

The Oregonian

In last speech, Charlie Hales pledges homeless 'navigation center'

By Brad Schmidt

March 25, 2016

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales delivered his final state of the city speech Friday, an oft-retrospective account of his lone mayoral term with a sprinkling of new initiatives he hopes to launch before leaving office at year's end.

Most notably, Hales announced plans to create a "navigation center" to help homeless Portlanders find housing.

Portland will also walk its green talk by adding scores of solar panels and establishing new reporting requirements for energy efficiency in new homes, he said.

And Hales will work with local schools to create an academy that entices high school students to later pursue careers in public safety.

But the rah-rah nature of Hales' speech – he asked nearly everyone in the audience to stand up and give themselves a hand – belied the overarching challenge of delivering a mayoral coda while fending off lame-duck status. Hales had hoped to seek a second term but dropped his re-election plans last fall, amid a difficult challenge from Oregon Treasurer Ted Wheeler.

At the same time Hales took to the ballroom stage in the Sentinel hotel, political attention was elsewhere. His would-be replacements participated in a mayoral debate across town. And thousands of people packed into the Moda Center to hear from Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.

But Hales made the most of his last marquee address.

The biggest announcement is a new navigation center, modeled after one in San Francisco, that will help provide overnight shelter for homeless Portlanders and a pathway into stable housing. It'll also help police direct homeless people off the streets by offering a place where they can go.

"It's a great idea, and it's gonna help the whole city," Hales said in an interview after the speech.

Hales said a vacant site, owned by Portland Public Schools, has been identified but he declined to disclose it. Hales hopes to open the center this summer, which could accommodate about 100 people, their partners, pets and possessions.

"You're not kicked out every morning at 7 o'clock," he said. "You've got that bunk until you're moved into permanent housing. It's not necessarily that much more expensive than what we're doing now, if at all. But it's, I think, a better model."

Even so, full costs aren't known, Hales said. The center would operate at the schools' site for two or three years before moving to a new location, with affordable housing perhaps built at the center's original location.

Hales also touted several green initiatives.

One would add solar panels to several city-owned buildings, at an estimated cost of \$336,000, nearly doubling the city's arrays.

"It's important that Portland be a leader, not just in policy, but also in actually changing how much energy we use and how much our carbon footprint is shrinking," he said.

Another would require home builders to disclose the energy-efficiency of new homes. He likened it to carmakers disclosing gasoline mileage.

"It's important, and now we all pay attention to that," he said. "So it's the same idea."

Hales also plugged a new academy with Portland Public Schools and Portland Community College. He hopes it will get more teenagers interesting in becoming police officers, firefighters or 911 operators.

"It will probably be in multiple schools because at any given time, there's not going to be that many people going through that program, but still," he said.

Hales also took time during his speech to reflect on his lengthy public career, which included a decade as a city commissioner and, later, his return to City Hall as mayor in 2013.

He highlighted recent accomplishments, including efforts to attract more diverse bureaucrats and easing employment barriers for people with criminal histories. He also talked about money he dedicated for community centers that he hopes will keep teens away from gangs, but noted that gang violence is nonetheless a "crisis."

As is customary, Hales received a standing ovation at the end of his speech. Next year, someone else will stand in his place.

Afterward, when discussing whether that person would continue his big announcement – the navigation center – Hales said they should welcome it with open arms.

"If a mayor before me had found this good idea of a navigation center, and had cut the ribbon on it six months before I took office, I would give 'em a big hug," he said.

Told that would make for an interesting photo opportunity next year, Hales joked that he'd enjoy it.

Depending, of course, on who voters select to replace him.

Body-camera policy needs vetting before city plunges ahead: Editorial Agenda 2016

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

March 24, 2016

To hear Mayor Charlie Hales talk about it, a plan to outfit Portland police officers with body cameras is practically a done deal. He told a reporter that "there's no going back," instructed city employees to "make this happen," and has the city on track to solicit bids from companies to provide and operate the cameras this spring.

However, in Hales' zeal to check off the police-accountability box before he leaves office, he's shorting a couple critical steps to make sure that the city acts with accountability. One is

financial: The city has not identified a source of funds to cover the ongoing operating expenses of body cameras, a deficiency that led the city's budget office to recommend against allocating funds in the coming year, as The Oregonian/OregonLive's Maxine Bernstein reported. But the second is even more consequential: Portlanders still have no clue as to what the city's policy on the use of body cameras will be.

When are officers supposed to turn on the cameras? Are domestic violence victims going to be recorded? How long will footage be stored? Who will have access to it? And will police officers who use force against someone get special access to view the footage before explaining what happened?

Those are all questions that the city needs to answer and allow public comment on before seeking proposals from vendors. Unfortunately, the city does not expect to release its draft until around the same time it issues its Request for Proposals, Deanna Wesson-Mitchell, the mayor's policy advisor on public safety, told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board.

Wesson-Mitchell said the policy, being crafted by representatives from Portland Police, the police union, and attorneys from multiple agencies, will be presented to the public for feedback, and could be altered before final adoption. She noted that the public already has had opportunities to share their thoughts, pointing to community forums last fall designed to solicit input.

Unfortunately, those forums were sparsely attended. More important, there's a fundamental difference between asking people to offer their general input on body cameras versus soliciting the community's response to a detailed framework that explains the circumstances in which officers will use the cameras, the manner in which that footage can be used and how footage incidents in which police officers use force is handled.

That last issue is a controversial one that city leaders have repeatedly danced around. In some cities, police officers are allowed to review the footage of use-of-force incidents, including shootings, before giving an account of what happened. It's a privilege that no ordinary citizen would get, and it is a practice that taints the quality of an investigation into an officer's actions. While he or she can't change what the footage shows, an officer can tailor his or her account of what happened depending on what the camera captures – or doesn't capture.

The public needs a legitimate opportunity to weigh in on the adequacy of the policy before the city bulldozes ahead with a Request for Proposals. City leaders cannot forget why the public is willing to accept the privacy implications of real-time recording of their interactions with police in the first place: Accountability and transparency. In too many instances, the public has felt it cannot trust the story that police are giving. That may be unfair or unwarranted, but that is the reality that Portland police and the community are living in.

Wesson-Mitchell contended that "like any policy" with the police, the body-camera policy is "able to be reviewed and changed over time as needed," as if that should be reassuring. It's not. Consider the 48-hour rule, which has long been the target of criticism from police accountability groups and even the U.S. Department of Justice. That rule gives police officers two days before they have to explain to their bosses or internal-affairs personnel what happened in a use-of-force incident. Despite pressure to revise that rule, it's unlikely to change before the union contract expires 2017 — and even then, it could be renewed.

There are many reasons to support investing in body cameras for Portland police. Other cities have reported a drop in incidents where officers used force after outfitting them with body cameras and an improvement in interactions with the public. It's not surprising that everyone's behavior improves when they know they're on camera.

But plunging forward without knowing how you'll pay for it in coming years is foolish and fiscally shortsighted. Plunging forward without giving the public a real chance to weigh in before the city presses ahead is a disservice to the accountability and transparency that city leaders supposedly want to enhance.

Portland needs to do this right, or not do it at all.

The Portland Tribune

Hales says city still navigating challenges of housing, jobs

By Jim Redden

March 28, 2016

In his final State of the City speech on Friday, Mayor Charlie Hales took credit for accomplishments during his first and only term in office, but warned many challenges to the city lie ahead.

Speaking before a packed house at the weekly Friday Forum lunch before the longtime civic organization, Hales — who chose not to run for re-election — said he had kept campaign promises to get back to basic budgets and move the Portland Police Bureau more in the direction of community police.

But Hales also said that much work remains to be done, including: reducing youth violence; preparing for 20 years of growth; hiring more police officers to fill the growing number of vacancies; and building more housing that low-income families can afford.

Hales also took the opportunity to announce the city was partnering with Portland Public Schools to open a multi-service Navigation Center to help homeless people in an unused school building. The center will be modeled after a similar program in San Francisco that Hales and other city officials recently visited.

"A Navigation Center will help us provide people a path away from trauma, off the streets, and into a successful life," Hales said, adding that it is only the city's latest effort to reduce homelessness since the City Council declared a Housing State of Emergency last October.

The location of the Navigation Center will be announced after discussions with neighbors. The goal is to open it first as a shelter before the temporary one opened last year closes in a few months.

Hales put much of his emphasis of his address on the update of the comprehensive land-use plan the council is considering. Such plans are required by the state to guide development during the next 20 years. Portland is expected to grow from around 600,000 to 800,000 people by 2035.

"We have one chance to get this right — to make Portland a sustainable, livable and equitable city of 800,000 people. The Portland we love now may be here in 20 years, but it's not going to happen by accident," Hales said of the update, which the council could approve as soon as May.

Despite emphasizing his back-to-basics philosophy, Hales announced a number of new initiatives.

In addition to the Navigation Center, they included: creating a Public Safety Academy to prepare young people for police, fire and emergency communications jobs in cooperation with Portland Public Schools and Portland Community College; doubling the amount of solar panels on city-owned properties to help fight climate change; and creating energy standards for homes and commercial buildings to encourage conservation.

Hales did not spend much time on next year's city budget, but said he wants to increase the hiring of police officers to fill vacant positions and continue a \$2 million program started last year to allow young people access to community centers for free. He also endorsed the temporary 10-cent-a-gallon gas tax on the May 17 primary election ballot.

"I've asked you to look over the horizon and into Portland's future. There are both perils and opportunities there. I know that we will creatively tackle those problems, and we will seize the opportunities that will keep the Portland the place we love," Hales said.

Hales also took the time to acknowledge many people in the audience who he said were helping make Portland a great place to live, from elected officials to citizens who had overcome personal hardships to succeed.

The Portland Mercury

The Four Most Interesting Lines from Mayor Charlie Hales' Last State of the City Speech

*By Dirk VanderHart
March 25, 2016*

Mayor Charlie Hales delivered his final State of the City at noon, as City of Club of Portland members and public officials noshed vegetarian dishes at downtown's Sentinel Hotel.

The speech didn't have the notes of finality you might expect—Hales says he'll work up another address at the end of his tenure that'll include all the wistfulness. Instead, the mayor spoke for an hour or so on many of the things you'd expect—rehashing accomplishments from the last year and slathering the city's state of affairs with a sunshiny patina. He also dropped a couple legitimate news items, took a selfie with his audience (see above), and acknowledged troubling problems with homelessness and gun violence that have grown while he's been in office.

It won't surprise you that not all of the thing was scintillating, so let's distill Hales' final SOTC into a few of the more salient lines.

"I don't believe anyone should be living in a car, a tent, or a shelter. And Carl is not a criminal for having to live in a car, a tent, or a shelter."

Here, Hales was utilizing an old State of the [Fill in the Blank] speech chestnut, tying real people's experiences into his points. The Carl he mentioned is a science-loving high schooler who has family issues and is homeless. (Hales has mentioned him before.)

But the quote is significant to the state of homelessness in Portland in general. After beginning his mayoral career with an effort to sweep campers/activists from the front of City Hall, Hales' administration has shifted dramatically in recent months to policies that formally allow homeless camping and a bunch of other experiments.

Which gets to one of Hales' new announcements. After a trip to San Francisco earlier this year, the mayor's office is planning on cribbing that city's Navigation Center model—and putting it in a still-secret building belonging to Portland Public Schools. SF's invite-only Navigation Center offers its residents services on-site, and allows them to stay until they've found permanent housing.

Hales today said he'll get a 100-person center up and running in short order, at an undisclosed location and for a cost that's still being determined. He suggested the center would be only temporary, potentially switching locations periodically (though, of course, he'll be out of office by the time that theoretically happens).

"In five years, almost 80 percent of our patrol officer will be new to the police bureau."

It's no secret that Portland's having trouble finding police officers. The Portland Police Bureau currently has 45 vacant officer positions, and a bunch of people on the verge of retirement. Lots of other police departments have higher starting pay than Portland, too.

Hales has already pushed money for hiring more people to check the backgrounds of prospective cops. Today he said he'll propose raising officers' starting pay from \$49,000 to \$60,000 (which is what they're paid after six months on the job anyway). He also said he'd offer a signing bonus to new recruits, though couldn't say how much. And he announced that the city's planning to work with Portland Public Schools and Portland Community College on early training courses for students interested in becoming cops, fire fighters, or 911 dispatchers.

"What happened at Matt Dishman Community Center last summer should happen every summer."

Hales was talking about the free admission for teens to Dishman and other community centers he funded as part of last year's budget. It was pitched by the mayor as a way to keep youth out of trouble amidst a rise in gun violence.

The free programming didn't stop that violence from being the worst in decades in 2015, but it was popular. And Hales pledged today he'll seek to make it an ongoing thing.

That'll likely happen, but it's worth pointing out that Portland Parks and Recreation is trying to figure out how it'll pay millions for workers at its community centers, many of who just won the right to union pay and benefits. The city's under no obligation to pay those workers—it could eliminate their positions instead if money's too tight. But if Hales' plan for continued free community center access is going to work, it implies the city also will pony up for the parks workers.

"...Pembina got the message!"

A dig on the Canadian energy giant Pembina Pipeline Co., which Hales first welcomed to town because of its interest in building an enormous propane terminal, then gave the cold shoulder when lots of Portlanders wound up despising the idea.

Hales only mentioned the company as a segue to a discussion of climate change and the necessity of energy efficiency. And he made a few announcements on that subject, too. First Hales updated the city's carbon reduction goals, announcing Portland's emissions have now decreased 21 percent from 1990 levels.

He said he'd help push that even further several ways (none of them, weirdly, involving changes to the city's transportation network). Most notable of those? Hales says the city's going to build a 2 megawatt solar project near the Bull Run Reservoir, where Portland draws much of its drinking water. It'll be a "community solar" project, allowing Portlanders to invest in the project to purchase clean energy.

There was a ton more, obviously. If you're interested, OPB will air the mayor's speech in its entirety Friday (March 25) at 7 pm.

The Portland Business Journal

Hales promises community solar, energy efficiency to combat carbon

By James Cronin

March 25, 2016

Portland will launch its first community solar project near the Bull Run Reservoir.

The two megawatt project was one of three initiatives to curb carbon Mayor Charlie Hales announced during his State of the City speech Friday.

That is one of several solar installations planned on city property. New solar panels are planned for the Southwest Community Center, the Ash Street Fire Station and the Ground Water Pump Station. Along with an installation on the city police bureau's North Precinct, solar power will be generated at 16 Portland-owned facilities.

When the community solar project near Bull Run is operational, according to the mayor's comments, his administration will have more than tripled the amount of solar on city-owned facilities. Community solar lets people who rent or are otherwise unable to install their own solar panels pay into a solar project for clean energy.

Plus, the mayor plans to expand the energy reporting program for commercial buildings to include homes. That, according to the mayor, will create