

The Portland Tribune

Council could vote in December on public campaign financing

By Amelia Templeton and OPB

November 6, 2016

After supporters testify at Thursday hearing, Commissioner Amanda Fritz wants to bring her proposal back for a vote before the end of the year

A proposal for publicly funded campaigns for the Portland mayor and city council seats received broad support from citizens at a hearing Thursday.

Thirty advocacy groups have endorsed the measure and of the 57 people who came to testify, all but two spoke in favor of publicly funded elections.

But the two people who raised concerns were city auditor Mary Hull Caballero and retired city auditor Gary Blackmer. They cautioned that any system of public financing would require new city staff and rigorous oversight.

The measure was introduced by Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who won office in 2008 using the city's previous publicly funded election system. Voters ended that program in 2010.

"This issue really, really matters to me," Fritz said. "The most difficult challenge facing our country today is lack in trust in government."

Fritz's proposal, modeled after New York's publicly funded elections, hinges on what's known as a small donor multiple match, a system designed to make candidates who successfully raise many small donations more financially competitive. It's a substantially different model from Portland's previous attempt at city-funded elections.

Candidates could choose to opt in, and would have to agree to contribution limits and meet requirements to show they were viable.

Candidates for city council would have to raise at least \$2,500 from 250 individuals, and candidates for mayor would have to raise \$5,000 from at least 500 people. They would also have to agree to cap individual contributions at \$250. Candidates would be allowed to receive up to \$40,000 of in-kind donations.

In exchange, qualified candidates would have donations of \$50 or less matched by the city at a 6 to 1 ratio.

The matching fund would be drawn out of the city's general fund budget, the same pool of money that funds parks, public safety and other services. Fritz has proposed limiting the public financing program to .2 percent of the general fund, roughly \$2 million to \$3 million per election cycle.

Oregon is among a handful of states that don't limit individual political contributions. The state supreme court has ruled contribution limits violate free speech provisions in the state constitution. Portland is also one of relatively few major American cities that elects its council members city-wide as opposed to by geographic districts, further adding to the expense and difficulty of mounting a campaign for a council seat.

"I think in Oregon we have a particularly broken system," said Diane Rosenbaum, a state senator and former senate majority leader who came to support the measure, and joked during her testimony that she had probably called most of the people in the room and asked them for money.

"I am hopeful that Portland can adopt this system, and that it can become a model for the state of Oregon," she said.

The measure's proponents said that amplifying small donations would give elected officials an incentive to spend more of their time engaging with a broad range of potential small donors.

Social worker Meg Bergio described a self-advocacy group she runs, encouraging adults with disabilities to engage with politics. Members of her group can only afford to give \$10 to a candidate, she told the city council. But a six to one match could turn 10 of those small donations into \$600, enough to get a candidate's attention.

"We might have elected officials running for office that would want to come and talk to us, at our meeting. We might get to share a little bit about what our lives are and what is important to us," she said.

The groups that have endorsed the measure include the Urban League, the Latino Network and many more that represent communities of color.

"Only two African-Americans and six women have ever served on the Portland city council" said Joanne Hardesty, who leads the Portland NAACP. She described the proposal as "an opportunity for regular folks to believe that they also have a role in our democracy."

Auditor Mary Hull Caballero said she supported the programs' goals, but said Fritz had not secured adequate funding for the management, legal and investigative work necessary to make it succeed.

Hull Caballero also said the city's elections officer doesn't have the time to review the "voluminous documents" the program requires. Caballero reminded the city council that the city's previous attempt at publicly financed elections was brought down in part by a high-profile case of fraud. A woman named Emily Boyles used fake signatures to qualify, and then misspent the \$145,000 she received through the program. Boyles was ultimately fined and required to return the money, but it took the city years to collect it.

"For these reasons alone, the city has no room for error in a successor program. It must be tightly managed and closely monitored," Hull Caballero said.

Commissioner Fritz has said, given the auditor's concerns, that the program would be overseen by a different city bureau or a public commission.

Fritz has one of the two additional votes she needs to pass the measure. Portland Mayor Charlie Hales is supporting it. Hales chose not to seek a second term in office after Ted Wheeler announced his run for mayor. Wheeler ultimately raised more than \$850,000 and won the seat during the May primary.

But both commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman signaled that they may be uncomfortable implementing a system similar to one that was recently repealed by voters.

"This council appropriates money for lots of purposes, but this is appropriating funds to fund our own elections," Fish said.

Commissioner Steve Novick expressed support for the concept, but questioned who would administer it and whether the city could afford to fund it. "I really really hope that we can make this work," Novick said.

Novick, who is currently running for re-election against challenger Chloe Eudaly, lamented the amount of time he's spent talking to wealthy donors.

"If you have six months to raise \$250,000, even if you can allocate 10 hours a week to raising money, that means you have to raise \$1,000 an hour," he said. "You wind up talking to people who have money."

Fritz said she intends to amend the proposal, and bring it back to the city council for another hearing and a vote in December.

City to Rose Fest: Move parade routes or lose permit

By Pamplin Media Group

November 3, 2016

After more than a century of marching through downtown Portland on Southwest 10th Avenue, city officials have told the Rose Festival to move its parade route.

Rose Festival Foundation members begin looking for a new route Friday. The festival was told by City Commissioner Steve Novick's office that it had to move the route to accommodate the Portland Streetcar, which travels on 10th and 11th avenues, or lose its parade permit in 2017.

"We've resisted this route change because 10th Avenue is such a perfect home for the parades," said Jeff Curtis, Rose Festival chief executive officer. "The Grand Floral Parade has utilized this street for most of its 104 years, and with the food carts and the library steps, it's a popular viewing place. But regardless of the route, the Rose Festival will continue to offer our parade fans the high quality events they've come to expect."

The Grand Floral Parade's downtown route has remained the same since 1984, for 29 years. That year saw a slight change in the downtown streets due to the construction of TriMet's light-rail line to Gresham. The Starlight Parade has been on 10th Avenue since 1976.

The Grand Floral Parade in early June begins at Veterans Memorial Coliseum on the east side of the Willamette River, and then follows a 4.2-mile route through downtown.

Curtis said the two parades will turn west on Washington Street from Southwest Broadway, turn south on 12th Avenue toward Taylor Street, where they will turn west and cross Interstate 405 to the disband area near Lincoln High School.

Desiree Hamilton, producer of the wacky costumed Starlight Run, which takes place prior to the Starlight Parade, said the race route would be altered by the city decision, but it still be a 5K event.

Willamette Week

Mayor Charlie Hales Proposes to Remove Ban on Apartments Without Parking

By Rachel Monahan

November 4, 2016

Mayor Charlie Hales is proposing to undo the city zoning codes that require developers to build off-street parking for buildings of more than 30 units.

This is a significant reversal—not only because minimum parking requirements raise the cost of housing but also because Hales championed the same parking minimums in 2012 as he was running for office and passed them in City Council during his fourth month in office.

The change from Hales comes in the form of an amendment to current zoning plans.

"This would undo a [...] code change that imposed minimum requirements for developments of more than 30 units," says a memo from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, published late Friday.

As a city commissioner, Hales had gained a reputation as a champion of high-density development and public transportation (along with the nickname "Choo-Choo Charlie"), in part on the basis of the fact he'd gotten rid of these same parking requirements for the first time in 2000.

But Hales bowed to public pressure on the campaign trail in 2012, as large developments were opening in the city.

Residents took issue with the the lack of parking, particularly along Southeast Division Street, where at least 224 apartments went up in a 13-block span with no parking ("Block Busters," WW, Sept. 18, 2012).

Earlier this year, the Council declined to create new parking requirements for developers in Northwest—a sign that at City Hall concerns over the housing crunch trumped residents' parking woes.

Tony Jordan, with Portlanders for Parking Reform, which pushed for rolling back the requirements along transit corridors, says that the city is working on other ways to address parking shortages, including permit programs.

"I think it's great," says Jordan. "It's redeeming of the decision that was made in 2013. [It] will help us build the housing we need."

Jordan argues the parking requirements are antithetical to the mayor's record of championing environmental causes.

"If we build copious amounts of parking, our transportation systems will suffer and we won't meet our climate action goals," Jordan adds.

Hales spokesman Brian Worley says Hales thinks the parking requirements have been ineffective.

"He no longer believes the 2013 minimum parking requirements are good public policy," says Worley. "In addition, minimum parking requirements do not promote more walkable, livable neighborhoods, while negatively contributing to climate change, and further increase Portland's housing affordability crisis."

Daily Journal of Commerce

Portland City Council weighs in on infill proposal

By Chuck Slothower

November 4, 2016

The first briefing on the proposed residential infill policy presented to the Portland City Council drew split responses from commissioners.

The policy aims to encourage denser construction in residential areas of East Portland. It would allow more types of "middle housing" – duplexes and other housing structures that fall between single-family homes and apartment buildings.

The proposal is dividing longtime residents who fear lost property value and those who say new and denser housing is needed to accommodate Portland's growing workforce.

The infill policy is being proposed as the city is under pressure by housing activists to allow a greater diversity of housing types in East Portland. The City Club of Portland in April endorsed a report calling for more middle housing to meet demand. Fair housing advocates including Portland for Everyone and its sponsor, 1,000 Friends of Oregon, say East Portland must be zoned for denser building or risk being turned into essentially a gated community.

"This proposal is going to allow schoolteachers and first responders and local shop owners to live in the neighborhoods they serve," said David Sweet, co-founder of Portland for Everyone. "Without something like this, those neighborhoods are going to be exclusive for wealthy people."

Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz had sharp initial criticisms of the policy.

Fish questioned the wisdom of encouraging denser development in East Portland's residential neighborhoods.

"At what point are we changing the character of our neighborhoods?" he asked.

Fritz expressed concern that the policy could lead to more teardowns of historic homes.

"This is going to increase the number of demolitions, not help," she said.

The city's infill plan would limit home sizes in certain zones to 2,500 square feet on a 5,000-square-foot lot. It would also lower rooflines to 30 feet above street level – effectively limiting building heights – and allow duplexes in all lots, not just corner lots.

More middle housing is called for in the city's comprehensive plan. That's one measure city officials say is needed to accommodate 123,000 additional households projected to reside in Portland by 2035.

The residential infill rules would be accomplished through a zoning overlay that would affect a broad swath of East Portland – about 95,000 of 150,000 lots. The area includes traditional single-family neighborhoods such as Eastmoreland, Irvington, Grant Park and Concordia.

“As the city evolves in the future, these are the types of structures that will fit into our single-family neighborhoods,” said Joe Zehnder, chief planner at the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

The zoning overlay excludes, most notably, areas east of Interstate 205 served by David Douglas School District. Some affordable housing advocates are pushing for more of the city, including David Douglas School District, to be covered by the infill plan.

City planning officials, in response to Fritz’s concerns, said the limit on home sizes should reduce the pace of single-family home demolitions by eliminating the profitable option of building a large home on a lot.

The city’s residential infill policy would have the effect of limiting the value of residential properties in the affected areas, both housing advocates and developers say.

“When somebody goes to sell a property, they’re going to get less money for it,” said Mike Hubbell, managing member of Portland Development Group, which builds infill housing in the city. “It’s going to hurt property values.”

Hubbell said he had no problem with the 2,500-square-foot limit, but questioned whether the policy will work.

“If they want a smaller house, so be it,” he said. “It just means everybody’s paying less. It doesn’t hurt or help (developers) one way or the other.”

For affordability advocates, keeping a lid on property values would be a positive side effect.

“The incumbents who benefit from the existing system, who’ve seen their property values double and double again, feel they’re being threatened by this,” Sweet said. “I get that. But if we don’t make a change – I think our heads are spinning watching prices go up 10, 12 percent a year, year after year. It’s frightening.”

Commissioner Steve Novick spoke most vocally in support of the proposed code changes, saying Portlanders increasingly find themselves stuck between the rental market and single-family homes approaching \$1 million.

“Providing the opportunity for something in between for people who don’t have a million dollars and don’t want to live in an apartment seems like a reasonable thing to me,” he said.

If the City Council approves a resolution encouraging the residential infill policies, city staffers plan to conduct a round of public outreach before returning to the council with zoning code changes in early summer 2017.