

The Portland Tribune

Novick: more 'missing middle' homes needed

By Jim Redden

March 17, 2016

In 1989, Northwest Portland residents protested to prevent Victorian-era houses from being demolished and replaced with more compact row houses. Some neighbors were arrested trying to prevent the destruction of what they called the “good old houses.”

But the protests failed, and connected townhouses are a common sight today in the Nob Hill area, especially west of trendy Northwest 23rd Avenue, and a few other parts of town, too.

Now, 27 years later, City Commissioner Steve Novick thinks more row houses should be welcomed as part of the solution to Portland’s affordable housing crisis. He considers them to be part of housing’s “missing middle” — smaller-scale units that include duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes and two-story apartments built around small courtyards.

Whether as rentals or owner-occupied homes, Novick says they could increase density in residential neighborhoods without overpowering adjacent homes — and they would cost less to buy than the large new single-family homes that are increasingly popping up.

“I don’t want Portland to turn into a city of just tall apartments and million-dollar houses. We need to find a way to create more housing options,” Novick says.

Such options were more common in the past in Portland, but the zoning was changed in many neighborhoods over the years to favor the construction of single-family homes, which is why those models are now considered “missing.”

Novick wants the Comprehensive Plan update currently being considered by the City Council to pave the way for more of it. He plans to push for a study of where and how new “missing middle” housing can be built when the council takes up the Comp Plan again on April 14. After it is approved later this year, the state-required land-use planning document will guide growth in the city for the next 20 years.

“If necessary, we might need to find incentive to encourage developers to build three or four row houses instead of a single million-dollar house,” Novick says.

Not everyone believes more “missing middle” housing is right for all neighborhoods, however.

“We should be putting together policies that would redirect development to the eastern neighborhoods that terribly need new investment, streets, and sidewalks,” says Robert McCullough, Southeast Uplift and Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association chair. “Bottom line, I would spend more time helping neighborhoods in need of repair and less in tearing up those that are doing just fine.”

Portland not alone

The concept of creating more “missing middle” housing is not unique to Novick or Portland. The term was coined in 2010 by Daniel Parolek of Opticos Design, a Berkeley company that seeks to

create livable, sustainable communities and design buildings that reinforce them. It is intended to define a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living.

“They are classified as ‘missing’ because very few of these housing types have been built since the early 1940s, due to regulatory constraints, the shift to auto-dependent patterns of development, and the incentivization of single-family homeownership,” Parolek says.

That is true in Portland, according to Eric Engstrom, a principle planner at the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, which is staffing the Comp Plan update. According to Engstrom, there is a lot of older “missing middle” housing in such neighborhoods as Buckman, Hosford-Abernethy, Kerns, and Sunnyside that could not be rebuilt today because the zoning was changed to single-family in 1980.

“More land is set aside for single-family zoning today than was the case pre-1980. For example, before 1980 most of the land in Southeast between Cesar Chavez Boulevard and 12th Avenue was zoned for multifamily development. Today, most of that area is single-family zoning,” Engstrom says.

Two maps pulled together by Eli Spevak, a local developer and leading proponent of alternative housing, show the difference. The majority of inner eastside blocks were zoned for multifamily housing in 1923, when the city adopted its first zoning code. But most inner eastside blocks are zoned for single-family homes in a map that accompanies the recommended Comp Plan update.

Spevak also advocates for zoning changes to allow more accessory dwelling units, tiny homes and shared housing at the website operated by his company, Orange Splot LLC.

Numerous studies have shown that even middle-class families cannot afford to live near employment centers in the Portland metropolitan area. This is true for both renters and potential homeowners with moderate incomes, who are moving farther and farther out of town to find housing they can afford. Spevak believes more “missing middle” housing could help reverse that trend.

It is not clear whether Portlanders concerned about density increases and skyrocketing housing costs agree that more “missing middle” housing is a solution. The City Council already has heard from residents opposed to large apartment buildings, dubbed “apartment bunkers,” in existing residential neighborhoods. And they have heard many complaints about so-called “McMansions” replacing smaller houses.

But the debate over “missing middle” housing is so new that Commissioner Amanda Fritz asked Novick if he meant “middle-class” housing when he raised the issue at a council work session on the Comp Plan a few months ago.

A boon to affordability

An online survey conducted for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability found some public support for more “missing middle” housing, depending on how it’s done.

The survey was conducted between Dec. 8, 2015, and Jan. 12, 2016, as part of the Residential Infill Project. The bureau is working to develop new and updated rules governing infill development in single-dwelling zones, to address the concerns being raised before the council. A steering committee made up of citizens, preservationists and developers is assisting with the project.

The survey confirmed that housing affordability is a top public concern, especially among those with lower incomes.

“Affordability was the top priority for renters, survey takers from communities of color, and respondents with an annual household income under \$50,000. Many who took the survey are concerned that infill is making housing less affordable,” the bureau reported about survey results, adding, “Many respondents contend that smaller, affordable homes are being demolished and replaced with much larger, more expensive homes.”

The survey also found support for developing more “missing middle” housing, along with accessory dwelling units to increase the supply of housing alternatives. This is especially true if such new housing fits into existing neighborhoods.

“Many respondents were supportive of increasing the number of allowed alternative options, particularly if scale and design or aesthetic considerations could be controlled. Some, however, opposed allowing any alternative housing options in single-dwelling zones because of concerns about changing character or increased density,” the survey report says.

Coming up with such standards and rules is one issue the Residential Infill Project is addressing.

“It really doesn’t matter if they call it a ‘triplex’ or ‘garden apartment’ or ‘courtyard cluster,’ if it’s huge and looming, right up against the property line, with no trees and lots of pavement, rather than nestled into the site’s features, and the list price is half-a-million, then it’s not achieving the goals of being compatible or affordable,” says Bridlemile neighborhood resident Jan Wilson, who has been following the Comp Plan update closely.

The council will consider amendments to the Comp Plan update at public hearings April 14 and 20. Votes on the proposed amendments are scheduled for April 28. The council will likely vote on the amended update on May 25 or June 15.

Portland to sue Monsanto for PCB contamination

By Steve Law

The city of Portland is teaming up with six other West Coast cities to separately sue Monsanto Co. for health and environmental damages caused by its products containing polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

The City Council unanimously agreed Wednesday to authorize the city to sue Monsanto, the exclusive manufacturer of PCBs in the United States from 1935 until the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned their manufacture in 1979.

PCBs were widely used in electrical and other industrial processes, but have been shown to be highly persistent in the environment and a likely cause of cancer in humans and animals.

Documents show Monsanto knew as far back as 1969 that PCBs led to contamination of fish, oysters and birds, said John Fiske, a senior trial attorney with Gomez Trial Lawyers of San Diego, in a presentation before the City Council on Wednesday. The company realized its product might cause "global contamination," Fiske said, yet continued to peddle its product, "choosing profits over environmental health."

PCBs are among the most potent contaminants in the Willamette River bottom and are one of the main targets of the massive Portland Harbor Superfund cleanup project.

Though the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to release its proposed cleanup plan for the Superfund site as soon as the first week in April, that was not the reason the city decided to sue Monsanto right now, said Tracy Reeve, city attorney.

Rather, Portland had a chance to join the other six cities in a cooperative legal strategy.

The cities, which include Seattle, Oakland and San Jose, would each file separate lawsuits against Monsanto in federal court, but use the same two law firms, Gomez Trial Lawyers and Baron & Budd in Texas.

The law firms intend to file a motion on March 31 in a federal court in Santa Barbara, Calif., to ask that one judge handle all seven suits. The law firms would conduct discovery and other legal motions on behalf of all seven cities, saving on legal fees.

The two law firms agreed to work on a contingency basis, getting a share of the penalties rather than charging on a per-hour basis.

As a result, Reeve said, this litigation will result in only minor administrative costs to the city.

Monsanto's media department was unavailable to provide immediate comment on the lawsuit decision.

Council spends money to prevent more Portlanders from becoming homeless

*By Jim Redden
March 16, 2016*

Responding to ever-increasing Portland housing costs, the City Council approved an \$2.75 million on Wednesday to fund additional homeless services.

The money is in addition to \$2.26 million the council approved when it declared a Housing State of Emergency last October.

Mayor Charlie Hales said some of the additional money will be spent on "deliberate experimentation" to help determine the best ways to reduce homelessness. A number of the services are modeled after those in other cities.

"We are trying some thing out that we're learning from other cities. Some of them are going to work, some of them aren't," said Hales.

Much of the new money, slightly more than \$1 million, will be spent on a service that was not discussed much when the council declare the housing emergency — preventing more low-income Portlanders from becoming homeless because of late rents and the high cost of moving to new rental housing.

Although the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB) has long operated a short term rental assistance program, all of the money in its current budget is already spent. The funds were used to help 3,200 people avoid eviction and another \$1,000 afford new housing.

"The demand is so high and the cost of housing is going up so fast all the resources were allocated in the first six months of the fiscal year," Marc Jolin, the executive director of A Home for Everyone (AHFE), told the council during the morning hearing on the funding request. AHFE is a collaboration between Portland, Gresham, Multnomah County and Home Forward, formerly known as the Portland Housing Authority, to cut homelessness in half by 2019.

Most of the original appropriation went to open two temporary homeless shelters, one in Southwest Portland and one in downtown. The largest portion of the additional funds approved Wednesday, \$1.286 million, will go to pay some of their opening and operating costs. Both required improvements to open and need ongoing staffing, maintenance and repairs to function.

Another \$139,248 will be spent to hire a property broker to help find locations to replace and expand the number of shelter beds when they close.

Some of the money, \$70,707, will pay to continue providing services to both city-approved and unauthorized homeless camps. The city is providing portable toilets, garbage collection and day storage for two camps in North Portland and one under the west end of the Steel Bridge.

Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff and point person on homeless issues, testified the camp services are helping to keep the surrounding neighborhoods cleaner.

And some of the money, \$30,000, will be available to send homeless people in Portland to other cities where they have better support networks. Only those who request such trips will receive them.

The money to pay for the services will come from a recent legal settlement with online travel companies over unpaid hotel/motel taxes and changes in property management agreements with the Portland Development Commission.

You can read the request

The Multnomah County Commission is scheduled to consider spending \$5.7 million on homeless and affordable housing services Thursday. Of that amount, \$1 million is requested for housing assistance for homeless families, domestic violence survivors, homeless youth, homeless veterans and related service systems.

The remaining \$4.7 million will help fulfill County Chair Deborah Kafoury's promise to appropriate \$10 million to AHFE next year to help. The request before the commission says all

of the money will come from the county's recent \$6.121 million Mortgage Electronic Registration Service lawsuit settlement.

The county request can be read at

http://multnomah.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=3&event_id=523&meta_id=86217.

Hales has promised \$20 million in city funds for AHFE and has asked all general fund agencies to propose 5 percent budget reductions to help free up the money.

A recent analysis by the City Budget Office (CBO) questioned whether the AHFE goal of cutting homelessness in half by 2019 is realistic. In a review of the PHB's next budget request, the CBO said the actual cost of such a reduction is not the \$30 million Hales and Kafoury promised to spend next year, but \$73 million over three years. And the analysis said the homeless population is probably increasing faster than expected because of the increasing housing costs the council is trying to address.

A previous Portland Tribune story on the analysis can be read at

<http://portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/297781-174665-city-report-casts-doubt-on-goals-for-homeless->

Willamette Week

An Operator Shortfall at Portland's 911 System Leads to Dangerously Long Wait Times

The dispatch desk is getting more calls, but has less staff to answer the phones than five years ago.

By Beth Slovic

March 16, 2016

Dennis Elleson heard a crash, then his wife's screams.

It was around 3:30 am Dec. 9 when a fir tree smashed through the roof of his home in the Lents neighborhood, pinning his wife, Bobbi, to a bed.

Elleson, 61, scrambled to get his wife some air. But his efforts were futile. "I watched her leg fall," he says, "and then she took her last breath."

Elleson called 911. Then he waited.

In Portland's emergency dispatch center, a five-minute drive away, operators were slammed. Heavy winds brought a flurry of emergency calls to the center. Downed power lines. Traffic accidents. Sounding alarms. A reader board showed more incoming calls than people to answer them.

In all, Elleson waited more than two minutes and probably close to four for an operator to answer his call—a wait that amounts to eons for emergency responders. The city has not

released data on the call's length, but three emergency operators tell WW that Elleson was on hold for more than two minutes.

A quicker response time would not have saved Bobbi Elleson: It eventually took firefighters three hours to extract her body from under the tree.

But her husband's experience on hold is one of several warning signs that Portland's 911 system faces its own emergency: Its dispatch desk is receiving more calls each year, but has far fewer people answering the phones than it did five years ago.

If call volumes hold, Portland is on track this year to see a nearly 60 percent increase in the number of calls on hold for longer than two minutes.

The inability of Portland's 911 system to keep up with demand has been largely ignored this election year, overshadowed by more visible issues like homelessness, police accountability and transportation.

Yet even the Portland official who oversees the system concedes its backlog is putting lives at risk.

"We're heading," says City Commissioner Steve Novick, "into dangerous territory."

There's never been a worse time in Portland to depend on 911.

Portland's Bureau of Emergency Communications answers police, fire and medical calls for multiple agencies in Multnomah County, and calls have jumped in the past five years, increasing 18 percent since 2011 thanks to cellphone and population growth. A car crash that used to generate two or three calls can now sparks 25.

Over the same period, the number of call takers and dispatchers has declined by 23 percent.

That shortfall comes even as funding has increased. It points to a failure by emergency managers to respond to increased demand by training new operators.

The city is not training enough new employees to keep up with turnover in a job that burns out workers.

To meet demand, Portland uses a system of forced overtime for operators who already work 10-hour days, regularly extending their workdays to 12 hours. The short-notice overtime orders—SNOT for short—are stretching employees to the breaking point, interviews with six current and former employees show.

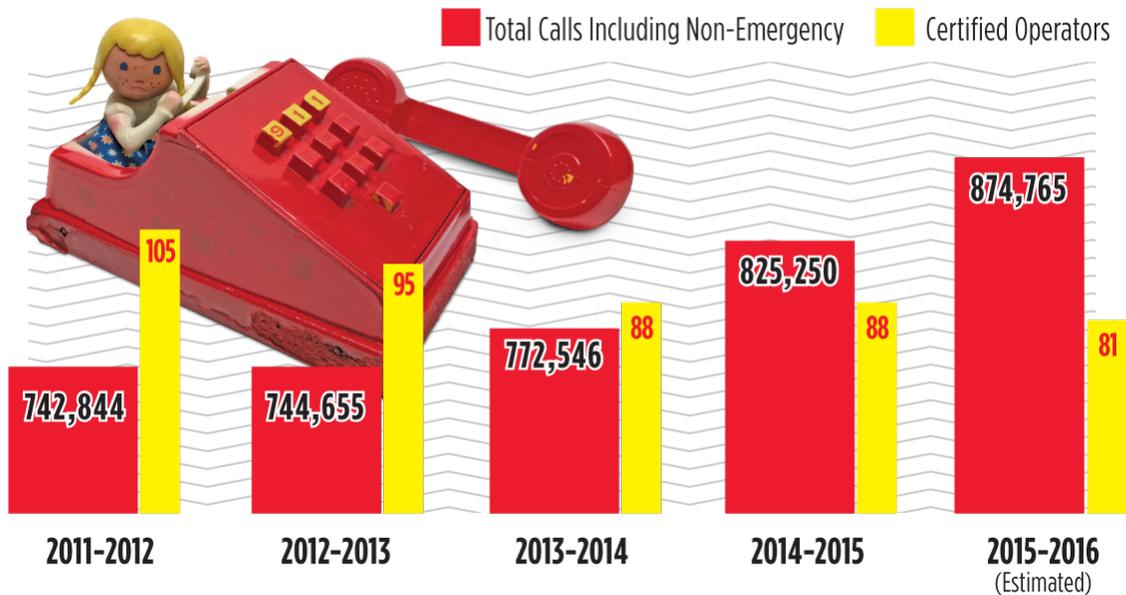
Yet the orders arrive almost daily. "Staffing levels are starting to get desperate," one such email from March 5 reads. "Please Please Please call and come help."

Workers who refuse overtime are threatened with discipline or termination, under the terms of their union contract. "That's always the dagger they dangle in front of us," says Lisa Vincenty, a 22-year veteran, speaking as a member of her union.

Others say the workplace atmosphere has turned toxic.

"I'm well-trained," says one operator who asked not to be identified for fear of retaliation. "I love the job. I want to stay. We're just suffering so much."

Total Calls to 911 vs. Certified Operators



On the surface, many of the bureau's statistics look good. About 96 percent of emergency calls are answered in 20 seconds or less. Ninety-nine percent of calls are answered within 60 seconds.

But as call volumes have increased, so have the number of calls holding for more than two minutes. In 2008, Portland reported 31 calls that waited for answers for over two minutes. In 2015, the city had 423 of those calls—a 13-fold increase that Novick, who took over the bureau in 2013, says he can't ignore.

He calls the increase "disturbing."

The system, he says, is stretched to the breaking point. "And we can't afford to have it break," he says.

So how did it get this way?

Funding is not an obvious factor. The budget for Portland's emergency communications bureau grew from \$14.6 million in 2005-06 to \$23.7 million in 2011-12, increasing an average of \$1.5 million per year. This year, the bureau's budget is \$24.7 million, an increase of \$250,000 per year in the past four years.

Meanwhile, Multnomah County's population has grown by more than 12 percent over the same period, jumping to 777,490 as of July.

Lisa Turley, the bureau's director since 2006, says she has not been able to add staff in most budget cycles. "If I can hold my budget harmless," she says, "I figure that's a win."

But employees say managers, including Novick, have made the problem worse by failing to plan ahead for employee turnover in a job with a steep learning curve.

It takes up to two years to train and certify a dispatcher, who must pass a battery of tests but doesn't need a college degree to earn a starting salary of \$21 an hour.

Dispatchers need to type fast, demonstrate sound judgment and keep their emotions in check even as adrenaline pumps through their veins.

"It's not a job everyone can do," says another employee who requested anonymity. "You could actually kill someone."

Retirements and burnout have depleted the ranks. Nineteen employees left the bureau in 2013 alone, city records show. And the bureau has yet to catch up.

Meanwhile, not everyone making it through the city's lengthy training program is sticking around. Seven of 12 new hires in 2014 resigned the same year.

Today, city records show the bureau has 81 certified operators, although it should have 107. Portland spent nearly \$600,000 on overtime last year.

That would be enough to hire six or seven operators. A 2002 audit recommended the bureau set goals for hiring, training and retaining sufficient staff, but a 2013 update of that report showed the bureau hadn't done so.

"The short staffing up there is not getting any better," says Steve Phebus, an operator who retired in December. "In fact, it's getting worse. They've seen it coming for 10 years, and they've done nothing."

Other factors contribute to the problem.

Operators also answer calls to Portland's non-emergency number, 503-823-3333, but wait times there are even longer—sometimes 10 to 12 minutes. Frustrated callers will sometimes hang up, call 911, then complain the non-emergency number is broken.

(Dispatchers say many of those 911 calls deal with the homeless population—records show about 2,000 such calls per month—and Mayor Charlie Hales' efforts to loosen camping rules have exacerbated the trend. Police typically won't respond to calls complaining about people sleeping on the street, so dispatchers have to endure callers' angry tirades.)

Novick blames funding and says he's going to fight for more money for the bureau in next year's budget, despite Mayor Hales' call for 5 percent cuts in all bureaus so he can shift money to housing.

Hales declined through a spokeswoman to be interviewed. Sara Hottman, his spokeswoman, says the mayor still wants bureaus to propose cuts "as an exercise in budget management," adding that he won't necessarily implement those cuts.

It will be up to Portland's next mayor to address the shortcomings—and the three leading candidates all say Portland needs a fix.

"Anything that gets to frontline public safety needs to be a top priority," says Oregon Treasurer Ted Wheeler.

Sarah Iannarone, a program administrator at Portland State University, says the city should incorporate a 311 system to address non-emergency questions more efficiently.

Jules Bailey, a Multnomah County commissioner, says 911 is a core government service. "People need to be safe," he says, "and we need people to get a 911 operator when they call 911."

For Dennis Elleson, whose wife died in the December storm, change will come too late.

In his moment of trauma, Elleson says he doesn't remember being on hold. But help could have come sooner. Once he reached an operator, he heard sirens from a nearby fire station in Lents within seconds, he says.

The Portland Mercury

The City is Going To Pay For Homeless People's Bus Tickets Out of Town

By Dirk VanderHart

March 16, 2016

The Portland Housing Bureau is earmarking tens of thousands of dollars to buy homeless Portlanders bus tickets out of town in coming months, provided they can prove that greener pastures await elsewhere.

In an unusual request out of step the city's normal budget process this morning, the bureau said that that money—along with another \$2 million for other efforts—are necessary as Portland struggles to fight its homeless crisis amid rising rents and ongoing no-cause evictions.

The \$30,000 request for bus tickets is the first we've heard of the proposal. It didn't show up in documents posted last week, detailing the funding requests from the housing bureau. Instead, it was introduced as an amendment in council chambers.

Sally Erickson, who leads the housing bureau's efforts against homelessness, told Portland City Council that the money is "for homeless people who are stranded here."

"They need assistance getting back to a place where there is a support system," Erickson said. "Where there's a place where they might be able to stay permanently. It's something that we're looking to start up."

Details on the effort were scarce at the hearing (we've reached out to the housing bureau with questions), but Erickson specifically compared the effort to San Francisco's Homeward Bound program, in which the city awards bus tickets to homeless people if they can prove they have a place to stay, they remain sober during travel, and are "medically stable enough to travel unassisted to the destination." (The program's not always followed those rules.)

"This isn't just handing out a bus ticket at all," Erickson said.

Though new, the \$30,000 request was a tiny fraction of the \$2.75 million the housing bureau and Office of Management and Finance (OMF) requested this morning to help bolster their efforts fighting homelessness. As we noted in this week's paper, the OMF—which manages Portland's business affairs—has had an outsized role managing new efforts since the city declared a housing emergency. In many cases, it's taken on projects that would typically be handled by the housing bureau.

That was laid bare this morning, when an amendment to the OMF's share of the \$2.75 million request increased by nearly three fold. City council approved \$686,522 to reimburse the bureau for management of two organized campsites, maintenance on two new temporary homeless shelters, and a broker who's scouting for new shelter sites.

The OMF's newfound role is causing concern among some officials—notably Commissioner Nick Fish, who used to oversee housing.

"I continue to believe that the housing bureau should be leading this effort," he said this morning. "We should be consolidating and streamlining and aligning" services.

The housing bureau got the larger chunk of change today, though, and much of that was to bolster rent assistance agencies offer to people at risk of becoming homeless. As Marc Jolin, director of the A Home For Everyone Coalition, told City Council, that money's drying up far quicker as rents rise.

Jolin spoke of thousands of people each month pushed to the brink of homelessness by the city's rental crisis. "If we want to stem the in-flow of people onto our streets... we desperately need additional rent assistance dollars."

In the end he got them. A unanimous city council vote—Housing Commissioner Dan Saltzman was absent—approved the \$2.75 million. It also potentially set up expectations for next year's budget, which council is just beginning to consider.

Requests like this morning's—asks for general fund money that occur outside of the typical budget process— have been sort of controversial in the past. When City Council recently decided to put taxes collected from Airbnb and similar services toward housing, Commissioner Amanda Fritz bristled at the move, arguing it should be done within the city's budget process. But Fritz presented no such concerns today.