

The Oregonian

Portland to sell Pearl District Property for apartments

By Brad Schmidt

August 15, 2016

Portland's urban renewal agency is poised to sell nearly 2 acres of property underneath the west end of the Broadway Bridge to an Arizona-based company hoping to develop 340 apartments.

The developer, The Wolff Company, plans to hold down rents on 68 units to qualify for a 10-year tax abatement – and 55 of those would remain affordable for a total of 30 years.

The Portland Development Commission would receive \$9 million for its property, but the city could net up to \$1.4 million less based on the amount of environmental cleanup needed.

Portland's urban renewal agency has owned the property since 1987 and once had big dreams of seeing it transformed as part of a major office project proposed by developers Jim Winkler and Bob Naito. But that vision never materialized and city officials all but pulled the plug in 2011.

That didn't stop Winkler, who also owns adjacent property, from trying to secure Portland's land. Last year, officials listed the Pearl District property with a broker and received two offers: \$2 million from a Winkler company and \$9 million from Wolff.

A May appraisal pegs the land's value at nearly \$8.8 million.

On Wednesday, the development commission's board is set to authorize the sale. Wolff would have 13 months to close on the property.

If the project moves forward as envisioned, it would extend a row of apartments along the narrow island of property north of railroad tracks serving Union Station but south of Naito Parkway.

Portland previously sold off nearby property that became The Yards at Union Station, a phased collection of several hundred apartments that also includes some affordable units.

The newest deal would ensure affordable units for individuals earning up to 60 percent of the region's median, or \$30,840, according to the city. Rent and utilities for a one bedroom could run up to \$825.

But the developer could seek higher rents because of where hot real estate market. Under such a scenario, units would be available to individuals earning up to 80 percent of the region's median, or \$41,100. Corresponding rent and utilities for a one bedroom could hit \$1,100 and still be considered affordable.

The Portland Housing Bureau isn't contributing any money to the project.

Northwest restaurant chain adds 'Living Wage' surcharge

By Samantha Bakall

August 16, 2016

One Pacific Northwest restaurant chain has found a new way to tackle the region's rising minimum wages.

Restaurants Unlimited, Inc., a Seattle-based restaurant group with locations in nearly a dozen states, has added a one percent "living wage" surcharge to all bills. The company, which runs restaurants in 10 states, owns Stanford's, Newport Seafood Grill, Henry's Tavern and a number of other restaurants across Portland.

Diners can expect to see the one percent surcharge applied to their entire bill, according to a company spokesperson. For the company's other restaurants in states that have sales tax, including Washington, the surcharge will be applied before tax. The revenue from the surcharge is added to a separate payroll account.

Restaurants Unlimited is among many restaurants across the country using novel approaches to tackle rising minimum wages. Several Portland restaurants, including Biwa and Nonna, have experimented with adding a "health and wellness" surcharge designed to help pay for health insurance and other employee benefits.

And earlier this year, a number of Portland restaurants, including Le Pigeon and Park Kitchen, ditched tipping and increased prices to help offset wages and compensate both servers and kitchen staff more equitably.

The Portland Tribune

PUTTING A HOLD ON POKER PARLORS

City calls bluff on 'volunteer' dealers at for-profit clubs

By Steve Law

August 16, 2016

Portland poker parlors are in turmoil after city regulators pledged to crack down on their use of "volunteer" dealers who earn their pay via tips from gamblers.

On July 12, the city sent warning letters to 15 poker clubs saying they may no longer deploy in-house dealers for popular Texas Hold 'Em and similar tournaments. Soon after, one of the most popular poker tournament halls in town — the former Encore Poker Club in Northwest Portland — shut down.

Now other poker clubs fear they may be next.

“Obviously, the letter had a very profound effect because within a day Encore was closed,” says Mark Humphrey, a lawyer representing the Aces Full poker club at inner Southeast Powell Boulevard. “It’s another straw on the camel’s back,” Humphrey says.

For several years the poker clubs have maneuvered around the state’s social gaming law — originally designed to permit an Elks Club bingo night or similar events — to operate small for-profit casinos.

To get around the Oregon Constitution’s prohibition on nontribal casinos, poker clubs make their money through entrance fees and selling food and drinks. All gambling wagers are divided up among the players, with none going to the “house.”

Texas Hold ’Em tournaments can fill 10 or more tables, where players compete over several hours until only the winner or winners are left with chips. They can win \$1,000 or more.

It’s hard to make a legal case that it’s merely “social gaming” if the clubs paid professional dealers for each table, so the clubs tiptoed around that restriction by having dealers survive on tips from the tournament players. Humphrey estimates the dealers earned \$16 to \$18 an hour that way.

City regulators have long known the practice was legally questionable, but have largely operated on a laissez-faire basis, saying there are bigger worries than cracking down on a popular pastime for thousands of residents.

Dealers seek wages

Last year, Bonne Marsh, a dealer at Portland’s Ace of Spades club, filed a complaint with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, saying the club owed her at least a minimum wage. The agency found in April 2015 that Ace of Spades owed her back wages plus civil penalties.

This year, an Encore dealer filed a similar complaint. BOLI investigated the complaint, and on June 17 issued an intent to assess civil penalties of \$59,000 against Encore, since renamed PDX Poker Club, and the affiliated King of Clubs Dealers Group, on behalf of 59 dealers. The ultimate fee could be much greater if the club is required to pay back wages to those dealers.

John Ogai, owner of the now-shuttered poker club, declined comment for this story, citing the pending BOLI case.

State investigators determined the poker dealers work at the behest of the clubs, and the clubs aren’t nonprofits, so they can’t use volunteers in this manner, says BOLI spokesman Charlie Burr.

“We believe they were performing work with the employer/employee relationship and thus were subject to Oregon’s minimum wage law,” Burr says.

However, BOLI hasn’t issued an order yet in the Encore case, as there is a contested hearing scheduled in October. “There hasn’t been any new rule-making,” Burr says.

But Anne Holm, the city regulator for poker clubs, didn’t wait for a ruling, issuing a stern letter to the city’s poker clubs a month ago. Holm didn’t return a call, but city senior management analyst Jen Clodius says the BOLI case left the city no wiggle room.

“It’s enforcing state law based on the BOLI investigation,” Clodius says.

It’s unclear why the city is choosing to act now.

But the two BOLI cases and the city’s new approach to enforce the law aren’t the poker clubs’ only worries.

Class-action suit looms

Last month, Portland attorney Rachel O’Neal filed a notice of intent to file a class-action lawsuit on behalf of local poker dealers, arguing they should be paid at least minimum wage.

Under Oregon law, tips do not count toward the minimum wage, but come on top of that wage.

“I’ve always known that the dealers weren’t volunteers; they were employees,” says O’Neal, who formerly played poker tournaments at Encore.

The social gaming law means it must be a game among players only, she says, so dealers can’t have “any association with the club.”

The city’s July 12 letter states that “designated dealers are not allowed” at the poker tournaments, because state law bars them from being employees of the clubs and they can’t be volunteers either.

That poses a Catch-22 for the clubs.

The city’s solution, advanced in that letter: “The deal must rotate among the players.”

That means each table at a Texas Hold ‘Em tournament must have the players deal cards to themselves and their competitors, as is done at home poker games.

Why dealers are needed

Ricky Lee, general manager at Ace’s Full in Southeast Portland, says that’s how his club is operating now to stay in compliance with the city. But he worries it could ruin the games and the company’s ability to stay in business. Last Thursday, the club didn’t lure enough people to hold its scheduled early-afternoon Texas Hold ‘Em tournament.

Lee, a former dealer in Las Vegas, says an experienced dealer knows how to control the game, move it along quickly, and avoid disputes among players.

“The original premise when I opened the club was to have the best dealers in town,” Lee says.

Poker is a “visual game,” he says, and players in tournaments want to focus on their opponents and not dealing. Rotating the deals leads to more mistakes and “misdeals,” he says, and slows the game down.

And some players, whether due to age or infirmity, are not that adept at dealing across long tables.

Lee, like others, says the poker tournaments are a relatively cheap and harmless form of entertainment, providing up to six hours of fun for \$20.

Despite the city's stern letter, players say two of the largest surviving poker clubs, Final Table in East Portland and the new Portland Meadows Poker Room at the North Portland racetrack, continue to use in-house dealers.

Brian Sarchi, owner/operator of the Portland Meadows club, says he's in talks with the city about the rule. Final Table proprietor Ben May did not return phone calls.

Dealers seeking to get better pay for their work in Portland may soon find it across the river, says attorney Rachel O'Neal. The Cowlitz Tribe is building ilani, a \$500 million casino complex in La Center, 16 miles north of Portland. The casino, scheduled to open next year, is expected to hire about 1,000 people and become a magnet for Oregon gamblers.

Reese takes the reins as new sheriff in town

By Nick Budnick

August 16, 2016

For months, critics of Multnomah County's elected sheriff post said it was too hard to make a change in leadership.

But the midterm changeover from Sheriff Dan Staton to his designated interim successor, Mike Reese, has been a relatively quiet one so far.

At 5 p.m. today, Staton is scheduled to retire, more than a year before his term was slated to end. Last week, the Multnomah County board declared his position vacant and called for an election in November to choose a permanent sheriff. Would-be candidates have until Aug. 30 to file.

On Wednesday morning, Multnomah County Circuit Judge Nan Waller will swear in Reese, the former Portland police chief, to be interim sheriff, overseeing an 800-person office that includes the county jails and a smaller patrol function in the eastern part of the county. Reese, who started his law enforcement career as a sheriff's deputy, intends to formally run for the office in November. Staton first designated Reese as his successor, then hired him as undersheriff in June to ease the transition.

Reese says he has used the past two months to absorb information on everything from the office's financial workings to how it investigates misconduct.

"Right now I'm looking at these systems to see how they are working," he says, adding that generally speaking, "from a management perspective, I'm really pleased" by what he's seen.

Reese declined to detail his plans before formally taking office. But his past stint of more than four years as police chief — the longest such tenure since Charles Moose in the 1990s — holds some clues.

As chief, Reese sought to keep a firm hand on the police bureau's finances, while encouraging managers to actively respond to potential officer misconduct issues.

Other than briefly exploring a run for Portland mayor in late 2011, he tried to chart a low profile. Don't expect that to change. The sheriff's office, he says, "is not the police bureau. The sheriff's office has never been as high profile."

But he will likely forge a close relationship with his old bureau, in part because he and Chief Mike Marshman are friends and allies. Marshman served as Reese's adjutant during his time as chief.

"Mike and I are close," Reese says. "We worked together for years. And I think he's going to be a great chief."

He said he hopes the sheriff's office and the bureau can work together in a way that helps build community trust at a time when hostility toward police on the national level is at an all-time high.

Reese will inherit some issues from Staton, such as personnel strife that had caused the unions for law enforcement deputies and civilian employees to call for Staton's ouster.

Several employees were either fired or quit during Staton's tenure after clashing with the sheriff, such as Shea Marshman, Mike Marshman's wife. Asked whether any of those former employees could be hired back, Reese said it would be inappropriate to comment on personnel issues.

Staton was at odds with Chair Deborah Kafoury, who'd launched an investigation into him widely seen as pressuring him to step down after allegations of abusive, vindictive and misogynist leadership. Staton's relations with other elected county commissioners also were strained at times.

Reese says he hopes to forge effective partnerships with Kafoury and the elected board.

He also will inherit the aftermath of an internal audit that found racial disparities in how corrections deputies use force on inmates. Reese says he plans to continue Staton's push to bring in an outside agency, the National Institute of Corrections, to review the audit and confirm its findings. Staton and his deputies had suggested that an antiquated system of recordkeeping may have contributed to those findings.

Reese says he's counting on the NIC to clear things up about the audit. "If there are (disparities), we are certainly going to address them."

There's also the issue of whether the sheriff's office should continue the expansion of its law enforcement role in the county. Staton had begun discussions with the city of Fairview over whether the city should dissolve its police force and contract with the sheriff's office instead.

Reese says that he supports the idea of finding efficiencies in law enforcement, and will continue the discussions.

In addition to choosing in November whether to elect Reese to be sheriff on a more permanent basis, voters will have another choice: whether to give up their right to make such decisions. The county's charter review committee decided in July to let voters decide whether the sheriff should be appointed by the county board — citing, among other things, a lack of competition for the job.

Portland's poor welcome: report finds immigrants, refugees more educated but worse off

By Shasta Kearns Moore

August 16, 2016

It's easy to think of a refugee crisis as a singular event: War or famine breaks out somewhere and people escape to The Land of the Free.

But Lee Po Cha knows differently. A Hmong refugee from Laos almost 40 years ago, Lee is now the executive director of Portland's Immigrant & Refugee Coalition Organization (IRCO). He has seen the waves of refugees from Asia, the Soviet Union, Africa and now the Middle East, in addition to the immigrants from all over the world.

"There's always going to be some newcomers," Lee says.

But, says a new report from Portland State University, those newcomers are much worse off than they were 10 years ago, even though on average they are more likely to have a college degree.

The results of the three-year study also found the fate of Portland's newest residents depended a lot on the color of their skin.

While white newcomers' annual market incomes rose to \$47,718 from \$26,769 in the last 10 years, annual incomes of newcomers of color plummeted from \$14,481 to just \$9,304.

That's despite the PSU report's finding that the likelihood of a newcomer having a college degree rose from 16 percent during the turn of the millennium, to 25 percent this decade.

"Please know the kind of urgency in terms of what it means to not face a welcoming, affirming, inclusive environment are really serious," the report's lead editor Associate Professor Ann Curry-Stevens told an Aug. 9 gathering of immigrant and refugee city leaders at Portland State University.

Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who also spoke at the event, says he is working on legislation and urging the state's institutions of higher education to create pathways for noncitizens' licenses and certifications to be recognized. For example, Dembrow says, a doctor trained in France would never have gotten the general education classes Americans have because in France they go directly to medical school. So, even though they are technically proficient as doctors, they would have to start their education all over.

"The topic has taken off like wildfire" all over the country, he says, citing statistics that 2 million people are underemployed. "It's a serious problem and it's a national problem."

This is just one example, Curry-Stevens says, of how much Portland's economy is losing out on the economic potential of this diversely experienced group.

“If there were no racial gaps in income or employment, the region would generate an additional \$10.83 billion in economic activity — equivalent to 7.3 percent of our economy — just in the Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton area,” the report reads.

Myths and racism

City Councilor Amanda Fritz is not surprised at all by the report’s findings. An immigrant herself from Great Britain in 1979, she says she has known things were getting worse for a long time.

“It’s exciting times and it’s scary times,” says Fritz, recalling a recent visit to her home country during the Brexit controversy. “No longer are we whispering about racism and a culture where white people feel that they have earned their privilege and get to keep it, but some of the political candidates are now saying that flat-out in the open. And it is scary how many people are saying: ‘Yes, that’s what I want to hear.’”

In an effort that has been in the works since Mayor Tom Potter’s time in the mid-2000s, the city started a New Portlander Policy Commission in June to begin to address some of the ways these newcomers are marginalized.

“We can no longer just pretend it’s going to get better by itself,” Curry-Stevens says.

The 190-page report lists common myths about refugees and recommendations for improving newcomer access. Curry-Stevens outlines 14 ways service providers can listen to and understand their clients more fully in order to get them the help they need in a way they can receive it.

The report also recommends housing codes be relaxed to provide higher occupancy rates as a way to accommodate large or multigenerational families, or those who want to help keep their fellows off the streets.

“It seems to us that if these people could exit a room safely in the event of a fire, then the occupancy standard is demonstrating merely a cultural norm, as opposed to a safety issue,” the report reads.

The report also encourages cultural liaisons to law enforcement officials and improvements to educational access. For example, sometimes refugee children are put in grade levels based on their age, not their abilities.

However, the report does not include clear reasons for why newcomers are so marginalized in Portland, nor how this city compares to others in the nation.

Income inequality and affordable housing — the same forces affecting white and native-born people — are a big part of the problem and are likely having a disproportionate effect on immigrants and refugees.

But Portland is also simply not yet as cosmopolitan as Seattle or New York, whose government workers may be more familiar with interacting with people of different languages, cultures and faiths. And, about three-quarters of the population here is white.

“There’s huge amounts of bias in hiring,” says researcher Curry-Stevens, who is white and an immigrant from Canada. “We are, as a region, late to the table in recognizing institutional racism.”

The dialogue is starting in Portland, she says, but the results haven’t happened yet.

Lee says he hopes service providers will follow the recommendations in the report.

“Otherwise we will just chase and chase and chase this problem and never be able to address it,” he says.

Before heading off to another meeting, Fritz put in her plug for the Portland Police Bureau:

“We are hiring. We want our police department to reflect the community,” she told immigrant and refugee leaders. “Spread the word, because we really, really, really want people to apply.”

Council: Homeless shelter now, industrial jobs maybe

By Jim Redden

August 16, 2016

The City Council brushed aside neighborhood opposition and legal questions last Wednesday to authorize opening a large homeless shelter in a vacant warehouse at Terminal 1 for up to 18 months — or permanently if developer Homer Williams can raise tens of millions of dollars to expand it into a homeless multiservice center.

“Make no mistake. I support the larger vision of a campus for homeless people. But we’re taking it in baby steps,” said Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau and presented the proposal to the council.

The council voted 3-2 to authorize PHB to lease the 14-acre property at 2400 N.W. Front Ave. from the Bureau of Environmental Services, which owns it. Voting for the lease were Saltzman, Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick. Voting against it were Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz.

The lease is for six months with two automatic six-month extensions, unless it is canceled. It begins Oct. 7.

The payments approved in the ordinance are \$10,000 a month, but that was immediately challenged by Portland attorney John DiLorenzo, who says he will seek an injunction against the project unless the payments are raised to around \$100,000 a month, which BES says is the market value of the property, which is zoned industrial.

DiLorenzo already is suing the city over alleged misspending of sewer and water ratepayer funds by the council. The judge hearing the case has ruled such spending must be reasonably related to the missions of the utility bureaus.

“It is obvious that the arrangement outlined in the ordinance deprives the sewer ratepayers of significant value,” DiLorenzo wrote to the City Attorney Tracy Reeve shortly after the vote.

Fish, who oversees BES, said the same thing during the hearing. That position was supported during the hearing by the Portland Utility Board and the Citizens Utility Board. Their representatives said the interests of BES ratepayers need to be protected.

Saltzman's office declined to comment on DiLorenzo's threat, saying it is a legal matter.

Terminal 1 currently is being sold through a surplus sales process approved by the council. Bids were due Monday. According to the broker assisting the sale, companies showing interest include a brewery, a movie and video production studio, a greenhouse operator, and developers of light industrial spaces.

Fish wants Terminal 1 sold to create family-wage industrial jobs, with the proceeds from the sale used to reduce future BES rate increases. He accused the council of paving the way for a single-source contract to develop the property for a nonindustrial use. Williams did not bid on it.

Few details offered

Wednesday's hearing was the first time the proposal had been discussed publicly. Williams did not offer a budget for either a temporary shelter or a permanent multiservice center, but said they would be forthcoming once the property is secured.

"In my business, it starts with the land. In this case, in order to do what I think is necessary, we have to have a significant piece of property. It needs to be close to the city," Williams said.

Williams said the temporary shelter could house up to 400 homeless people and will be operated by the Union Gospel Mission, explaining that a couple hundred thousand dollars already have been raised for the conversion. Williams originally said the larger project — modeled after the Haven for Hope in San Antonio, Texas — could accommodate 1,000 people or more. He said it would cost \$100 million, with half the money coming from the private sector, but later lowered the estimate to \$60 million.

Saltzman said no permanent changes will be made to the 96,000-square-foot warehouse or surrounding paved land while the shelter is temporarily opened. He explained that portable toilets, showers and propane heaters, instead, would be moved to the site.

The council will vote Wednesday on whether to seek a \$100,000 Equitable Housing and Planning Development grant from Metro to evaluate the feasibility of Williams' long-term plan for the site, which he is calling the Trail of Hope.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has notified the city that Terminal 1 was only cleaned up to industrial standards when the Port of Portland sold it to BES to be used as a staging ground for the Big Pipe project. Residential standards are much higher. The notification said the city must involve DEQ in re-evaluating the property if the use is changed.

"In my eight years on the council, I can't recall any precedent for an action like this. Let's be clear, there is no plan, no funding, and there has been no public process and no due diligence," Fish said.

Most testify against the shelter

The vote followed more than three hours of public testimony from around 50 people, most of whom opposed the proposal.

The largest group was residents of Riverscape, a large condominium and apartment complex just south of Terminal 1. Many from the group said they felt blindsided by the proposal because no one from the city had contacted them before it became public. Many said they feared for their safety or the safety of their children if hundreds of homeless people were going to be housed at Terminal 1, either temporarily or permanently.

Also opposing even the temporary shelter was Bob Sallinger, conservation director of the Portland Audubon Society. He said it violated policies to preserve industrial lands recently approved by the council in the Comprehensive Plan update, and warned it might prevent the plan from being approved by state land-use regulators, as required by law.

The project also was opposed by John Jensen, political director of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48, who said the property should be used to create industrial jobs. That view was echoed by Andrew Baugh, the chair of the Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission, who testified as a private citizen.

Several of those who testified against the proposal suggested opening the unused Wapato Jail owned by Multnomah County in North Portland for the homeless instead. The idea is opposed by Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury.

Prominent supporters included: Williams; consultant Don Mazziotti, a former Portland Development Commission director working with Williams on the project; and former City Hall staffer Rich Rodgers, who is working on homeless issues, among other things.

Most of those who supported the proposal said they wanted more information about it, however. Some supported opening a shelter in the warehouse only over the winter, but not as a permanent solution.

Notably absent was anyone from Multnomah County or either of the city-county organizations working on homeless and affordable housing issues: The Joint Office of Homeless Services and A Home for Everyone.

According to Saltzman's office, the next step is for the joint homeless services office to negotiate an operating agreement for the shelter with Williams' Trail of Hope.

Willamette Week

Google Fiber Is Not Coming to Portland

The Wall Street Journal reports Google has suspended fiber plans here.

By Beth Slovic

August 15, 2016

The Wall Street Journal reported last night that Google has suspended plans to bring Google Fiber to the Portland metro-area.

A city of Portland official confirmed Monday to *WW* that Google is backing out of plans to launch the high-speed internet service here.

The *Journal* reports that Google is shelving plans to lay fiber optic cables in Portland as it changes its overall strategy, switching from cable to wireless technology because cable has proved too expensive and time-consuming.

The Oregonian's Mike Rogoway reported in July that Google was delaying its plans for months or longer.

As recently as June, Google's plans to bring super high-speed internet to Portland seemed on track, even though there's never been an official announcement. In June, the company won approval for a "fiber hut" on city-owned property in Southwest Portland, *The Oregonian* reported.

Google has not responded to a request for comment.

The chief of staff to Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who has long championed better internet service in Portland, confirmed *The Wall Street Journal's* report.

"The city has been informed by Google Fiber of the change in network deployment plans for Portland," wrote Brendan Finn, the chief of staff, in an email Monday. "We will continue to work constructively with Google Fiber and all other providers to increase broadband services to Portlanders."

Update: A spokeswoman for Google writes in an email: "We're continuing to explore the possibility of bringing Google Fiber to Portland and other potential cities. This means deploying the latest technologies in alignment with our product roadmap, while understanding local requirements, which takes time."

Portland Warily Eyes Seattle's New Rule for Rentals: First Come, First Served

Portland housing officials say they'll wait and see if the policy reduces housing discrimination.

By Julia Comnes

August 12, 2016

Portland's neighbor to the north is attempting to crack down on housing discrimination with a groundbreaking and controversial new policy for rental housing: first come, first served.

Seattle City Council passed a policy this week requiring Seattle landlords to process rental applications on a first-come, first-served basis and to accept the first qualified applicant that applies.

"There seems to be a strong common-sense argument for this," Leland Jones of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development told *The Seattle Times* earlier this week.

Seattle, like Portland, is grappling with a tight housing market, steep rent increases and huge demand for scarce apartments. The new rule, which will go into effect on Jan. 1, has been called the first of its kind in the U.S.

Studies have shown that landlords' biases, especially racial biases, create barriers for renters. In Portland, a housing audit conducted in 2015 through undercover testing showed that in 12 out of 25 cases, prospective renters who were white were given preferential treatment.

Matthew Tschabold, policy and equity manager at the Portland Housing Bureau, says that he needs to see how Seattle's law will play out before proposing a similar policy for Portland.

He raised some concerns about the rule, like whether it would negatively impact prospective renters with limited access to the internet, who might not see a housing posting as quickly as someone with internet access.

"How a property manager is making the vacancy available to the public will really determine whether a first-come, first-served model would hurt or support various communities," Tschabold said.

He also emphasized that the law doesn't remove the use of certain screening criteria, like criminal record checks and credit history, which he cited as a major cause of housing discrimination.

"It might be more of a symbolic policy gesture without really addressing the issues," said Tschabold.

Once the rule goes into effect in Seattle, landlords will have to disclose information about their minimum screening criteria before accepting rental applications.

Then, landlords will be required to screen applicants in the order in which the applications were received, and make offers to qualified applicants in that order.

Landlords will be required to keep records of when applications were received. Renters can then request those records from the Seattle Office of Civil Rights. If applicants think they were wrongfully skipped, they will be able to sue the landlord.

There's some wiggle room in the policy. For example, people with disabilities who may need extra time to fill out an application will be given a place on the list of applicants based on the date of their extra-time request.

An online poll created on *The Seattle Times* website this morning shows that the law has plenty of detractors: So far, only 6.63 percent of respondents think the new law is a good idea, while 81.11 percent think it's a bad idea and 13.26 percent think it needs more study.