February 16, 2016*

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish says he made a mistake in 2010 by not publicly disclosing details of a controversial land transfer that stuck the city with most cleanup costs for the South Waterfront Greenway.

The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday published its investigation into the budget-busting park project, which opened last year at a cost of \$15.1 million.

The project moved forward in 2010 after Fish signed off on a deal deliberately kept out of the public spotlight. Fish and a city attorney placed the deal on the City Council's consent agenda -- allowing it to be immediately approved with no discussion.

Fish declined to be interviewed for our story.

But on Friday, Fish sent an email to supporters. In it, he conceded that "it was my mistake" to bring the deal to the City Council without a public hearing. By placing it on the consent agenda, he added, "it did not get the sunshine it deserved."

"Six years ago, based on what I know now, I would have insisted on more robust public process," Fish wrote. "While I am proud of the greenway we delivered to the South Waterfront community, I recognize that I could have done better."

The 2010 agreement allowed city officials to take possession of a contaminated piece of riverfront property from developers Williams & Dame and Oregon Health & Science University. Officials knew the land was contaminated and had previously argued that the developers and hospital were responsible for cleanup before it became a park.

Fish's deal assigned cleanup costs almost entirely to the city, allowing Portland to move forward with its project. Cleanup ultimately cost \$5 million, according to city estimates.

Fish, the son of a former U.S. Congressman, joined the City Council in June 2008. He'd been an elected official for nearly 2 1/2 years when he asked the City Council to sign off on the South Waterfront deal.

Details of that agreement, in which the city took ownership through condemnation, were not made public in 2010, The Oregonian's investigation found.

The plan as publicly described also left out key facts: Instead of revealing that officials knew the land was badly contaminated and hadn't been cleaned, they wrote in city documents that any environmental concerns "may be satisfied" by approving the deal. City officials also wrote that there would be "no direct cost" to acquire the property.

The Oregonian's investigation prompted friends and constituents to question Fish's commitment to accountability and transparency, Fish wrote.

"Since these are core values guiding my public service," he wrote, "their concerns deserve a thoughtful response."

Below is Fish's full email, which he did not send to The Oregonian:

The South Waterfront Greenway

Dear Friend,

I have heard from friends and constituents that a recent story in the Oregonian (posted online), about the South Waterfront Greenway, has raised concerns about my commitment to accountability and transparency.

Since these are core values guiding my public service, their concerns deserve a thoughtful response.

In 2010, early in my service on the City Council, I was presented with a set of challenges about a long-promised greenway in South Waterfront. In a nutshell—the developers were balking at moving forward, and the community was adamant that we keep our promise and build it.

I was sympathetic to the neighbors, and looked for a way to break the impasse. The advice I received was to proceed with a "friendly condemnation," putting the City in the lead. This approach was supported by each of my colleagues.

While reasonable people can debate the merits of the approach, it was my mistake to bring it to Council without a full public hearing. By placing it on the Consent Agenda, it did not get the sunshine it deserved.

Once Council voted to move forward on condemnation, I brought the greenway project to the Council on numerous occasions for public discussion. We intentionally spent extra time detailing the financial and project risks, in order to ensure that Council made a fully informed decision on greenlighting the work.

During my evolution as a leader on the Council, I have learned that there is no substitute for robust public discussion of important issues before the Council.

That's why I have directed my Utility Bureaus to always bring big issues to Council on our Regular Agenda, ensuring more sunshine and oversight.

That's why I asked the City Auditor to conduct an independent review of the BES Columbia Building when I learned of cost overruns.

And that's why I honored a commitment to establish a new oversight body for our public utilities, the Portland Utility Board.

Six years ago, based on what I know now, I would have insisted on more robust public process. While I am proud of the greenway we delivered to the South Waterfront community, I recognize that I could have done better.

In the end, the City delivered a greenway that matched the community vision of a neighborhood that celebrates its relationship with the Willamette River. In time, the rest of the trail will be built out, expanding the opportunity for Portlanders to enjoy nature and the river.

Thank you for the honor of serving on the Council—and for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Nick

Wait until after the election to name a new PDC director:

Editorial Agenda 2016

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
February 15, 2016*

Five years on the job seemed about right for Patrick Quinton, who resigned his position last week as executive director of the Portland Development Commission. It's too soon for Portland, however, which grew in some lastingly good ways on his watch and, on the cusp of the PDC's major commitment to expand development on the post office's Pearl District campus, needs a steady hand.

But steady hands occur in a political context. Quinton's priorities were those of outgoing Mayor Charlie Hales. So it makes sense for Portlanders in this election year to wait until a new mayor is elected before Quinton's successor is found and named. To search and hire sooner would be to deny this political reality and to possibly put the PDC at odds with the city's new elected leadership, a counterproductive strain at a time when the PDC — an urban renewal agency at heart — heads into a future in which urban renewal funds may evaporate.

Even in his brief tenure, Quinton withstood the whiplash of shifting priorities. He was hired from the financial sector in 2011 under Mayor Sam Adams, who was all about creating economic opportunity amid the recession. As Brad Schmidt of The Oregonian/OregonLive reported, Hales upon election in 2013 immediately pushed the PDC back to its traditional "place-making" role: projects that would transform neighborhoods and create their own draw. Quinton jumped to.

The PDC redrew several urban renewal districts, brought acute attentions to Old Town Chinatown and jumpstarted redevelopment of the Central Eastside's Burnside Bridgehead. Significantly, the agency under Quinton went the extra mile in helping to keep Iberdrola Renewables, a significant employer, in Portland. And it bought property in the Lents urban renewal district for the popular and flourishing Portland Mercado.

But the PDC's post office deal, struck last month, is the agency's biggest single reach and evidence of Quinton's dogged determination: an \$88 million commitment to buy a 13.4-acre site at the base of the Broadway Bridge and develop the land over several years with mixed residential and commercial uses. If successful, what is now a moribund industrial site just north of downtown would be a dynamic link between the swank Pearl District and threadbare Old Town Chinatown.

The PDC's work can move forward perfectly well with an interim director serving under the lame duck mayor. Commitments can be honored. Momentum can be sustained. The PDC, twice reduced in staff size by Quinton and the more nimble for it, should view the next several months as a time to show it has the bench strength for such follow-through.

Hales' initial reaction to Quinton's resignation, as it was also with PDC Chairman Tom Kelly, was to move immediately to find the right successor to Quinton. Kelly told Schmidt: "It's our job to keep the agency going in the best way possible, as opposed to waiting for the next politician to come along."

Nobody wants a true professional flapping about in political winds. But in the case of the PDC, so central to the creation of Portland's built environment and economic vitality, the pro that

follows Quinton must show the very same qualities that set Quinton apart: adroitness in the face of community, economic and political pressures, and the self-possession that typically accompanies proven talent.

Portland deserves as much. It can wait to get it right and ensure that the next PDC director not only fits in but leads — a tough act to follow under any mayor.

The Portland Tribune

Japan looks to Portland as urban model

*By Jennifer Anderson
February 16, 2016*

Portland has a secret admirer across the Pacific Ocean.

It's the nation of Japan, which has lately seen a wave of Portland-inspired interest in food, drink, culture and design.

Now they want to learn from Portland's urban planning efforts, too.

A delegation of 50 Japanese leaders were in town last week to tour the city and check out what projects and policies might be adaptable for their own towns, many of which are suffering from population decline.

"Japan is obsessed with all the leading cities in the world — Brooklyn, New York City, Boston," says Mitsu Yamazaki, international business development officer at the Portland Development Commission, who's been working with Japan's government for the past three and a half years. "But recently, because of the lifestyle shift, Portland has been at the top of their minds."

The jaunt is part of the FutureCity Initiative, a five-year effort by the Japanese government to inject economic growth into their smaller towns. While the conference has been held in Japan and Malaysia each year, this is its first time meeting outside of Asia.

The stakes are high.

After two decades of economic stagnation in Japan — including the bursting of a real estate bubble, the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011, and other challenges — Tokyo now is preparing to host the 2020 Olympics.

But it won't be a silver bullet, Yamazaki says: "It's going to be a short-term injection of economic activity, but long-term, they will keep losing population. If it goes as predicted, the smaller towns that exist today — about 1,000 towns — will die or go bankrupt. There's a very serious effort around the nation."

The mayors of those Japanese towns came to Portland along with high-ranking leaders in the Japanese government, seeking inspiration from the urban development and citizen engagement efforts here.

While Portland hosts international leaders all the time, Amy Nagy, PDC's business development coordinator for the clean-tech industry, calls this particular type of tour "unprecedented."

The Japanese delegates met here Feb. 8-10 along with 150 industry leaders (architects, engineers and attorneys) from the United States and Canada.

On Monday, they toured Portland's proudest developments, including downtown and the Pearl District as well as the Lloyd District, central eastside, Tilikum Crossing and the South Waterfront, plus free time for their own exploration.

On Tuesday, they listened to speakers from Portland and Japan talk about sustainable urban development and community cooperation.

Mayor Charlie Hales and Metro President Tom Hughes spoke, as well as Japanese leader Naotaka Kawakami, acting director general of the Office for Promotion of Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy in Japan, part of a Cabinet office.

Shuzo Murakami, president of the Institute for Building Environment and Energy Conservation in Japan, gave the keynote lecture on moving toward a sustainable society.

A handful of Japanese mayors also presented case studies of their towns, whose residents have been rushing to the big cities because of the economic development there. "But now they realize they need to revitalize the smaller towns," Yamazaki says. "Here we are, small town Portland, gaining people every day."

Yamazaki says Japan's government leaders also have recognized that change needs to be implemented at the local level, rather than top-down.

"Portland's message all along is you should try to be more independent, let citizens decide what they want and how they want it," he says. "Whatever placemaking, economic development (happens), it's really the town's own way of doing things. I think that was conveyed yesterday."

Portland's presence in Japan

Thanks to social media and business development efforts by the PDC, there already is a steady exchange between Japan and Portland.

A number of Portland establishments have opened in Japan in the past few years, including Blue Star Donuts, Slappy Cakes, Stumptown Coffee, Navarre restaurant and PDX Taproom, a bar with 10 Portland beers on tap in the heart of Tokyo.

Tokyo opened its first food cart pod thanks to inspiration from Portland, according to "True Portland: The Unofficial Guide for Creative People," a guidebook written in Japanese.

A Japanese department store held its own Portland Fair last week, celebrating everything from Portland-made artisan chocolate, honey, tea and salt to craft beer, coffee, drinking vinegar and kombucha.

In Portland, a local nonprofit called From Portland With Love held its second charity concert last Thursday to support Oregon's sister city of Minamisoma, Fukushima, with their tsunami and earthquake recovery efforts.

And in May, a contingent from Japan will be in Portland for the third annual Pop Up Portland event, featuring 10 local makers and designers.

Much of the exchange comes thanks to Yamazaki's efforts working with Japanese leaders for three and a half years on urban development partnerships.

He's wooed big Japanese names like MaruKin ramen to locate here (at the new Pine Street Market food hall), and launched a Pop Up Portland event in Tokyo to feature everything from outdoor gear to footwear, bicycles to stationary.

He's helped bring Japanese outdoor gear companies Montbell and Snowpeak to Portland, with help from state and county tax incentives.

And he helped negotiate the sale of land in Old Town for Japan's largest hotel chain, Toyoko Inn.

Yamazaki says the Future City delegation came to town with a lot of questions, like how the city's compactness helps in policy making, and why there are a lot of organic grocery stores and urban farms.

"People don't put the two together, but that's a result of the urban growth boundary," Yamazaki says. "There are many areas we have to dig down and explain."

Demolition or deconstruction? Council to debate issue on Wednesday

By Jim Redden

February 15, 2016

The City Council will consider a resolution requiring that deconstruction be used when an older house is torn down on Wednesday.

Deconstruction is disassembly by hand, as compared to mechanical deconstruction by heavy machines. Although deconstruction costs more than demolition, the resolution says it has numerous benefits that justify the additional expense.

Among other things, the resolution submitted by Mayor Charlie Hales says requiring deconstruction will increase the amount of recovered materials. It will also reduce the amount of debris going to landfills and the release of hazardous materials, such as asbestos and lead paint chips, into the air.

The resolution directs the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to develop City Code language for the council to consider requiring deconstruction for houses built before 1916 or designated as a historic resources. Exemptions include houses damaged by fire and mold.

The idea was refined by a Deconstruction Advisory Group comprised of deconstruction experts, builders, developers, neighborhood groups, and historic preservationists that met 14 times.

The issue was among several pushed by neighborhood activists and others as the number of residential demolition and infill projects increased when the economy began improving. An impact statement with the resolution says that an average of 300 Portland homes have been demolished in each of the past two years.

The resolution is supported by United Neighborhoods for Reform, even though the grassroots organization believes it should apply to more homes.

The hearing starts at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 17. You can read the resolution and impact statement at www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=50265&a=564641

Council to consider relocating homeless camp on Thursday

By Jim Redden

February 15, 2016

The City Council is scheduled to consider moving the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp to Southeast Portland on Thursday.

The relocation is supported by homeless advocates but opposed by some businesses and residents.

The camp is currently located at Northwest 4th Avenue and Burnside Street. The Portland Development Commission has bought that property and the council want to relocate it to a city-owned site at Southeast 3rd Avenue and Harrison Street by October.

Three items are on the Feb. 18 agenda to authorize the relocation — a "street vacation" ordinance to increase the size of the parcel and two resolutions authorizing the relocation.

The hearings start at 2 p.m. The public will not be allowed to testify on Mayor Charlie Hales' new homeless camping policies at that time, only the three items related to the relocation.

Instead, the public will only be allowed to testify on the three agenda items directly related to the proposed move of the camp from Northwest 4th Avenue and Burnside Street to a city-owned parcel at Southeast 3rd Avenue and Harrison Street

"The Council meeting regarding Right 2 Dream Too is expected to attract a large number of concerned stakeholders who want to testify on the specific issue. The Right 2 Dream Too relocation has gone through more than three years of public process, and people will want to have their say on the final proposed actions. As such, the mayor will limit testimony to the topic of the meeting," says Sara Hottman, Hales' communications director.

The Portland Tribune published an editorial last Thursday calling for the public to be allowed to comment on Hales' new policies to allow more homeless camping at the Feb. 18 hearing. There have been no public council hearing on the new policies, which are supported by homeless advocates and opposed by some business and neighborhood associations.

Hottman says that people who want to comment on the new homeless camping policies may sign up for to speak under the "communications" item at the beginning of Wednesday council agendas. Such requests must be made in advance to the Council Clerk, however, and all five slots are already taken for next Wednesday's meeting.

Hottman also says the public can contact the mayor and commissioners via e-mail, phone calls, and social media.

The council was original scheduled to consider the relocation on Feb. 4. That meeting was postponed because of quorum problems.

A previous story about the relocation can be found at portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/291407-167771-could-new-homeless-camp-be-long-term-model

A previous story about Hales' new homeless camping policies can be read at portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/292500-169753-hales-portlanders-should-tolerate-more-homeless-camping.

Daily Journal of Commerce

Affordable housing project poised to grow

*By Beverly Corbell
February 12, 2016*

A new apartment building for low-income residents in the Pearl District will have more than twice as many units as planned originally if revised plans are approved.

Original plans called for a six-story building with 40 units of affordable housing. The new plans, also preliminary, call for a 12-story building and 93 units of affordable housing.

The project's developer, Innovative Housing Inc., is planning to present the new plans to the Pearl District Neighborhood Association on March 1, said Julie Garver, the nonprofit's housing development director.

When plans for the development on the northeast corner of Northwest Raleigh Street and 14th Avenue were submitted to the Portland Housing Bureau initially, a couple of options were given for increased density, Garver said.

"The PHB decided it would like more density on the site and asked us to formalize that (bigger) proposal," she said.

Innovative Housing Inc. was selected by the Portland Housing Bureau to develop the site, which the city bought last year from Hoyt Street Properties for \$1.3 million.

The project will be financed by low-income tax credits – "a financing tool that works well on a large project like this," Garver said.

Construction is expected to start in 2017.

Another change to original plans is a courtyard move, said project manager Dave Turville of LRS Architects, which is designing the building.

"The previous plan had the courtyard on the street, and this (plan) moves the courtyard to the interior – the northeast corner of the site," he said. "The building will wrap around two sides of the play area for kids and there will be indoor and outdoor play areas."

Other amenities will include a small rooftop terrace with a kitchenette for residents, a laundry room, and bicycle parking with a wash and repair station. Originally, the apartments would have been studios or have one or two bedrooms; now, plans call for apartments with one, two or three bedrooms, Turville said. One-bedroom units will be between 500 and 600 square feet, two-bedroom units will be around 800 square feet and three-bedroom units will be between 1,000 and 1,100 square feet, he said.

The building will be constructed on a small vacant lot, Turville said.

"It's pretty compact, but it will be nice housing for people," he said.

All rental rates for the apartments will be in the affordable range, Garver said. Targeted tenants will be families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Kurt Creager, director of the Portland Housing Bureau, said he is pleased with the design and said a decision was made to use all available public funding for the project.

"We have so few properties in that area that we are trying to maximize public value for a mix of homeless families and the downtown workforce," he said.

Portland Business Journal

Hales' homeless camping plan riles some businesses, raises questions

By Jon Bell

February 12, 2016

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales on Monday announced a new, albeit temporary, strategy to try and make life easier on the nearly 2,000 or so Portlanders who reportedly don't have a place to sleep each night.

In part, it involves allowing people to sleep on city sidewalks at night and set up tents on certain city properties.

While some will find a bit of relief from the new approach, others, including the Portland Business Alliance, are not happy with the way things are headed.

"Sleeping outside is not a safe solution for anyone," PBA wrote in an email to its members this week. "This trend is unacceptable. As Portlanders, we should call on the city to inventory all of its unused property and immediately convert as many locations as possible into shelter space.

"We should demand this as the first step toward solutions that treat people with dignity, provide homeless individuals with safe indoor options, respects neighbors' concerns and keeps everyone safe by enforcing the law."

The plan also calls for the establishment of more homeless camps that partner with local nonprofits, an increase in temporary shelter space and permitting overnight parking for people to spend the night in cars and RVs.

Neighborhood associations have banded together in opposition to some of the measures, as well. The Overlook Neighborhood Association, for example, has worked with other associations to encourage the mayor to develop a better strategy after the city essentially sanctioned the establishment of the Hazelnut Grove homeless camp in North Portland.

What do you think about Hales' new approach? Take our poll and let us know.