

The Oregonian

Right 2 Dream Too move? It's a cliffhanger

*By Brad Schmidt
February 18, 2016*

The drama of a four-hour public hearing about the future of the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp continued in epic fashion Thursday – with a cliffhanger.

Prompted by undisclosed cold feet from Commissioner Steve Novick, the Portland City Council delayed its vote to authorize moving the camp from its current location in Old Town Chinatown to city-owned property in the Central Eastside.

Novick had been expected to support the controversial relocation along with Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz. But when Hales urged a vote after receiving testimony from about four dozen people, Novick said he would instead feel "more comfortable if we waited."

And with that, the vote was called off and rescheduled for next Wednesday at 2 p.m.

"Whatever it takes to make the decision is fine with me," Hales said after the meeting, reiterating that he believes he still has three votes to approve the homeless camp's move.

Asked why he wanted to wait, Novick was crisp: "I'm not going to tell you."

The delay marks the latest twist for the 4-year-old homeless camp, which has been lauded by politicians but has been criticized by business groups who don't want it near them. In 2013, Hales and Fritz thought they had a deal lined up to move the camp to the Pearl District – only to see it blow up after a long public hearing similar to Thursday's.

Once again, attorneys argued that the city is manipulating its zoning code to allow the camp. Once again, business leaders said the camp's proximity would cause irreparable harm to industry. Once again, campers accused their opponents of NIMBYism against the homeless.

And once again, the future is now murky.

Opponents of the move quietly huddled after the meeting, telling one another that the delay could only be seen as a positive. Novick, meanwhile, was heckled by supporters who wanted the vote to go forward after years of uncertainty.

If ultimately approved, Right 2 Dream Too would move by October to a nearly half-acre site at Southeast Third Avenue and Harrison Street. Campers would sleep in tents but the city would pay for shower, toilets and laundry facilities. Most notably, the camp would be authorized to use the land for 10 years.

Since its inception in fall 2011, Right 2 Dream Too has housed nearly 300 people, said member Trish Reed.

"We cater to everyone who comes through our gates," she said. "We do our best to provide safety and warmth and love to our family because these people are our family."

Opponents said they don't doubt the camp's good work. But they said it doesn't belong in an industrial sanctuary.

"I would suggest Council spend the night there," said Andy James, a real estate executive. "This is not a restful and peaceful place."

It's not clear what may happen between now and next week's meeting. Novick – who is up for re-election in May – said he wanted to speak with city staff but declined to identify them or say what he wanted to discuss.

Before Novick's hesitation, Hales had been explicit. Thursday was the time to act.

"Should we move it here?" he said. "Yes or no?"

And like any good cliffhanger, that answer will come. Eventually.

Portland considers transferring homeless services to Multnomah County

*By Brad Schmidt
February 18, 2016*

Two and a half hours into a controversial hearing about the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales let slide a political bombshell that would blow up how government agencies deals with homelessness.

City and county leaders are now considering a deal to draw clear lines about who does what, Hales said. And if it goes forward, homelessness would fall to Multnomah County leaders while affordable housing would be the city's business.

"Commissioner (Dan) Saltzman is in the process of leading a process by which our homeless services staff are transferred to Multnomah County," Hales said.

"We will be in the housing project development business and Multnomah County will be in the homeless services business if the transition that Commissioner Saltzman is leading goes forward," Hales added.

That change would be a systemic shift to city and county governance and the often ambiguous division of urban services.

If approved, the change would create a Joint City-County Office of Homeless Services. But the office would report directly to Multnomah County Chairwoman Deborah Kafoury and employees would be "hosted" at the county, according to a letter outlining the proposal.

The proposal comes from discussions with a city-county coalition called A Home For Everyone. Hales doesn't necessarily support changes and needs more information, said Josh Alpert, the mayor's chief of staff.

"They're still trying to craft what it would actually mean" Alpert said.

The Portland Tribune

Council postpones vote on moving homeless camp

By Jim Redden

February 18, 2016

The City Council postponed a vote on moving the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp to Southeast Portland in the face of heavy opposition from area businesses and residents on Thursday.

The council is now set to take it up again on at 2 p.m. on Feb. 25.

The postponement seemed to catch Mayor Charles Hales, who favors the move, by surprise. Earlier in the four-hour hearing, the council easily approved "vacating" a portion of a city street next to the proposed location to increase the size of the city-owned property where the camp would move.

But when Hales called for the vote, Commissioner Steve Novick said he wasn't ready.

"I would feel more comfortable if we waited on a vote. There are some conversations I would like to have with staff," Novick said.

Although Novick did not offer any specifics, there were many issues raised during the testimony by supporters and opponents of the move that could concern him. They include how long anyone would be allowed to stay at the camp and effect on nearby businesses and neighborhoods.

The move would relocate the camp from its current location in Chinatown to a city-owned parcel at Southeast 3rd Avenue and Harrison Street. It is supported by homeless advocates, but opposed by many east side businesses and residents.

Brad Malsin, a developer who is president of the Central Eastside Industrial Council, testified the proposed move would violate city zoning codes and conflict with future plans for the area, which classify the area as an industrial sanctuary. The move was also opposed by the board of the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry, which is nearby.

Hales argued the move is not a solution to homelessness, but a safer sleeping option for about 100 people at a time.

"You can't just snap your fingers and make (permanent housing) come out of the ground. We can't just chase people around. We have to have places where they can sleep," said Hales.

Hales also said the city plans to spend \$67 million on affordable housing in the foreseeable future.

Complicating the decision, Hales also disclosed during the hearing that the city and Multnomah County are considering a deal that would transfer the issue of homelessness to the county. The city would work on affordable housing. Details have yet to be announced.

KOIN New 6 contributed to this story.