

The Oregonian

Hitting the reset button on achieving equity in minority contracting: Editorial Agenda 2016

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

March 15, 2016

It's difficult to tell where fault lies in the meltdown of Portland's Commission on Equitable Contracting and Purchasing, which recently issued a disturbing no-confidence vote in the city's leadership but whose chairman kept secret a video record of its last raucous meeting. No matter. The commission heads into retreat mode Thursday, when it will meet for four grinding hours at a North Portland location.

Let this meeting be a reckoning of what the commission is to do, however late in the game it is to name a mission, define specific steps the commission and city must take to ensure fulfillment of the mission — and whether, frankly, commission members have sufficient energy to forge ahead seeking deep engagement from city leaders they view as foot-draggers.

The founding purposes of the commission were entirely aspirational. But that's not good enough when money and high-stakes contracting are involved. A 2011 city study found that during a five-year period in which Portland awarded \$875 million in construction contracts, less than 3 percent of the money went to minority-owned firms, Brad Schmidt of The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. While the year 2014 showed improvement, in which 7.5 percent of roughly \$100 million in contracts were claimed by minority-owned businesses, the question remained: What should that number be? And, separately: Should a number even be named?

Nowhere in the city's founding 2015 documents for the commission does it say. It's not that Portland should have a quota — it should not, as quotas undermine meritocracy — but the commission must possess a clear end goal if it is to make specific, non-aspirational recommendations for achieving it. In the founding documents, the Council merely enumerated a long list of soft directives to the commission: "review citywide reports and data"; "review minorities and women-business contracts"; "seek guidance from various stakeholders"; "advise the Council which City efforts are the most directly related to increasing minorities and women."

It was distressing, if unsurprising, to find that the commission wrote a letter to Mayor Charlie Hales in January saying its members had been kept out of discussions calling for a \$195 million overhaul of the Portland Building and a \$57 million plan to construct a city water pipeline beneath the Willamette River — both primo projects potentially employing dozens of subcontractors. As revealed in a video of a recent meeting, commission sentiment is that Hales and top administrators are checked out and unresponsive, leaving the commission in a vacuum.

While the commission hits the reset button this week, the Council must consider its original failure to provide a clear charge to the commission and the follow-through for success. The apparent assumption upon which the commission was founded — more minorities needed to achieve better balance — is a crowd-pleaser but fails to drive change, setting the stage for a

cruel hoax. Minimally, it reduces the commission, in the words of the commission's letter to Hales, to "little more than window-dressing."

Portland can do better. The work begins as the commission sits down to decipher what's possible and dignified and necessary. Are things too far gone for repair? Probably not. Will the commission find a heading that helps guide the city to a worthy destination? It should. Will city leaders listen closely and name what's required to ensure success? They must.

The Portland Mercury

The Birthplace of Homelessness

How Old Town Became Portland's Primary Homeless District

By Joe Streckert

March 16, 2016

HOMELESSNESS IN PORTLAND may not be unique to Old Town, but the neighborhood is well known as Portland's primary homeless district. It's a neighborhood and a situation that was created more than a century ago by simultaneous forces—economic and social—working in concert. And while the types of homelessness that were prevalent at the end of the 1800s and into the early 1900s differed slightly from our modern version, the decisions that were made back then built the Old Town of today.

City of Transients

From its incorporation in 1851 until around World War II, Portland's early industries, like logging and agriculture, relied on a large influx of low-skilled manual laborers who performed dangerous, difficult work. Most of these workers were young, single men living from job to temporary job.

This transient workforce didn't sign lease agreements or acquire mortgages. Instead, they lived in smaller, cheaper housing units such as residential hotels.

"If you go back through the history of Portland, we had thousands of single-room occupancy units," says Ed Blackburn, executive director of Central City Concern. "A lot of West Coast cities did—and that's largely due to their ports and natural resource industries."

However, the area now referred to as Old Town (previously known as the North End, Whitechapel, and Couch's Addition) wasn't the only hub for low-income lodging and transient labor in Portland. Before the Lownsdale area became populated with buildings like Portland City Hall and the Keller Auditorium, it was a very different sort of neighborhood. Just north of where South Waterfront is today, Lownsdale was brimming with cheap housing, European immigrants, hotels, and saloons. Unlike Old Town, which is still with us, this second low-income district fell victim to aggressive urban renewal policies in the 1950s. New structures like the Edith Green-Wendell Wyatt Federal Building replaced what had once been an affordable, vibrant neighborhood.

According to Carl Abbott—professor emeritus of urban studies at Portland State University (PSU) and author of several books about Portland—the two lower-income neighborhoods (Old Town and Lownsdale) flanked downtown like bookends.

"That's where you'd find the cheap hotels and the flophouses," Abbott says, "as well as the saloons, gambling halls, and stores specializing in selling work clothes and equipment, often used."

Abbott says these two neighborhoods were heavily populated with temporary day laborers—not unlike the informal work-seekers of modern times.

Saloons and Hotels

Most of the businesses in Old Town and Lownsdale catered to that large transient population—who also enjoyed the proliferation of bars and other industries of vice. According to Blackburn, Portland had approximately one saloon for every 70 inhabitants in 1890, and a heavy concentration were located in what is now Old Town.

"It became known by the 1890s as Skid Row," says Chet Orloff, an adjunct professor of urban studies at PSU. "However, in the 19th century, 'skid row' had a slightly different connotation. It was more of a workers' place."

Orloff says that at the time, Portland's transient workers weren't commonly referred to as "homeless." While a large percentage may have been without a permanent residence, they weren't necessarily destitute.

"[During this period] there were relatively few people sleeping on the streets," says Abbott.

"The Social Gospel"

Back in those days, a city like Portland (and a district like Old Town) attracted a certain preponderance of drinking, gambling, prostitution, and various vices. It also attracted a certain level of ideological competition in the form of anti-alcohol and anti-vice crusaders.

"In the early 19th century, something called the 'social gospel' began to take form," says Orloff. "It was a combination of religious, anti-alcohol, and social service movements. It continued on into the 20th century and, in many ways, is still with us today."

The Salvation Army had been a fixture of Old Town since the 1880s, but the organization and the Union Gospel Mission began to take on bigger roles in the neighborhood in the 1910s and '20s.

"It was a poorly housed, unchurched population," Abbott says. "[With these organizations] they'd get a meal and a sermon."

Modern social service programs didn't come along until much later, and Portland politics in the early 20th century tended toward the conservative. For this reason, public aid for low-income populations was often not available.

"Portland was such a stick in the mud during the early 1930s," Orloff says. "[We didn't receive] the kinds of social services the New Deal was providing for unemployed people in other cities. The mayor and the city council refused to accept the grants and funds being provided by federal agencies—at least for the first couple of years of the Depression.

"Finally, by about 1935," Orloff continues, "the pressures were such that Portland began accepting federal public dollars. But until then, we were never a great example of a city that provided services."

Decades passed, and eventually government-funded social service and aid organizations started serving the population of Old Town—but took their cue from the earlier private institutions.

"By the 1960s and 1970s," Orloff says, "those [earlier] practices become hardened into policy as the city began to establish its own publicly funded social service agencies in Old Town. Practice evolves into policy."

Nothing to Do... and Nowhere to Go

After WWII, Oregon's economy changed, and manual day labor became less and less important. These types of day jobs still existed, but weren't plentiful enough to sustain the population that previously relied on them.

"Demand for unskilled workers went down," Abbott says. "This led to an aging population of people in the Old Town area... a population increasingly detached from the labor market."

As Portland's early transient population grew older and lost their jobs, their homes were next to go.

"When we got into the 1950s, a lot of those [single-room occupancy] hotels started coming down," says Blackburn, referring to hotels that had served the low-income working population. "They were being replaced by offices and higher-income apartment buildings."

Soon residential hotels, which had once housed a significant chunk of this city's citizenry, became little more than a curiosity.

Lowndale, Portland's other low-income neighborhood, underwent a massive rehaul in the 1950s that gave Portland its South Auditorium District. The contentious and controversial urban renewal project displaced hundreds of residents and businesses, which left Old Town as Portland's lone historic skid row district.

Deinstitutionalization

In the last half of the 20th century, social service institutions that once served transient laborers and down-and-out ex-loggers now had a new demographic to serve: people who had been released from state-run mental hospitals.

"In the '70s and '80s, you had the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill—another population detached from the labor market," says Abbott. "That's when I think skid row turned into a homeless district. Previously, it had been a bunch of poor guys, economically marginalized, but still participating in the labor force and served by vice institutions.... It eventually evolved into a district where you have a concentration of homeless folks."

According to Abbott and Blackburn, deinstitutionalization created a population that was even more estranged from the traditional economy than transient laborers, who were at least occasionally employed and housed. This new population of previously hospitalized people were less fortunate. Many couldn't work, and even if they could, manual labor jobs had gone away.

And housing, like residential hotels that could have served this very low-income population, were being phased out.

"This deinstitutionalization happened at a very strong and consistent pace," says Blackburn, "but the community resources that were supposed to arrive didn't happen—at least not to the extent that had originally been promised."

According to Abbott and Blackburn, this new population dramatically changed the character of Old Town.

No House for You!

With the decline of residential hotels in Portland, the bottom had fallen out of the housing market. Low-income people simply didn't have as many options as before. At the same time, new housing regulations found ways to deny people.

"By the mid-'90s and early 2000s we saw people coming out of many years of incarceration," says Blackburn. "At the same time, employers and landlords were growing more sophisticated—for example, doing background checks—and a lot of these [former prisoners] were excluded. This was also the case with [US Department of Housing and Urban Development] housing, in regard to who could qualify."

The same time period coincided with a shift away from federally funded low-income housing, to housing vouchers.

"That in itself wasn't a bad move," says Blackburn. "It's that the city didn't build more units."

This lack of housing dogs Portland to this day. The units simply aren't there to hold the population.

"The average new apartment is \$1,900 a month," says Blackburn. "You can't fight homelessness with that. Even if it's overbuilt, and the price has come down by 10 percent, you're still not getting close."

The City Has A New Front In the Fight Against Homelessness And It's Probably Not Who You Were Expecting

By Dirk VanderHart

March 16, 2016

ON MONDAY MORNING, a dull green shipping container that had been sitting dormant for weeks beneath the Steel Bridge opened its doors, and downtown Portland's many homeless residents finally had a new option for securing their stuff during the daytime.

The container was late. We're roughly six months out from October, when Mayor Charlie Hales said Portland would begin offering day storage so homeless people aren't constantly tethered to their belongings. Everyone agrees the service is needed.

But nobody showed up Monday. One woman rolling a shopping cart by the storage container paused only long enough to theorize the program was a setup so police could look through people's things.

"They need to do more outreach, I think," Program Manager Jay McIntyre said of city officials the following morning, as the container sat empty for a second day.

The storage program is part of a barrage of striking new efforts that have emerged under Portland's homelessness and housing emergency. Since that emergency was declared in October, the city's opened two new homeless shelters, taken steps to permit three organized encampments (with another in the works), unveiled a game-changing new policy around camping enforcement, and mulled using city-owned parking garages as night-time sleeping spots.

Equally striking is the city bureau that's at the helm of most of these efforts.

It's not the Portland Housing Bureau, which has traditionally coordinated the city's homeless services, and has a staff dedicated to those issues. Instead, Hales' office has been routing the new services to a far less specialized bureau: the Portland Office of Management and Finance (OMF).

The bureau—which runs the business side of the city's enormous bureaucracy, with a hand in human resources, facilities maintenance, revenue collection, contract procurement, and much more—suddenly finds itself a leading front in the fight against homelessness.

And at a time when the city's working to streamline its homeless services work with Multnomah County, the OMF's emergence has caused some heartburn.

"We've never done this before," says Commissioner Nick Fish, who helmed the Portland Housing Bureau from its inception in 2009 until Hales took it away from him in 2013. "It's a bit of a contradiction that we are on one hand trying to streamline, align, and coordinate services, and at the same time, we've actually in some ways become less coordinated."

The distinction of who handles what Fish calls a "bold and essentially unproven plan to address camping and homelessness" is in some ways a case of inside baseball. As Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff and the passionate architect of many of the new homeless efforts, told the Mercury: "I'd like to ask Portlanders: Do they care? It's just expedience."

But it's more than that, too. The OMF's increasing use reflects ongoing disagreements in city hall about how Portland should handle the emergency at hand. Commissioner Dan Saltzman has said he doesn't want to manage Right 2 Dream Too—which OMF is working to provide a new home for—or camping in general. And since Saltzman controls the housing bureau, it makes some sense for the mayor's office to do its own thing with one of its own bureaus.

Hales has gone further than that, though. While it's overseen campsite sweeps for years, OMF is now managing a contract for services at a temporary emergency shelter the city opened up in recent months near Multnomah Village, and working to permit two brand-new homeless encampments. Shelter management has long been handled by the housing bureau, which also has oversight of the organized homeless community Dignity Village.

Saltzman wasn't available to talk about this disconnect with the Mercury, but his staff and Alpert both insist that the housing bureau still has vital input in all of these new programs. To some with long experience at Portland City Hall, though, the change has been notable.

"That Charlie is using OMF to manage those contracts suggests to me that he has some concern with the management of the housing bureau's ability to effectively negotiate and/or manage those contracts," says former Commissioner Randy Leonard, who left public office in 2012 after a decade on the council (and, it should be noted, was never overly friendly with Saltzman).

"It does suggest that some problems/tensions exist between the mayor's office and the bureau most qualified to manage contracts related to housing issues for the homeless," Leonard says.

The extent of OMF's increasing activity is perhaps most visible in the city's budget. On Wednesday, Alpert is scheduled to appear before city council to ask commissioners to allocate \$2.75 million in unused funds toward bolstering its anti-homelessness efforts. A good portion of the money is headed to the Housing Bureau, but roughly \$250,000 is earmarked for OMF, to pay the bureau back for expenditures on the day storage project (\$136,129), an organized campsite on North Kerby (\$60,340), and other efforts.

And as talks over next year's budget get underway, OMF is requesting nearly \$2 million for shelter operations and three employees to manage "homelessness- and camping-related programs." The City Budget Office is currently recommending commissioners shoot down the proposal.

The extracurricular activities by OMF effectively bring a new bureau into the homelessness fight right when officials are planning to streamline the system. Last month, Saltzman and Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury unveiled a plan to consolidate homeless services provided by the city and county under a single office, overseen by Kafoury. Officials speak optimistically about getting the effort underway by July.

If that happens, it's the latest step in a series of moves aimed at simplifying the region's strategy to fight homelessness. Most recently, officials founded A Home for Everyone, a taskforce of government officials and nonprofits that's drawing up plans to cut homelessness by half in coming years.

But it's unclear how any of the OMF efforts fit into that picture. Neither Kafoury nor Alpert can say whether the mayor's new initiatives will be moved to the new office, or remain under OMF.

"I would expect... that whatever OMF is doing that relates to homeless services is going to be something that is then put forward as something for the joint office," says Kafoury, who notes she hasn't "been kept in the loop on every issue."

"This is one of the reasons why we're trying to get this joint office where we have all the staff working together in the same direction," she says. "So we don't have one person doing one thing and another person doing another thing."

Fish—who recently cast a lone vote against relocating Right 2 Dream Too partially because of a lack of housing bureau oversight—says that when he signed onto Portland's housing emergency, his "expectation was we were going to be pooling the talent, coordinating our efforts and running everything through this framework... this is not being led by the housing bureau. It did not come through A Home for Everyone."

Alpert isn't overly concerned with those distinctions—just in trying to get Portland's hectic, controversial homelessness crisis into shape as soon as possible.

"In my mind none of that matters," he says. "Every bureau should be stepping up. The mayor made that very clear when he asked the council to declare a state of emergency."

GoLocalPDX

Portland Traffic Problems Are Getting Worse and More Costly

By GoLocalPDX News Team

March 16, 2016

Portland has some of the most congested highways in America according to the data released in the INRIX global traffic study.

One Portland highway corridor ranked right with the biggest hell highways in America around New York City, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta as being the most congested.

I-5 From MacAdam Ave to N.Tomahawk Island Drive is the 41st most congested section of highway in the United States. At its worst, this 10 exit span takes nearly 40 minutes to travel with an average speed of just 15 mph. The worst time to travel that 9.6 miles is 4:00 pm.

Seven Portland highway corridors were ranked as among the mosy congested in the United States.

Rank	City	Road(s)From	To	Freeflow Travel Time (min)	Distance (miles)	Worst Peak Period	Peak Travel Time (min)	Peak Average Speed (mph)	Peak Delay (min)	Total Delay Per Year (hrs)	Total Delay Per Year (days)	Worst Day/Hour	Worst Day/Hour Travel Time (min)	Worst Day/Hour Average Speed (mph)	Worst Day/Hour Delay (min)
41	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	I-5 OR-43/MacAdam Ave/Exit 299	N Tomahawk Island Dr/Exit 30B	11	9.61	pm	19	30	8	33	1	Friday 16:00	39	15	31
122	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	US-26 Carmelot Ct	Canyon Rd/Exit 73	5	4.31	am	9	28	5	19	1	Wednesday 08:00	16	16	12
211	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	OR-217 72nd Ave/Exit 7	Hall Blvd/Exit 4A	5	4.20	pm	8	30	4	16	1	Wednesday 08:00	15	16	12
233	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	I-84 OR-99E/Pacific Hwy/Grand Ave	I-205/Exit 8	7	6.21	pm	8	44	2	8	0	Thursday 17:00	12	32	10
240	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	I-205 Washington St/Stark St/Exit 20	US-30 BUS/Columbia Blvd/Exit 23	5	4.77	pm	8	35	3	13	1	Friday 17:00	18	15	15
241	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	I-205 US-30 BUS/Columbia Blvd/Exit 23	Washington St/Stark St/Exit 20	5	4.56	pm	7	37	3	11	0	Friday 16:00	14	19	11
242	Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	I-5 Haines St/Exit 293	Elligsen Rd/Exit 286	8	7.74	pm	11	42	3	13	1	Friday 17:00	26	18	22

Cost to Portland Could be \$1 Billion

As GoLocal previously reported, the growing congestion in Portland is costly in time and money for Oregon families and business.

Traffic congestion across the state could cost the economy almost \$1 billion annually by 2040, according to a study released by the Port of Portland and the Portland Business Alliance.

The study was commissioned by 33 businesses that operate in the Portland-area.

“If that’s your future, then that seems kind of sad, and that’s not very attractive to me,” said Susie Lahsene, senior manager of transportation and land use policy at Port of Portland.

The average Portland metro household will experience 69 hours of road congestion this year. A total of 5 percent of all Portland metro area travel time is spent under congested conditions, like stop-and-go traffic, according to the study.

Growing Problem

The global comprehensive survey finds that “Urbanization continues to drive increased congestion in many major cities worldwide. Strong economies, population growth, higher employment rates and declining gas prices have resulted in more drivers on the road – and more time wasted in traffic.”

“The report reveals the U.S. faces large challenges to solve congestion issues, fueled by continued economic and population growth, higher employment rates and declining gas prices,” said the report.

INRIX Traffic Scorecard "analyzes and compares the state of traffic congestion in countries and major metropolitan areas worldwide. The report reveals the cities most impacted by worsened traffic conditions are those that experienced the most economic improvement during the past year. The U.S. had the worst congestion, with the average commuter spending nearly 50 hours in traffic in 2015."

METHODOLOGY

[Source Data & Analysis](#)

The INRIX Traffic Data Archive is the source of “Big Data” (typically several years of historical traffic information) used in the Scorecard. The INRIX 2015 Traffic Scorecard analyzes metropolitan areas in the United States and European countries, as well as select cities in Asia.

INRIX has developed efficient methods for interpreting its real-time traffic data to establish monthly and annual averages of travel patterns. These same methods can aggregate data over periods of time to provide reliable information on speeds and congestion levels for specific segments of roads.

KATU

Day storage facilities open for homeless individuals in Portland

By Mary Loos

March 15, 2016

PORTLAND, Ore. — The City of Portland is trying another way to help the homeless population in the city.

A big green cargo container has been placed under the Steel Bridge, to help homeless individuals stow their belongings during the day. The city has contracted Central City Concern to manage the storage facility for the next six months at a cost of \$67,000, which is just part of the total budget allocation for the project which was discussed at City Council back in August.

"It's very difficult to go look for a job or go to a job interview when you have all your possessions with you," Jay McIntyre with CCC explained.

The hope is that by providing a place to hold their belongings and information about services, people will be able to start to move on to that next step up from homelessness. But city officials also see it as a way to help clean up the streets during the day.

"There's absolutely no cost to them. There's just a little bit of paperwork and then we take a picture of them just to ensure that if they do lose their receipt that we're getting the property back to the correct person," said McIntyre.

In addition to the clean, dry storage inside, there are other 24-hour services like porta-potties, a garbage dumpster and a needle depository.

The Steel Bridge location is just one of two spots for the day storage. the other is located near Hazelnut Grove off North Greeley Avenue and is being run by campers there. There's no cost to run that storage unit, since the campers are taking care of it, but the city had initially paid \$56,000 for both containers.

The doors are open twice a day, from 8 a.m. through 9:30 a.m. for drop off, and from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. for pickup. When it's not open for business, the doors are securely locked. While the word is still getting out through the homeless community, the hope is the idea will be successful.

A previous incarnation back in 2010 was set up near the Chinatown Gate, but only ran for a year.