

The Oregonian

Charlie Hales' homeless camps threaten Portland's neighborhoods (OPINION)

By Guest Columnist Maryl Logue

March 6, 2016

Two things stand out quite sharply about Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' proposal to set up homeless tent camps in various Portland neighborhoods. First, none of these solutions involve setting up a homeless camp in affluent areas, such as in the wide-open spaces of Eastmoreland Golf Course, only 300 feet from the mayor's home. And second, even as a stop-gap measure, homeless camps merely spread the harm already caused by homelessness and rampant drug use into stable working- and middle-class neighborhoods that don't have the ear of City Hall like our more affluent neighbors do.

In just the last few days, city officials in both San Francisco and Seattle have begun a dramatic retreat from their earlier tolerance of homeless tent camps. They have learned through bitter experience that such camps inevitably erode the security, economic vitality and quality of life of the neighborhoods they abut. Take crime: Even as far back as 2005, the U.S. Conference of Mayors published statistics showing that approximately 1 out of every 3 homeless people were drug addicts — and that was before the recent epidemic of heroin and other opioid use led to the quadrupling of overdose deaths in the U.S. between 2009 and today.

Drug addiction is a disease, not a moral failing. But let's be realistic: It also makes otherwise good people do bad things — and if you doubt that, go to any Narcotics Anonymous meeting and listen to the stories people tell of the terrible things they did to feed their habits.

Homeless camps also erode the economic viability of neighborhoods. In working- and middle-class neighborhoods, families have almost their entire net worth from a lifetime of working tied up in their homes. What do you think happens to the value of those homes when a homeless camp sets up down the street?

Anywhere these pop-up style camps exist, there follows crime, garbage, human waste and destruction of surroundings. Any person who has ever cleaned up after one of these camps can attest to the deplorable conditions that exist there — conditions that we are facilitating by encouraging the formation of such camps.

The fact is, there is nothing humane about a homeless camp. It is certainly true that, even without such camps, the conditions that homeless people suffer would be horrible. But these pop-up camps do nothing to encourage inhabitants to better their circumstances. They do nothing to address the underlying causes or needs, especially for those with mental illness or addictions. All they do is spread the problem to heretofore stable neighborhoods.

Lastly, and perhaps most crucially, camps lower the quality of life for everyone. Yet they are paid for only by the neighbors who border the camps. The rest of us can drive past, pedal past, walk past and experience only a moment of discomfort. But anyone living next to a church lot camp, a sidewalk camp, or near the underpass camps of downtown — those are the people

paying the real price. Their safety is compromised, their property values are compromised, the cleanliness of their neighborhoods is compromised; nothing is spared.

I am not advocating that we ignore the plight of the homeless. Instead, I am advocating for a real solution to homelessness that spreads the cost equally among all Portland citizens — including the mayor's neighbors in Eastmoreland — rather than simply shoving the burden onto those living in working-class neighborhoods who have little voice downtown.

I believe strongly that most citizens of our city would support an emergency bond measure that would pay for buying or building the apartments we need to provide a real solution for the homeless, especially for families with kids, who should not be forced to try to survive in these camps. It could also fund drug treatment for all who want it and expand funding for existing nonprofits already in the business of helping the homeless.

But whatever we do, let's please not push the homeless problem onto the backs of those with the least voice to object: the working class. Why should we be penalized for not having the wealth or connections of the true elites of Portland who will never have to deal with a homeless camp in their neighborhood?

Portland's toxic air: Soil tests so far show little long-term health risk

*By Kelly House
March 5, 2016*

If you're among the handful of Portlanders who live directly across the street from Bullseye Glass, high levels of cadmium in your soil might be putting your health at risk.

But even a couple of blocks away from the art glass factory, which regulators pegged as a source of elevated arsenic and cadmium in the air, tests for heavy metals in the soil so far show little cause for alarm.

Those are the broad findings from soil tested by The Oregonian/OregonLive. The results largely mirror those found in samples taken by the U.S. Forest Service and a day care center near Bullseye.

The test results are far from comprehensive, and they shouldn't be read as an "all clear" sign. Oregon officials, who say much more data is needed to understand risk levels in Portland's air pollution hot spots, plan to release their own test results soon.

We decided to test the soil after the Oregon Health Authority warned gardeners not to eat food grown within a half mile of Bullseye in Southeast Portland or North Portland's Uroboros, which also makes glass.

The tests do not address a separate and serious health concern. Residents of these and other neighborhoods could face long-term effects of inhaling carcinogenic heavy metal particles in the air.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality announced Feb. 3 it discovered hazardous levels of cadmium and arsenic in the air near Bullseye. In the ensuing weeks, concerns about pollution spread. Moss showed elevated levels of cadmium near Uroboros and of arsenic, nickel and lead elsewhere in the city.

Someone who spent 70 years, 24 hours a day breathing air at levels detected near Bullseye could face a cancer risk as high as 1 in 1,000, Oregon toxicologists say. (That's assuming that all chromium found there was the hazardous, hexavalent form.) The state's health goal for individual pollutants is typically 1 in 1 million.

Bullseye suspended use of cadmium, chromium and arsenic. Uroboros stopped using cadmium and chromium; the company said it doesn't use arsenic. Both companies, which have operated since the 1970s, question assertions that they've been polluting the air.

Longtime residents still wonder whether years of breathing the emissions has affected their health. They want to know if the metals have accumulated in garden beds and been absorbed by home-grown produce.

The Oregonian/Oregonlive took 27 samples of soil from locations around Bullseye and Uroboros and submitted the soil to two accredited environmental labs. We also examined 25 soil tests from the U.S. Forest Service and five from a private day care.

The vast majority of the 57 tests did not detect levels of soil-borne arsenic or cadmium in excess of state safety thresholds.

The Oregonian/OregonLive also submitted samples of vegetables and fruits from three gardens near Bullseye to a lab that tests foods. A child would have to eat big helpings of the veggies we tested to exceed Europe's rigorous weekly limits for cadmium: 6 ounces of arugula, plus 1 pound of onions, plus 3 pounds of tomatoes.

The Oregon Public Health Division has told clinics and labs to report all positive cadmium tests on urine. Spokesman Jonathan Modie said no information will be released until the data are analyzed.

Dr. Catherine Karr, director of the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit at the University of Washington, said perhaps 100 or more Portland parents and physicians have called with questions. But none reported test results that would trigger further evaluation, she said.

Laurie Simpson, who has lived with her family near Uroboros for 20 years, plans on getting soil from her vegetable garden tested. She's also planning on have her two girls, 9 and 11, tested for cadmium.

"We have a garden, and all our neighbors have gardens," Simpson said.

Concentrations in soil

Cadmium and arsenic are both carcinogens when inhaled. A different type of risk comes from ingestion, when contaminated soil or food passes from hand to mouth.

In soil, long-term exposure to arsenic concentrations above .43 parts-per-million can increase your risk for bladder and kidney cancer.

Due to Oregon's volcanic past, arsenic already appears in the Portland area's soil at levels far beyond that threshold – 8.8 parts per million, on average. At that baseline level citywide, state regulators expect to see one additional case of cancer in every 49,000 people.

The Oregonian/OregonLive took scoops of surface soil from parking strips and public spaces such as North Portland's Lillis Albina Park, Southeast Portland's Powell City Park and Brooklyn School Park. We mapped these results with data collected by the Forest Service and CCLC, a childcare center near Bullseye.

Five tests out of the 57 yielded arsenic levels above state standards.

A Forest Service sample taken at Cleveland High School was very high at 36 times the ordinary level in Portland, and it registered 11 times the standard for lead. One cleanup expert described those levels as "alarmingly high" but cautioned that more tests were needed to confirm the results. A separate Cleveland test by The Oregonian/OregonLive turned up arsenic within state safety guidelines.

The Forest Service also measured arsenic at almost two times ordinary levels in a residential area on Southeast 27th Avenue.

At CCLC, two blocks from Bullseye, two samples were more than double the arsenic baseline. But four other samples were so low that the average was within the state safety guideline. As a precaution, child care officials said they have fenced off grassy areas of the playground and are considering removing the grass.

"We just want to make sure children remain safe," spokeswoman Colleen Moran said.

Soil taken from an industrial area on North River Street, near the east end of the Fremont Bridge, contained three times the baseline for arsenic. That would be enough to push long-term cancer risk up to 1 in 15,000.

But no homes are nearby, and experts say it's not high enough to cause alarm. Given the long-term concentration of industries and rail yards in the area, the source is also unclear.

None of The Oregonian/OregonLive's other samples near Uroboros tested above state standards for cadmium or arsenic.

Cadmium concentration

Very close neighbors of Bullseye Glass have more reason to worry about the soil.

Soil-borne cadmium isn't a known carcinogen, but it is linked to kidney failure. State safety guidelines assume that long-term ingestion of cadmium at levels higher than 78 parts per million increases the risk of kidney disease.

At a parking strip in front of two homes across Southeast Bush Street from Bullseye, four out of five samples revealed cadmium levels above the state safety benchmark. In one case, the heavy metal was three times more potent than what state regulators consider safe. The five samples together averaged roughly twice the state safety standard.

Out of 57 samples tested for cadmium, that block was the only place that popped out as a potential problem for contaminated soil.

"It is definitely cause for concern," said Brent Jorgensen, an environmental consultant who regularly deals with cleanup processes.

Bullseye spokesman Chris Edmonds said company officials still have "a lot of questions" about how much blame their business deserves for Southeast Portland's pollution hot spot. Noting that Bullseye is located near other potential pollution sources, Edmonds said the soil readings outside the company's manufacturing plant don't clear up the uncertainty.

While company leaders await results from the state's soil tests, they are moving forward with plans to install pollution controls at the plant.

"The company has been and remains concerned for the well-being of the community and the health of the environment and our neighbors," Edmonds said.

Coping with contaminants

Even when cadmium is at levels found in the soil near Bullseye, the risk can be managed, experts say.

Exceeding the state's safety thresholds for soil doesn't necessarily trigger cleanup. The standards are not binding. But Keith Johnson, cleanup manager for the Oregon environmental quality department, said exceeding the thresholds is a cue that "we need to look harder" to determine whether cleanup is warranted.

Oregon's risk threshold is calibrated to protect someone who ingests a dose of heavy metal-laden soil nearly every day for 26 years and absorbs every molecule into the body.

"I would not be overly concerned about a few high soil readings unless there are places where children could consume a lot of soil," said Toby Rossman, an arsenic expert and professor of environmental medicine at New York University.

But Karr, the University of Washington pediatrician, said cancer agents should be avoided as much as possible. Tobacco smoke, carcinogens in food and water and genetics can come together in unpredictable ways to trigger some form of cancer, which roughly 1 in 3 women and 1 in 2 men risk developing in their lifetimes.

"No exposure to a carcinogen is good," Karr said. "We try to be precautionary and limit exposure."

Oregon health officials are still evaluating the potential threat from eating garden produce.

David Farrer, a public health toxicologist at the Oregon Health Authority, said washing and peeling garden vegetables and herbs before eating helps avoid ingestion of contaminants by getting rid of dirt clinging to leafy greens on leaves and roots.

Those with contaminant levels as high as those across the street from Bullseye should consider installing raised garden beds or planting grass to cover the soil.

"It wouldn't cause me to panic or move out," Farrer said, "but I would sort of make plans to create some kind of barrier."

The Portland Tribune

Like it! PBOT rolls out BikeTown PDX website, social media, open houses

By Jennifer Anderson

March 4, 2016

Portlanders can now start engaging with their soon-to-come bike share system, BikeTown.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation and Motivate, the operator of BikeTown, recently announced that the official bike share website and social media channels are live.

They are:

BIKETOWNpdx.com

facebook.com/BIKETOWNpdx

twitter.com/BIKETOWNpdx

instagram.com/BIKETOWNpdx

The social media channels will provide information and an easy way for Portlanders and visitors to connect with the program and follow its progress.

People who sign up for updates will be the first to know when BikeTown memberships go on sale later this year.

The system is set to launch in July.

PBOT is holding a round of open houses this month, inviting the public to weigh in on BikeTown's proposed station locations.

PBOT has promised to launch an interactive online map on March 9 that will show the different options for the 100 station locations throughout the central city, to house 1,000 orange Nike bikes.

Once the program launches, users can follow a real-time map (accessible via website or app) showing the locations of the BikeTown bikes and stations.

The initial service area includes downtown, Old Town/Chinatown, inner Northwest, Goose Hollow, South Waterfront, West End, Pearl District, Central Eastside, Rose Quarter, Lloyd District and inner North Portland.

The upcoming PBOT open houses to discuss station locations are scheduled for these dates:

- Tuesday, March 15, 5:30-7:30 p.m. in Southeast Portland, location to be determined
- Thursday, March 17, noon-2 p.m., City Hall, Lovejoy Room, 1221 S.W. 4th Ave.
- Wednesday, March 30, 5-7 p.m., Portland Building, 1120 S.W. 5th Ave.
- Tuesday, April 5, 6-8 p.m., Northwest Portland, location to be determined
- Thursday, April 7, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Immaculate Heart Church, 2926 N. Williams Ave.

Council to consider removing obstacles to affordable housing Wednesday

*By Jim Redden
March 7, 2016*

The City Council will consider two resolutions Wednesday to reduce the time required to build new shelters, transitional housing, and affordable housing projects.

Both resolutions are introduced by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who is in charge of the Portland Housing Bureau. They are in response to the council's acknowledgement of an affordable housing crisis with the declaration of a housing state of emergency last October.

"Portland Housing Bureau data indicates that on any given night about 4,000 people sleep on the streets or in shelters across Portland, and the number of affordable housing units, mass shelter beds, and short-term housing options are far from meeting the demand for shelter," reads one of the resolutions.

"There is a current need for 23,845 units of housing affordable to households earning below 60 of Median Family Income (MFI). An adequate supply of this housing is necessary to address these housing needs, particularly for persons experiencing homelessness, persons transitioning from homelessness to more stable housing, and for persons at risk of being displaced from existing rental housing through significant rent increases or conversion of housing to other uses," reads the other.

One of the resolutions would waive reviews by the Design Review Commission and Portland Historic Landmarks Commission for city-subsidized affordable housing projects in the Central City and Gateway Plan districts. The resolution says these reviews are the lengthiest and most costly of the city's construction review processes, slowing down and increasing the cost of affordable housing projects.

"This Council declares that an emergency exists because there is a critical need to facilitate approval and development of City Subsidized Affordable Housing projects as quickly as possible to respond to the Council's declared Housing Emergency," says the resolution, which can be read at <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/auditor/article/567634>.

The other resolution direct the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to develop a proposal to simplify regulations, remove regulatory obstacles and expedite processes for land use reviews and permits for affordable housing projects, mass shelters and short-term housing. It says the proposal is to be developed in coordination with the housing bureau and the Bureau of Development Services, and presented to the council for approval.

"[I]t is in the public interest to facilitate the review and permitting of development offering affordable housing units, mass shelters, and short-term housing projects in Portland and to consider needed changes to the city code to accomplish this objective," says the resolution, which can be read at <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/auditor/article/567635>.

The council has approved millions of dollars for new affordable housing and housing preservation projects. The funds include an additional \$20 million in urban renewal funds for North and Northeast Portland, an increase in the amount of urban renewal funds dedicated to

affordable housing from 30 to 45 percent, and a pledge of \$20 million more for shelters, transitional housing and affordable housing, to be matched by \$10 million from Multnomah County.

The resolutions are separate from the process Saltzman has promised to create to adopt new policies requiring housing projects to include a certain amount of affordable housing, now that the 2016 Oregon Legislature removed the prohibition against so-called inclusionary zoning.

The bill approved by the Legislature authorizes cities to pass ordinances to require up to 20 percent of new units to be offered at below market rates. The requirement applies only to developments with 20 or more units, and the developer must receive at least one incentive from the city in exchange for the affordable units, such as tax exemptions or density variances. The units must be offered at rates affordable to people earning 80 percent or less of median income.

City wants to gauge public views on Superfund cleanup priorities

*By Steve Law
March 7, 2016*

The city of Portland, with the help of Portland State University, is seeking to gauge Portlanders' views on cleanup plans for the Willamette River Superfund site.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to finally release a proposed cleanup plan this spring on how best to address contamination in the river bottom for an 11-mile stretch of the river.

Cleanup options are expected to cost between \$800 million and \$2.5 billion. Proposed remedies could include capping contaminated spots of the river with rocks and other materials, treating or segregating contamination in the river or wholesale removal of contaminated sludge and transferring it to a hazardous waste disposal site.

The city Bureau of Environmental Services is working with PSU's College of Urban and Public Affairs Program, which operates Oregon's Kitchen Table, to conduct the public survey.

To participate, check out the survey at www.oregonskitchentable.org, or call Sarah Giles at 503-725-5248 and ask for a hard copy.

The survey is available in five languages.

The survey will be available starting March 7, and remain open until the end of March.

Daily Journal of Commerce

Design review may become easier for affordable housing projects

By Chuck Slothower

March 7, 2016

The Portland City Council on Wednesday will consider a major proposal to accelerate design review for projects that include affordable housing.

The proposal, by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, would do away with Type III design review for affordable housing projects. He hopes to encourage affordable housing by making the approval process faster and easier.

“We want ... to provide a quicker avenue to get necessary approvals from the city to break ground to build that housing,” Saltzman said Thursday.

Type III is the most rigorous planning process, requiring a pre-application conference and a public hearing. The city’s own timeline for Type III review shows applicants should expect a 103-day process, or more than three months.

Developers have long complained of the lengthy timeline.

Under Saltzman’s plan, to be introduced as a City Council resolution, Bureau of Development Services staff members would be responsible for the new review process, called “Type II-x.”

Saltzman said city staff members are fully capable of providing a thorough review that adheres to Portland’s design standards and comprehensive plan.

“I think staff would be pretty rigorous, too,” he said.

More details of Saltzman’s proposal are expected to be revealed with the release of next week’s City Council agenda.

Saltzman said the idea came out of a meeting with Mayor Charlie Hales and Portland Design Commission members.

Saltzman said design commissioners are sometimes frustrated by city standards that take into account design aspects like access to the Willamette River, even for buildings that might be a mile away.

“What does that mean?” he said.

Design commissioners could not be reached for comment on Thursday.

Saltzman said he expects his proposal to move forward.

“I’m pretty sure there’s good support for this in the building,” he said.