

The Oregonian

Cynical City Council rushing to pass Steve Novick's inequitable truck tax: Editorial Agenda 2016

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

May 9, 2016

The city of Portland values equality. It maintains an Office of Equity and Human Rights, for instance, and has adopted citywide racial equity goals and strategies. This commitment to equal treatment is evident in almost everything the city does and even carries through to taxation, where it can lead in interesting directions. Remember the 2014 proposal, made by Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales, to assess a tiered fee for road maintenance designed to charge roughly in keeping with people's ability to pay? The proposal fizzled, but not the message: Portland is equity city.

Except when it isn't, that is, as trucking companies that do business here discovered last week. All things, it seems, have their limits.

City Council is in a mighty rush to tax heavy trucks to pay for road maintenance and safety projects. The Council's impulse is certainly good: As long as the city's asking voters to approve a 10-cent local gas tax in order to pay for roads and such, it ought to look for ways to tax big diesel trucks. Equity, right?

But that isn't as simple as you might think. Big rigs are taxed differently in Oregon than smaller vehicles and pay a weight-mile tax rather than a per-gallon tax. Such complexity is one reason Council shouldn't rush a truck tax. It's generally better to do things well than to do them quickly.

Nonetheless, City Council held a first reading last week of Novick's big-rig tax and is scheduled to take it up again Wednesday. It's "very important for us to pass this legislation immediately," explained Novick last week. Why? "The fuel dealers' association, which is opposing the gas tax, is using as their primary argument against the gas tax the fact that it exempts heavy trucks. I think that before Portlanders vote, it's very important for us to let Portland voters know that we are not letting heavy trucks off the hook."

The truck tax suffers from two significant equity problems, as a succession of industry representatives explained to Novick and his colleagues. One of them derives from the way it's calculated, and the other is a cynical product of political calculation.

The heavy vehicle use tax, as it's known, would apply to businesses that pay the state's weight-mile tax and have Portland business licenses, as required for any business that trucks material to a Portland address. So far, so good.

The problem is the tax formula: Businesses would pay the city the equivalent of 2.8 percent of their total weight-mile tax, which reflects their use of roads everywhere in the state. Some businesses' trucks might travel a small number of miles within the city and the vast majority elsewhere in the state. Others' trucks might travel more miles within Portland and fewer miles outside the city. Some businesses, meanwhile, might operate relatively small trucks within Portland and triple-trailer road trains on state highways. That matters because the weight-mile

tax is a function of both miles traveled and vehicle weight. Not only does the tax correspond badly (to be generous) to a trucking business' use of city roads, but it also applies inequitably among businesses themselves.

Yet Novick and his colleagues are rushing to pass it before all of Portland's gas-tax ballots are returned in order to send a message. Hurrying a half-baked and inequitable tax into the books in order to ease the passage of a separate tax is simply bad governance. City Council could, of course, revisit and improve the heavy vehicle use tax after passing it, but optimism about that scenario requires absolute ignorance of the city's arts tax.

Even more cynical, meanwhile, is the Council's decision to keep the heavy-truck tax in effect even if voters reject the gas tax. Why not link the truck tax to the gas tax and allow them to survive or die together? Doing this might be bad for the gas tax, Novick explained Wednesday. The trucking association, you see, "is already opposing the gas tax, and linking the two would give them an added incentive to fight harder against the gas tax." Expediency thus trumps equity.

Novick's conniving, sadly, resonated with most of his colleagues. The only commissioner present on Wednesday who tried to make a case for fair treatment was Dan Saltzman, but his proposal to link the taxes died for lack of a second. Commissioner Nick Fish, who was visiting family abroad, was absent.

Portland's taxpayers really shouldn't be surprised by such scheming and bungling. Novick and his colleagues have already botched the gas tax, after all, dedicating only 56 percent of the revenue – about \$9 million per year – to street maintenance despite facing a backlog that would take almost \$120 million per year over a decade to eliminate. Then again, by getting both taxes wrong, at least the Council did something equitably.

The Portland Tribune

Homeless camp opens in Lents without city approval

By Jim Redden

May 9, 2016

Community activists who say local leaders are not doing enough to address the homeless crisis built a camp for women on Portland-owned property in Southeast Portland on Mother's Day.

"We announced a state of emergency for houselessness in October. It is now May. We have done nothing to move forward on this issue," said Lisa Lake of Advocacy 5 during a Monday morning press conference at the camp at Southeast 93rd Avenue and Woodstock Boulevard in the Lents neighborhood.

The camp has six tents on elevated platforms, a portable tent trailer, and a portable toilet. Lake said it was reserved for vulnerable women who are regularly abused while living on the streets.

Chad Stover, the livability project manager in Mayor Charlie Hales' office, said the camp is not sanctioned by the city. Although Hales has eased restrictions for camping on unused city

property, Stover said the camp's supporters did not follow the process for setting up a city-sanctioned one.

"We're looking for places to house vulnerable women and have a long list of possible sites, but this is not one," said Stover, who showed up to watch the press conference.

According to Stover, the property is owned by the Portland Development Commission and is being sold to a private developer, Lisac Brothers Construction, for \$500,000. Stover said the mayor's office told camp supporters they would not sanction the project during a meeting around four weeks ago.

Lake said the camp would move if the property owners asks it to leave, although some supporters say she not move without the city finding a new location, like it has for the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp.

Also speaking at the press conference was Milwaukie Mayor Mark Gamba, who said he supported the camp and thought it could be duplicated throughout the region. Gamba said his City Council also declared a housing state of emergency several weeks ago.

"This is a great example" of one approach to the homeless crisis," Gamba said.

Portland mayoral candidate Sarah Iannarone also spoke in support of the camp at the press conference. Iannarone, a Portland State University urban researcher, said she helped build the camp on Monday and called it a model that should be used in other neighborhoods.

"It's not a permanent solution but a temporary model for the kind of policies I support. Top-down solutions are not keeping up with the demand," Iannarone said.

In a Monday morning email announcing the press conference, Iannarone said the camp was built and supported by Advocacy 5 and their community partners: Boots On the Ground PDX, PDX Outreach Nursing, Rose City Backpacks of Hope, Forgotten Realms, Free Hot Soup, Houseless Community Builders, Right 2 Dream Too, The ReBuilding Center, and the Village Coalition.

According to the press release, "The purpose of the project is to provide immediate support for houseless women who are routinely and heinously sexually assaulted. The sanctuary will house small groups of women with a live-in host and overnight security. Residents will abide by a code of conduct and observe good neighbor policies. The goal of the project is to provide emergency shelter for women and to help them transition into permanent housing within 9 months."

Land needed for affordable housing

By Jim Redden

May 10, 2016

"Missing middle" housing has unexpectedly emerged as one of the most controversial issues in the Comprehensive Plan update heading for Portland City Council approval.

A majority of the council has introduced an amendment calling for a study of building more duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, row houses and small apartments. Such housing, which is

currently prohibited in many residential areas, should cost less than the large new single-family homes and taller apartments that are currently being built.

The amendment is supported by affordable housing advocates and those who favor increasing density in Portland.

“We need some of the vast tracts of land now zoned for single-dwelling development made available once again for a mix of single-family and ‘missing middle’ densities, making it possible to build affordable homes by sharing land costs,” the Oregon Opportunity Network wrote in support of the amendment on April 20. The groups includes 20 Portland organizations, including Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East, the Portland Housing Center and Human Solutions, which owns and operates affordable housing complexes.

But some neighborhood activists and organizations are questioning the amendment.

“There are no guarantees that this will provide affordable housing,” says Multnomah Neighborhood Association chair Carol McCarthy, speaking on her own behalf.

“Our experience is quite the contrary,” McCarthy says. “New housing is destroying affordable existing housing and replacing it with twice as many houses that each cost three times as much. The demolitions are polluting the air and our gardens, filling up the landfills with high-quality building materials, displacing our lower-income citizens — renters and seniors — and turning our streets into parking lots.”

McCarthy and others also complain the amendment was introduced too late for serious study and debate. And a city task force working on some of these issues, the Residential Infill Task Force, is not scheduled to release its recommendations until after the final council vote.

The council is scheduled to vote on the amendment on Wednesday at the final hearing where proposed amendments are to be considered. A vote on the amended version of the Comp Plan — as it is commonly called — is scheduled for June 15.

The Comp Plan is a state-required land use planning document intended to guide development in the city over the next 20 years. According to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, the amendment does not change existing zoning.

“The missing middle policy is a policy that directs us to explore further code and zoning changes in the future, but there is not a map being adopted with the policy. There is no rezone happening with the adoption of the plan. The implementation of the policy would involve a future planning project with public outreach and opportunity to comment,” says Eric Engstrom, a head planner working on the Comp Plan.

But neighborhood activists and officials are suspicious such changes would be subsequently implemented within the city’s complex land use planning process, which they say is hard for average citizens to understand and follow.

“The question we should be asking is whether zoning by stealth actually will improve Portland’s livability and affordability. Our current experience is that the increasingly streamlined process to demolish older and affordable homes so that developers can replace them with high price structures is not meeting either goal,” says Robert McCullough, chair of the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Associations and Southeast Uplift neighborhood coalition organization.

Willamette Week

Homeless Women's Camp Will Move From Empty Lot in Lents

By Rachel Monahan

May 9, 2016

The homeless camp for women that was erected in Lents over the weekend will move out within the next day.

But the women have forced the city's hand to provide a camping site elsewhere on Portland Development Commission property, said Lisa Lake, president and CEO of Advocacy 5, which helped set up the camp.

"This at-risk population can't be left out there until the city and the powers that be move," said Lake.

The city now says they expect to find space for an all-women's camp on PDC property in the next two weeks. The current location of the camp, at Southeast 93rd Avenue and Woodstock Boulevard, is set to be sold and will become a food cart pod, and maybe housing later on.

In the meantime, the city will provide housing vouchers for the women to stay in a motel or it will provide space in domestic violence or homeless shelters.

Mayor Charlie Hales' office says it does not yet have an estimate on the cost of setting up and running the official camp, or providing vouchers, but should have one tomorrow.

The mayor's office released the following statement:

"These organizations have done us a service in connecting us with these women, so we can move them to safety. However, our Safe Sleep Guidelines are clear: They cannot set up unsanctioned camps. It's not courteous to the surrounding neighborhood, and it doesn't allow us to connect these women with the services they deserve. We are moving far faster than government typically does, and we need these organizations to work with us for the benefit of our whole Portland community."

Site of Women's Homeless Camp Is Being Sold to Become a Food Cart Pod

By Rachel Monahan

May 9, 2016

This weekend, an advocacy group opened a women's homeless camp on city property in the center of East Portland's Lents neighborhood.

But the camp faces an imminent threat: The property is being sold to become a food-cart pod, then apartments.

The Portland Development Commission, which owns the vacant lot at Southeast Woodstock Boulevard and 93rd Avenue, is planning to finalize a deal worth \$500,000 on Wednesday that will sell off the previously vacant lot to a private developer, Lisac Brothers Construction.

The developer's plans include creating a small food cart pod and building a commercial space for a restaurant.

A second phase of the project, which will not begin until the 2035 Comprehensive Plan is adopted, would include a 12-unit market-rate apartment building, according to PDC documents.

"We're proceeding with the transaction," said PDC spokesman Shawn Uhlman, noting the mayor's office is handling any actions related to the camps.

The mayor's office has been looking to a site for an official women's-only camp, said Sara Hottman, a spokeswoman for Mayor Charlie Hales.

But she also noted they informed the camp's organizers that the Southeast Woodstock and 93rd site would not be suitable.

There's no word yet from the mayor's office on what actions, if any, it will take.

The group that set up the camp, called Advocacy 5, decided to take matters into its own hands after delays in finalizing a site with Hales' office.

"We cannot, as an agency of conscience that sees this population almost daily, wait anymore for the City of Portland to take action," the group Advocacy 5 wrote to the Lents Neighborhood association, as The Portland Mercury reported Sunday. "There are women being violated in the most heinous of ways, everyday."

The Portland Mercury

That Women-Focused Camp In Lents is Going Away, Mayor's Office Says

*By Dirk VanderHart
May 9, 2016*

That was quick!

One day after an unsanctioned camp for homeless women sprang up on a plot of Portland Development Commission land near Lents Town Center, organizers have agreed to take it down, according to Mayor Charlie Hales' office.

"The organizers have now agreed to work with the Mayor's Office to place the women who are currently at the site into shelters within the next 24 hours," Hales spokesperson Sara Hottman says in an email. "The campsite will then be shut down."

But it's not the last Portland's seen of the encampment—tentatively calling itself "Hope Forward."

"Organizers will work on developing a managed camp at another PDC site," Hottman writes. "The move is expected in the next two weeks."

Advocacy 5, the nonprofit that coordinated yesterday's takeover of a plot at SE Woodstock and 93rd, hasn't yet confirmed Hales' announcement. The group—a conglomeration of several

organizations—has railed against what it says is slow progress by the City of Portland in protecting homeless women who frequently experience sexual assault. It's been working with Hales' office to establish an organized camp for women for months, but when officials recently pulled the Lents property off the table, advocates decided to act anyway.

"No one seemed to know the next step," Gresham homeless advocate Raine Ritalto said yesterday. "So we went on and took the next step."

The pressure would seem to have paid off. News emerged today that the PDC has a tentative deal to sell the 0.38-acre Lents plot for market-rate apartments and food carts, but Hales' office is committing to quickly move the group to another space.

Here's a statement Hottman forwarded from Hales:

"These organizations have done us a service in connecting us with these women, so we can move them to safety. However, our Safe Sleep Guidelines are clear: They cannot set up unsanctioned camps. It's not courteous to the surrounding neighborhood, and it doesn't allow us to connect these women with the services they deserve. We are moving far faster than government typically does, and we need these organizations to work with us for the benefit of our whole Portland community."

The Portland Business Journal

Should Hales business license fee increase pass, here's how much extra you'll pay

*By Andy Giegerich
May 9, 2016*

Wondering how much extra your business would pay should Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' business license fee hike takes effect?

The mayor's office on Monday [offered this calculator for just such a purpose](#).

Hales, in his 2016-17 budget, proposed raising the city's business license fee from 2.2 percent to 2.5 percent, a 13.6 percent increase, as he looks to raise \$11.1 million for affordable housing and safety programs.

Businesses came out firing against the plan, which Portland's largest business lobbying group said was done with little input.

Hales' office said the increase would affect 25,200 of the 43,000 businesses that pay the fee. Most, officials said, would continue to pay the minimum \$100 fee.