

The Oregonian

Property eyed for massive homeless campus now for sale

By Brad Schmidt

June 24, 2016

If Portland and Multnomah County leaders have any serious interest in building a massive homeless campus along the Willamette River, they'll need to decide quickly because the clock is now ticking.

That's because the city-owned Terminal 1 site is officially for sale.

The Bureau of Environmental Services this week moved forward with plans to market the property with the expectation that its 14-acre site will sell for upwards of \$10 million.

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the bureau, doesn't support building a homeless campus at the location. He released a lengthy memo last week explaining the numerous zoning challenges associated with trying to convert the industrial property to a homeless campus.

The homeless campus is the brainchild of developers Homer Williams and Dike Dame, who want to emulate a similar effort from San Antonio, Texas. Williams figures the campus -- dubbed Oregon Trail to Hope -- could cost \$100 million to \$120 million and he's trying to build support.

A fundamental question for city and county leaders is whether they believe in the vision and, if so, whether they want keep the Terminal 1 site as a potential location.

City utilities can't subsidize homeless services. That means officials would need to buy the site using discretionary money.

The Bureau of Environmental Services is now accepting offers, with the goal that a potential buyer retains industrial uses. Officials don't plan to review offers for at least 30 days. It's not clear when a final decision will be made.

Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler and Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Housing Bureau, have each spoken favorably about the campus concept. If they're serious, they'll need to turn up the political heat -- and potentially find some money -- to help keep the site available.

That, or Williams and Dame could attempt to buy the property themselves.

'There is no silver bullet': City, county leaders discuss homelessness at forum

By Talia Richman

June 23, 2016

As it poured outside the Oregon Convention Center, panelists at The Oregonian/OregonLive's forum on homelessness Thursday were reminded of the about 1,800 people who would sleep outside in the rain.

"Tonight, they'll be sleeping under tarps, some with garbage bags taped together," said moderator Len Reed, an editorial writer for the media group. "The weather changes, but that doesn't change."

Five speakers – including Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler and Portland Business Alliance Chairman Mitch Hornecker – put forward different ideas on how to deal with Portland's "no. 1 issue." But there was a consensus on at least one thing.

"There is no silver bullet," said Deborah Kafoury, chairwoman of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners. "There is no great idea, excuse me, no 'Big Idea,' in a different community that we can just take and put into Portland and end homelessness."

But progress is being made, she said, mentioning the \$30 million Joint Office for Homeless Services the city and county formally approved this week.

Israel Bayer, the executive director of Street Roots, said one key to ending homelessness isn't more shelters, but more affordable housing. Next week, the Portland City Council will decide whether to refer a \$250 million bond measure to voters that would subsidize apartments for very low-income residents.

"You can't invest in a \$100 million shelter without passing a housing bond," he said. "If we put all our money into shelters today, homelessness in five or six years would double. The bond measure is very necessary."

But the panelists did discuss models in different cities, especially San Antonio, Texas. Two Portland developers have pitched a \$100 million homeless campus on the Willamette River meant to provide shelter and services for some 1,400 people a night. It's patterned after the "Haven for Hope" facility in San Antonio.

"San Antonio really looks at, as prime object, how do we move people off the streets and keep them off the streets," Wheeler said. "But we have our own issues. These models can inspire us and direct us, but we have to find our own approach."

And for projects like that to work, Wheeler said, "the private sector must be really willing to come forward."

Hornecker said the business community is already at the table and agrees something more must be done. He said governments must spend more on services, even after obtaining "new revenue." He also said no idea should be off the table, including "low-cost, immediate, temporary alternatives that are imperfect."

He suggested using property the city already owns, but that is underused or even empty, as a way to get the homeless off the street while bigger projects are in the works. He mentioned the police bureau's former Southeast Precinct.

"The more dollars we spend today to support current problem, the less we have to devote to the future," he said. "You have to compare not if it meets our long term goals, but is it better than sleeping in a sleeping bag tonight in the rain?"

But it wasn't clear whether organized or visible camping, a controversial approach blessed by current Mayor Charlie Hales, will remain among those ideas. Wheeler, who also said "everything should be on the table," said after the forum that wouldn't include campsites.

But Wheeler rejected the idea that there must be a trade-off between funding short-term and long-term solutions.

"I don't buy the premise of that argument," he said. "We need to do both. If that means reprioritizing, then we do that. We've said it's our No. 1 issue and we need to show that."

Wheeler said that as mayor, he'll work with the state to focus on building more affordable housing and looking at the "crapectacular nature" of mental health services that exist across the country.

Kafoury, meanwhile, urged continued support the city and county's longtime "housing-first" approach to homelessness, which allows people to get off the streets while they work on other problems they may be facing. And, she said, "just a few months of rent assistance will get people back on their feet."

"But we need to tailor our response to the needs of the individual," she added.

Michelle Cardinal, CEO of an advertising agency near the North Park Blocks, which became a flashpoint for visible homeless last summer, talked about her path to advocacy.

From her window, Cardinal could see people doing drugs. She could see prostitutes. There was fighting. It was terrifying, she said to the panel. So she got involved and started talking with advocates and officials on how to help.

She answered a question on why taxpayers "owe anything to the homeless."

"You don't owe anyone anything," she said. "But you live in a community, and it's the circle of life. ... We're going to pay for this one way or another."

Draft body-camera policy puts police union concerns above public's: Editorial Agenda 2016

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

June 23, 2016

Mayor Charlie Hales understandably has championed the idea of outfitting Portland police officers with body cameras to help repair the community's fraying trust. Certainly, an objective recording of an officer's encounter with members of the public can provide transparency, dispel untruths and boost accountability for officers' behavior and actions.

It's too bad, then, that Hales is already torpedoing those goals in his zeal to land a new four-year contract with the police union that includes provisions for using body cameras. His office has declined to publicly share the policy that city negotiators have quietly brokered with the Portland Police Association. And the details that have leaked out reveal the city's willingness to bargain away the practices that make body cameras a useful tool for truth squadding police accounts to begin with. While city officials say the public will have a chance to weigh in before a policy is finalized, the message is clear: Police union concerns to protect their members trump the public's long-standing pleas for accountability.

As The Oregonian/OregonLive's Maxine Bernstein reported, the body-camera policy in the draft tentative agreement between the city and police union would permit officers in a wide range of situations to review their body-camera footage before writing a report or answering questions from investigators. Among those who could check their video first are officers who fire Tasers or use other non-deadly force against a citizen.

As police accountability advocates have noted, allowing officers to view the footage prior to writing a report or giving an account hurts the quality of an investigation into an officer's conduct. While nothing can change what the footage shows, an officer can alter his or her account of what happened based on what is or is not captured by the camera. Even subconsciously, an officer's recollection can be contaminated by what's in the video.

That means administrative investigators looking into whether employees acted improperly don't get a true understanding of what prompted someone to act the way in which he or she did. Could there have been a violation of training, a shortcoming in police policy or a misunderstanding of proper protocol? Investigators are less able to answer those questions when they have to rely on statements shaped by outside influences.

Such a policy also takes away the opportunity to gauge an officer's credibility.

For example, consider the case of Thai Gurule, a 16-year-old Roosevelt High School student. Gurule was walking with his brother and a friend in North Portland when police officers detained the three. After exchanging words, the police officers kicked, punched and Tased the teen. In their police reports, they claimed that Gurule was throwing punches and even had one officer in a chokehold, making her fear that he "was trying to strangle" her.

However, the officers' dramatic reports faced one problem: Video footage captured by a nearby bank's surveillance camera and on bystanders' cell phones contradicted their claims that the teen was resisting arrest or doing any of what they said. A judge acquitted Gurule of the charges and called out one of the officers, Betsy Hornstein, as "not credible in several important instances." If the officers had been able to review video of the incident, would they have tailored their account in some other way that didn't reveal such credibility issues?

Hales' spokeswoman, Sara Hottman, said the office could not comment on specifics of the policy, noting that negotiations are ongoing. But she said allowing officers to review such footage helps them "to write the most accurate reports possible."

It's almost as if the city has forgotten why the public is willing to cede its privacy and commit millions for the purchase and ongoing operation of body cameras in the first place. Here's a hint: Wanting police officers to be able to write more accurate reports has nothing to do with it.

Instead, the mayor should recall that the city is operating under an agreement with the federal government to settle claims that the police bureau engaged in a pattern or practice of excessive force, particularly against those with mental illness. He should think about the difficulty he and other leaders before him have had in trying to get rid of the so-called "48-hour rule," a contract concession that gives those in officer-involved shootings two days before having to answer questions from internal investigators about what happened. And he should think of Thai Gurule, and whether he would have been acquitted of the charges brought against him if officers had developed their reports after examining video footage first.

Certainly, people's memories in times of stress are fallible. Small inconsistencies are easily explained, and even expected. But helping police officers provide a supposedly more "accurate" report is not a compelling reason to violate the independence of a body camera recording.

Hottman notes that the city has held six public forums to solicit ideas and received other electronic comments before developing its policy. But that's exactly why it's insufficient. An open-ended question about what people want to see is very different situation from asking people about a specific proposal to let officers review footage.

The time is now for the public to weigh in on the provisions of the policy – not after the police union has signed off on it. Once agreement is reached, the city will be less willing to redo the body-camera policy and risk having to reopen negotiations on other matters. And the city doesn't have the final say anyway. Any disputes between the city and the union about what policy provisions should be adopted go to a mediator. The city's willingness to accept a lenient policy undermines its chances for success in pressing for a tougher one.

Recently, as Hales celebrated the City Council's commitment to devote funds for a body camera program in 2017-2018, he remarked on the power and promise of such technology.

"What body cameras do is, they keep the truth safe," Hales said.

But the secrecy since then begs the question: From whom is the city trying to keep it safe?

The Portland Business Journal

Why Portland bought a hotel for the almost-homeless

By Jon Bell

June 24, 2016

The homelessness issue has gotten big in Portland, and the city seems to be taking a multi-prong approach to try and keep it in check and even cut it down. Among the moves made just since last fall: new temporary homeless shelters have opened, public property camping rules have been relaxed — not without some controversy — and a new location for the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp has been approved, though appealed.

The city took another unique step this week when the Portland Housing Bureau announced it plans to purchase the Joyce Hotel in downtown Portland for \$4.22 million. The hotel, located at 322 S.W. 11th Ave., is one of the last “weekly stay buildings” in the city, meaning it offers its guests week-to-week rentals instead of only nightly or monthly. For decades, the hotel has served as transitional housing for many of Portland’s homeless residents in need of a place to stay short-term. Its 69 rooms rent for between \$19 and \$50 a night.

At the end of last year, the building’s owner, DZ Real Estate, informed the hotel’s management company, Precision Property Management Corp., that residents had three months to vacate. Looking to stave off that eventuality, PHB initially tried to buy the building from DZ Real Estate. Those negotiations fell through, but a second round proved successful.

“I am very pleased that the Joyce Hotel will remain open so that some of the most vulnerable people in our community will have a safe place to go, rather than being out on the street,” Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau, said in a release. “As a compassionate city, we must continue to prioritize our resources to invest in the social safety net for Portlanders who are most vulnerable and at risk.”

According to PHB, residents currently in the hotel will be relocated during a planned rehabilitation of the property. Local nonprofit Central City Concern will take over operation of the hotel in the coming months.

The move, announced this week, came just a day before the Portland City Council voted to take another, even bigger step to take on the homeless issue. At its meeting on Wednesday, the

council voted to team up with Multnomah County on a new Joint Office for Homeless Services as a way to unite forces.

The city will kick in \$15 million and four PHB employees for the new joint office. The county will also pony up \$15 million and employees already focused on the issue. If approved by the Multnomah County Commission, the new joint office would launch on July 1.

“People want us to do our best to help get people off the streets, and that’s going to take a lot of work,” said Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair, at the meeting on Wednesday. “This is just the beginning.”