

The Oregonian

'I cannot believe this!' Why Amanda Fritz is so mad

By Brad Schmidt

April 2, 2016

Portland Commissioner Amanda Fritz's penchant for public reprimands was on full display this week during a lengthy hearing on new tree-cutting regulations.

Fritz believes she had good reason to be upset.

Fritz had wanted to vote "no" on another commissioner's amendment. But, because of a procedural mistake, her City Council colleagues wouldn't let her.

"I cannot believe this!" a stunned Fritz announced during Wednesday's session.

Fritz is well known for occasional outbursts when she doesn't get her way, and those flare-ups aren't typically well-received inside City Hall.

There was the time she gave a long speech deriding Mayor Charlie Hales' first budget while complaining he wasn't collaborative. The time she was "disgusted" with a downtown development plan. The time she likened her colleagues to Congressional Republicans when they welcomed Uber to town.

Now, this.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman had proposed an addition to Fritz's new tree-cutting rules that would exempt low-income housing projects from paying big fees. Fritz didn't support Saltzman's plan. Hales made a procedural error and called for a vote on Saltzman's amendment before allowing public testimony — which Fritz supported for the sake of discussion — and it passed unanimously.

After public testimony, however, Fritz was unswayed. She said poor Portlanders need tree-cutting protections, too.

Had the vote happened as it should have — after the testimony — Fritz could have voted "no." But now she couldn't. So she asked the City Council to reconsider.

Apparently some commissioners thought Fritz wanted them to reconsider their position on Saltzman's plan, instead of simply allowing a second vote so only she could vote "no" — while still planning to vote "yes" on her overarching proposal.

The City Council voted against reconsidering.

"So wait a minute, you're gonna have me vote 'no' on the whole thing?" Fritz said.

"You're gonna have you vote 'no' on the whole thing," Saltzman countered. "Don't look at me."

"That was a professional courtesy!" Fritz said, beginning to gather her things so she could walk out. "I cannot believe this!"

Fritz explained that she wanted to vote against the amendment so she could still vote "yes" on her overall proposal with a clear conscience. A confused Saltzman said he was lost from a parliamentary procedure standpoint. He offered to accommodate her wishes.

"I'm not sure why you're preparing to walk out right now," he said.

"Because the motion to reconsider lost," she retorted. "I'm sorry if you don't understand parliamentary procedure."

That last note seemed to sour any chance at reconciliation.

On Friday, with 48 hours for reflection, Fritz said the rest of the City Council must have been tired from a long meeting. She said she doesn't think they intentionally tried to prevent her from voting "no."

Fritz maintained that she handled the situation appropriately.

"Yes," said Fritz, a two-term city commissioner who is up for re-election in May. "The reason I was upset was because they voted 'no' on letting me re-vote. I did it correctly. They made mistakes. They didn't understand where we were at."

Next week, the City Council plans to fix the mess. Fritz will get a chance to put her "no" vote on the record. Then officials are expected to unanimously approve Fritz's overall proposal, which will increase fees for most developers who tear down large trees.

Asked if she's satisfied with the outcome, Fritz said: "I still don't like the amendment."

How Portland plans to boost housing affordability (OPINION)

By Guest Columnist Dan Saltzman

April 3, 2016

Oregonian reporter Luke Hammill's excellent article "Seattle's housing deal, political shift may provide Portland a blueprint," highlighted Seattle's effort to address rising rents and a lack of housing affordability. I am pleased that in Portland we are keeping pace. Most of the elements of Seattle's grand bargain have been, or I expect will be, adopted by City Council before the end of the year.

Guided by a belief that all Portlanders have a right to safe, decent housing, last year the city enacted the state's first local tenant protections. As Portland increasingly becomes a city of renters, we must remember that growth and prosperity should never come at the expense of our seniors on fixed incomes, our families with children or the hardworking Portlanders who have not seen their wages keep pace with housing prices.

We've boosted the development of affordable housing with our urban renewal funds, significantly increasing the amount we dedicate to new affordable housing by 50 percent to build hundreds of additional units over the next few years. We've accelerated our permitting process so that affordable housing projects can move rapidly toward construction.

We are taking a comprehensive approach to the community impact of gentrification in the historic neighborhoods of North and Northeast Portland. Recognizing that the heart of a community is the people who helped to create it, our preference policy prioritizes those who have experienced the injustice of displacement — and the longtime residents who are at risk now — for city investments in housing and homeownership opportunities.

Thanks to the Oregon Legislature, we now have an outstanding opportunity to enact inclusionary housing programs. This year I'll be bringing a proposal that will increase affordable housing throughout our city by requiring new residential developments to include a certain percentage of affordable housing units. An inclusionary housing program will fundamentally change Portland's housing landscape by ensuring mixed-income communities throughout our city for generations to come. Coupled with this proposal will be a new fee on development, providing yet another funding stream to create affordable housing.

Furthermore, our new comprehensive plan will condition any additional density or height given to new developments on inclusion of affordable housing within their new developments or payment to our affordable housing fund.

Portlanders should be able to live in the communities where they work and have community ties. We need to ensure that this great urban environment we call home continues to serve the people who have made Portland the great city that it is — not just wealthy new residents.

We as a city must continue to meet the challenges of providing new affordable housing at a swift pace — a pace that may leave some thinking we are moving a bit too fast. However, we must move with a sense of urgency so as not to miss a market that is booming at historic levels and to preserve our city as a place that Portlanders from all walks of life can call home.