

The Oregonian

Portland officials tried to keep no-confidence vote quiet

By Brad Schmidt

March 10, 2016

A Portland commission tasked with helping steer more city contracts to women and minorities issued a vote of no confidence against the city three weeks ago.

That vote, however, was hidden from public scrutiny by city officials.

It wasn't until Wednesday that the city released records from an explosive Feb. 18 public meeting – and only in response to questions from The Oregonian/OregonLive. The disclosure came after a city bureau director told commission members that he alone was authorized to speak on behalf of the group.

The dust-up marks the third time in recent months that two separate city committees created to tackle inequities have instead voiced concerns about leadership. Videos of recent meetings and other documents make clear that the city's Equitable Contracting and Purchasing Commission remains deeply fed up with Portland's slow progress to provide meaningful data or address inequities.

What's more, members of the nine-member panel feel ignored by top city officials including chief administrator Fred Miller, purchasing director Christine Moody and Mayor Charlie Hales. The revelations call into question how seriously Portland officials are committed to tackling systemic barriers that limit opportunities for communities of color.

Portland's Office of Management & Finance acknowledged Wednesday that officials purposely held back video — and written minutes— from the Feb. 18 meeting. That decision was made by Bryant Enge, director of the city's Bureau of Internal Business Services, who serves as chairman of the commission.

"At that time, the commission was still in its infancy, and the video does not show the commissioners in the best light," Jen Clodius, a city spokeswoman, wrote in an email Wednesday. "Bryant decided not to post any more videos" until after the commission meets for a retreat next week.

The commission has held seven meetings and the past three have been recorded with members' knowledge.

And yet tensions clearly boiled over last month, the newly released video shows, with the conversation regularly taking aim at city leadership.

Andrew Colas, a commission member and chief operating officer of Colas Construction, went off at the end of the nearly two-hour meeting.

"I don't need to convince anybody here that there's a big problem," he said.

"Right now, they've got us sitting here wasting our time," Colas continued. "We're not getting the respect of a city commission, anyway. Christine Moody hasn't shown up to one of these meetings. Fred came to one of these meetings and he completely could care less about anybody that was here."

Colas kept going. He called on commission members to channel their collective power by writing concerns on letterhead and delivering that message to the City Council.

"That's power," he said, snapping his fingers. "I promise you, immediately, we would have a reaction from every single commissioner, we would have a reaction from the mayor, and we would actually get something done. That's what we need to do."

At that point, Maurice Rahming, president of O'Neill Electric, called on the board to vote no confidence in the city's procurement process. Members immediately voted in support, with no discussion, according to the video. Colas abstained.

There's no mention of the vote in city minutes.

After the vote, Colas offered support for Enge and warned that Enge might be fired as a "sacrificial lamb" if he delivered the message to Miller. Colas worried about losing leadership from Enge, one of Portland's rare African American bureau directors.

At that point, two commission members called for Enge to resign so he could avoid being in such a difficult position.

"This meeting has been adjourned," Enge quickly announced.

Minutes for the meeting make no mention of the call for Enge to resign.

Those omissions, coupled with city officials' decision to sit on the video, are noteworthy. At the February meeting, commissioner Tony Jones of the Metropolitan Improvement Partnership explicitly called on Portland to do a better job with minutes so the public could understand what happens at meetings.

Various commissioners, reached by The Oregonian/OregonLive in recent days, declined to comment.

Their quiet comes even after Enge instructed members to expect media calls. He told members that the city couldn't censor them but that it was his job, as chairman, to speak on behalf of the commission.

Enge didn't respond to a request for comment Wednesday about holding back records from the meeting. Beyond the city's initial statement to The Oregonian/OregonLive, neither did a spokeswoman for the Office of Management & Finance nor Hales' spokeswoman.

Hales personally pushed to create the committee in February 2015. But as concerns have mounted in recent months, commission members were told by Enge that Hales had a busy schedule and it might be easier to instead meet with Hales' chief of staff, Josh Alpert, before next week's retreat.

Alpert in a statement said the commission hasn't received the level of direction he expected because the mayor's office has been focused on housing and homelessness. But Alpert said he recently met with some members and all sides are "back on course."

Portland "needs and values" the commission, he added.

The spectacle of February's meeting followed months of frustration by commission members who complained that they were in some cases stonewalled and hampered from taking action. Commissioners requested data about contracting numbers but didn't find the city especially responsive.

Miller attended a meeting in November. He did little to ease concerns about a 2015 city audit that slammed city purchasing for diluting efforts to help minorities and women, and poor reporting on progress.

In January, the commission wrote a letter to Hales saying that members were repeatedly left out of discussions that fell squarely under their mandate. They pointed to a proposed \$195 million overhaul of the Portland Building and a \$57 million plan to build a drinking-water pipeline underneath the Willamette River.

Commission members said they need to be included earlier in decisions, when concerns can be taken seriously. Otherwise, they were "little more than window dressing on decisions that the City has already made" and they could not "fulfill our legislative mandate."

Improving equity in contracting has long been a city goal, dating to Mayor Vera Katz's administration. A 2011 city report, called a disparity study, found that during a five-year period Portland awarded nearly \$875 million in construction contracts.

Of that, just 2.8 percent of the money went to firms owned by minorities.

Numbers from the 2014 fiscal year showed some improvement, according to meeting records. Out of \$100 million in contracts, 7.5 percent of the money went to minority-owned businesses.

But the issue remains a problem. During Wednesday's City Council meeting, for instance, Commissioner Amanda Fritz dug into the paltry sum going to minority contractors for a sewer project.

"It's only \$4,283," she said, "out of \$9 million."

Portland approves new process to review affordable housing

By Brad Schmidt

March 9, 2016

The Portland City Council on Wednesday unanimously approved less-stringent design regulations for some affordable housing projects.

Developers can now expect quicker turn times and lower fees as they go through the city's design review process. But the City Council approved the changes on only a temporary basis, and officials say just two projects are in the pipeline through this fall.

The first is an affordable-housing project being developed on city-owned property by Innovative Housing. The 12-story project is at Northwest 14th Avenue and Raleigh Street in the Pearl District. It would include 93 units, 44 of them open to people earning between 0 and 30 percent of median income.

The second project is also on city-owned property in the South Waterfront area, on what's known as RiverPlace Parcel 3. The project -- being developed by BRIDGE Housing and Williams & Dame Development -- would include 162 market-rate units and 203 affordable units. Of the affordable units, 90 would serve people earning between 0 and 30 percent of the median income.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman proposed cutting the city's bureaucratic red tape because the City Council last year declared a housing emergency. He said officials need to try various tweaks to policy to encourage more affordable housing.

"This is one of those tries," he said. "Let's give it a shot."

The Portland Tribune

Council approves measures to create more affordable housing

By Jim Redden

March 9, 2016

The Portland City Council took two more steps to support the construction of more affordable housing Wednesday. Both are in response to the Housing State of Emergency the council declared last October in recognition of the regional affordable housing crisis.

After a lengthy discussion, the council approved two measure submitted by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who is in charge of the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB).

One would slightly speed up the design review process for PHB-backed affordable housing projects in the Central City and Gateway Plan districts. It would eliminate the need for the Design Review Commission and Portland Historic Landmarks Commission to hold public hearings on such projects, although their approval could still be appealed to the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

The other measure directs the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) to work with the PHB and the Bureau of Development Services (BDS) 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.

According to Saltzman, the proposal to reduce regulator obstacles will involve a review of all city requirements on affordable housing projects to see if they increase costs and completion times. That includes reviewing the impact of the city's Green Building Standards that Saltzman sponsored to help reduce greenhouse gas emission.

"Everything is on the table," Saltzman said during the hearing.

Paul Grove, the lobbyist for the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland, proposed two other areas of review to help nonprofit organizations with limited resources. One was waiving construction-related city fees and the other was creating a "one stop center" for organization with limited staff who have trouble navigating the bureaucracy.

Grove was testifying on behalf of the Home Builders Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the HBAMP, which has a program that helps nonprofit shelter providers.

"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," read one of the measures.

"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," read the other.

The council approved both measures. They 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 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.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: The Next \$850 Million

The City Spends \$70 Million a Year on Housing. Is It Working?

By Dirk VanderHart

March 9, 2016

SINCE PORTLAND began grappling with a housing and homelessness emergency in October, a few numbers have popped up again and again.

There's 1,887—the estimated number of unsheltered homeless people who live in Multnomah County. Or 3,801—the estimated number of people in the county who meet the federal government's definition of homeless.

And of course there's \$30 million—the amount, split between the city and Multnomah County, that officials have said will put us on track to cut homelessness in half.

Here are some numbers that haven't appeared: Since 2005, the City of Portland's spent nearly \$850 million on affordable housing and homelessness prevention. That's an average of \$70.6 million every year, pulled from a variety of sources.

Yet, as the Portland City Budget Office (CBO) notes in an interesting new analysis, the local homeless population is only around 200 people smaller than a decade ago, and we're hurting badly for affordable housing.

"Many people wonder why, after hundreds of millions of dollars in investments and a coordinated strategy to address homelessness and affordable housing needs, the problem persists," the CBO wrote in its newly released review of the budget that the Portland Housing Bureau has requested for next year.

The answer to that question is complex, and the city's done a lot of good with its \$850 million. But the huge river of cash that's been channeled toward housing and homelessness in recent years rarely, if ever, comes to light. And it's another number we should be talking about.

The CBO's review is a careful and critical look at the budget requests, delivered in a year that the bureau has a relatively free hand. The housing bureau's \$153 million proposal is more than double its average budget over the past 12 years. The \$40 million it's seeking from the city's general fund is more than 2.5 times the 12-year average.

That request has real momentum—even as Portland also looks for money for parks, cops, and roads. After all, the city needs 23,845 more cheap units, according to the housing bureau. This really is an emergency, and it deserves serious resources.

But the CBO's cautionary take is worth city council's attention. Analysts are finally forcefully saying what they've quietly urged since an emergency was declared: If Portland's going to spend this money, it better make sure it's working. The CBO wants clear goals for housing money, and it wants the city to rigorously track those goals.

And the office says officials need to be honest about how much funding will be required to slash homelessness to the levels they propose. More and more people are becoming homeless every day, the budget analysis notes—meaning the \$30 million price tag might already be an understatement. And even if it's not, the report says more like \$73 million is needed over a course of three years.

Importantly, the city's fiscal minders aren't suggesting that the city shouldn't spend historic amounts to curb this crisis. They just want officials to ensure that, when we pony up that next \$850 million, it's going to get the job done.

PBOT Has Unveiled A List of 305 Potential Biketown Stations

By Dirk VanderHart

March 9, 2016

With the city suddenly rolling in sneaker cash, 1,000 bright-orange bikes are slated to pop up on Portland streets in just four short months. Biketown, we're told, is nearly here.

But where will the system be situated? Portland had initially planned on a 750-bike system, which would have been limited largely to downtown and the inner eastside. Then, when no sponsors came calling, the city reduced those ambitions to a 600-bike program. But when Nike announced earlier this year it was in for \$10 million over the course of five years, Portland's ambitions rose. We're anticipating 1,000 bikes, and that means the service area can be larger than expected.

So where should the bikes be clustered? The "smart bike" system the city plans to buy is different from bike share in many other cities. It's not based on special docks—the bikes have locks and computers on board. But the city's still planning to dot Portland with bike share stations that can serve as hubs of activity (and where it'll be cheaper to lock up your lumbering orange rig). And, as it turns out, the city's narrowed its options.

Documents posted to the PBOT website show the city's considered 305 different locations for bike share stations, and scored them all on a host of factors—perceived demand, nearby transit, nearby affordable housing, an uncluttered streetscape, etc. After five open houses and more than a month of online comments, the bureau plans to narrow that number down to 100. Which is where you come in.

The possibilities span as far north as Killingsworth, and down to around SE Clinton and the South Waterfront. They go as far east as Cesar Chavez, and cover a wide swath of downtown and the fancier portions of Northwest Portland. It's a larger range of possibilities than the city unveiled last year, when it was planning a 600-bike system, but really only in its southeasterly ambitions.

That's largely because those are areas that a methodology by Portland firm Alta Planning and Design suggested would spur most demand in the system—obviously a key component if we're going to avoid the issues Seattle's seen recently.

"This is very much technically and demand-driven," says Steve Hoyt-McBeth, who's managing the project for PBOT. "That's why we were very, very disciplined in growing a system that still allowed density."

Here's the interactive map where you can give feedback. And here are all the stations and their scores. Oh, and here's a key for what those scores mean. Enjoy!