

The Portland Mercury

In September, Portland City Council Will Vote On Huge Police Oversight Changes. Tonight, You Can Make Your Voice heard

By Doug Brown
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The Portland City Council will vote next month on some major Portland Police Bureau (PPB) oversight changes and tonight will be one of the last chances for the community to speak up before they do.

On September 7, council will vote on the future of the Citizen Review Committee (CRC)—a volunteer civilian group overseen by the Auditor's Independent Police Review (IPR) that holds public hearings for citizens unhappy with how their complaints against the PPB were handled—and whether it'll be merged the bureau's Police Review Board (PRB), which is private. If the plan (as it is right now) passes, complaint appeal hearings will no longer be open to the public or the media.

From 6 to 8 p.m. at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus (Terrell Hall, 705 N. Killingsworth), council members are hosting a "town hall" to for community input "regarding proposed adjustments to streamline the complaint and commendation processes" for the PPB.

For background on the changes, check out this Portland Tribune story:

In an effort to streamline a system that federal Justice Department lawyers have characterized as byzantine, city officials including Portland's elected auditor, Mary Hull Caballero, are considering scrapping the aspect of the city's system that allows a citizen review committee to publicly hear appeals of bureau disciplinary decisions concerning alleged officer misconduct.

Hull Caballero, who's been charged with implementing the City Council's direction, says the city's 2012 settlement of a federal Department of Justice lawsuit leaves officials little choice. That's because of how long the committee and the city's Independent Police Review office has taken to process appeals of officer discipline.

Appeals, Hull Caballero says, "are taking 149 days to get through. They have to be done in 21 days. So we're not even within striking distance of meeting the requirement in the agreement."

At a meeting last Thursday, CRC members acknowledged that changes needed to made to streamline the system, but they did not want appeal hearings to be held in private.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Not enough green for green roofs

By Beverly Corbell

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Columbia Green Technologies opened its doors in Portland about 10 years ago because the city had a reputation for green building and the company's founders wanted to take advantage. They saw Portland becoming a prime market for their product: vegetated roof systems.

But that didn't happen, Columbia Green Technologies Chief Operating Officer Greg Love said. Portland is now a minor green roof market, he said, and production here has dropped off.

"We do most of our business outside of Portland," he said. "Seattle is a big market and now our biggest market is Washington, D.C."

In 2008, Portland initiated a temporary cash incentive program that triggered a dramatic increase in green roof production. But the \$6.5 million program ended in 2012, and production has since decreased and prices have since increased. Now, as the city has shifted financial resources toward affordable housing initiatives, some green roof stakeholders are calling for new incentives.

Matt Burlin, outreach coordinator for sustainable stormwater management for Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services, reported to the City Council in 2011 that the city's cash incentive program for green roofs was a success. The city's list of providers of eco-roofs (the simplest form of green roof), he said, had grown by 30 percent since the program started. The cost of eco-roof installations also had dropped, he said.

But eco-roof prices did not go down, said Jon Crumrine, who started Envirosapes Northwest in response to the city initiating its cash incentive program in 2008. The average cost of installing a green roof ranges between \$12 and \$15 per square foot, said Crumrine, who later sold his business to Vaughn Environmental Systems (he was retained as a consultant).

"It certainly didn't have any impact on (bringing) costs down, but it did help promote the technology in our area," he said.

Alice Coker, environmental specialist with Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services, said the city commissioned a study that looked into whether the cash incentive lowered prices of green roofs; it was inconclusive.

"We don't know if it brought prices down," she said. "There were too many variables involved."

Meanwhile, the Portland City Council has shifted its emphasis to affordable housing because the homeless population has increased in the past five years, said Ivy Dunlap, landscape architect with the Bureau of Environmental Services.

"Things are so different now, and a different administration has different challenges and there weren't hundreds of people camped in the Springwater Corridor," she said.

As priorities change, so do allocations of dollars, according to Troy Doss, senior planner with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

“Because of direction from council, bonuses are shifted to affordable housing,” he said.

That shift in focus has played a significant role in green roof production decreasing here, Love said. For the past five years he has joined Columbia Green Technologies CEO Vanessa Keitges at countless city meetings, he said, to push for more city support for green roofs. Markets like Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Toronto are ripe for green roofs, according to Love, because they offer incentives and rebates for installations.

“Although some jurisdictions will still use incentives (for green roofs), it has become standard practice in a lot of Central City development, and a lot of projects are doing eco-roofs,” Doss said. “And the majority of eco-roofs were not developed using bonuses.”

In addition to the evaporation of the cash incentive program, the proposed draft of the 2035 Central City Plan includes mandates for eco-roofs in certain zones. New buildings with a net area of at least 20,000 square feet would be required to include an eco-roof that covers at least 70 percent of the roof area – with exceptions including HVAC systems and skylights.

That plan has Love’s approval, though he doubts it will become a reality.

“We’ll believe it when we see it,” he said.

Also, the draft plan calls for eliminating a current bonus of floor area ratio (FAR) for providing green roofs.

Architect Shawn Sullivan, eco-roof consultant for Winkler Development, said eliminations of cash incentives and the FAR bonus will increase costs and make developments vulnerable to infeasibility.

“It was really nice having the incentive, and I think carrots are always better than sticks,” he said.

Sullivan said he fears the market for green roofs will soften because developers aren’t looking to spend more money.

“If the (incentive) program was here I think we’d be doing a heck of a lot more business,” he said. “With mandates, things are going to cost too much and then we can’t afford to build.”

Wade Lange, regional vice president for American Assets Trust, said the absence of incentives for green roofs could slow development.

“When it adds additional cost without any compensation, it just causes developers to pause and consider whether they want to go forward with the development,” he said.

The city should bring back the cash bonuses or add other incentives for green roofs, according to Greenworks principal Mike Faha.

“I think they should continue or enhance that (cash bonus), given what’s going on around here, that we’re getting denser and denser,” he said. “We know they worked and the city would do better talking to developers about what kind of incentives meet their needs.”

Increasing costs will drive up rents – the opposite of the goal to increase affordable housing, Sullivan said

“Like so many mandates that are good for our city and environment, they (green roofs) increase costs, which have to be reflected in increased rents,” he said. “We currently have an affordable housing crisis, and making construction cost more is not going to be part of the solution.”

However, Amy Chomowicz, the city’s eco-roof program administrator, said there still are benefits to installing green roofs in Portland.

“You can get a reduction on your stormwater bill if you put on (an eco-roof) through the Clean Water Rewards Program,” she said. “There are various ways to manage stormwater on site and if you do an eco-roof over the entire building you don’t have to have ground-level stormwater treatment (for the roof).”

Building height towers over zoning debate

By Chuck Slothower

August 1, 2016

Height, and where tall buildings would detract from neighborhoods, dominated the initial public hearing for the proposed draft of Portland’s Central City 2035 Plan.

Goose Hollow and West End residents came out in force on Tuesday to a meeting of the Planning and Sustainability Commission to oppose proposed maximum building heights of up to 460 feet on some parcels. The Goose Hollow Foothills League has been a vocal advocate for preserving views of Mount Hood from the historic neighborhood.

“Excessive heights cause an excessive incentive to tear down rather than preserve,” said Richard Rahm, a West End resident.

Developers and some affordable-housing advocates have been pushing for taller buildings to provide more housing and greater return on investments. That has caused consternation throughout Portland, and the West End and Goose Hollow have emerged as particular hot spots for the debate.

Sherry Salomon, a Goose Hollow resident, said allowing buildings up to 325 feet “threatens the character of our neighborhood.” It puts at risk historic Goose Hollow buildings such as the Concordia Club, a historic Jewish social club, she said.

Fred Leeson, president of the Architectural Heritage Center’s board, lamented that the neighborhood’s views of Mount Hood haven’t been the same since construction of the KOIN Tower in 1983.

“We seem to be in such a rush to be a huge city just like any other American city,” he said.

Walt Weyler, a West End resident and an Oregon Symphony Association board member, said the city should not allow construction of large multifamily buildings without additional parking.

“Parking is needed for arts performances,” he said.

The city has moved away from minimum parking requirements, instead investing in public transit.

Some speakers advocated for greater heights. Allison Reynolds, a lawyer representing Unico Properties, owner of the U.S. Bancorp Tower, said the code should allow for unlimited height at the site of the skyscraper better known as Big Pink.

The building, along with the KOIN Tower and the Wells Fargo Center, predates and exceeds downtown's 460-foot height limit. As a result, the towers are considered nonconforming uses, which could complicate refinancing, transactions or rebuilding after a disaster, Reynolds said.

Reynolds added that the buildings' owners would be amenable to limiting the allowable height on those properties to the towers' current heights, but she said there are some discrepancies in how skyscrapers' heights are measured.

Portland State University officials also argued in favor of increasing allowable building sizes along the transit mall and MAX orange line tracks.

Several speakers decried a zoning code requirement that buildings and additions should meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold standards from the U.S. Green Building Council.

"There is an issue with mandating one single green building program," said Caitlin Horsley, sustainability and education manager for the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland.

Some speakers said they want the option to use a competing certification: Green Globes from the Green Building Initiative.

Audrey Craig Gnich, with Portland Forward, cautioned against doing away with a floor-to-area ratio for providing day care facilities in the Central City.

"We'll be left with a zoning code that does almost nothing to support families and family-sized developments in the Central City," she said.

The Planning and Sustainability Commission will hold a second public hearing on the Central City 2035 Plan on Aug. 9 at 4 p.m. in the Portland Building.