

## The Portland Tribune

### Wheeler to stagger bureau assigns to shape city government

*By Jim Redden*

*December 21, 2016*

Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler intends set and control the direction of city government when he takes office in January through a staggered bureau assignment process.

During a Wednesday morning interview with the Portland Tribune editorial board, Wheeler said he has had many meetings with the remaining members of the City Council, Commissioner-elect Chloe Eudaly, and city bureau directors since being elected mayor at the May 2016 primary election.

Wheeler said he has specific ideas for the directions he wants many agencies to take which he has discussed with them, and will announce his initial bureau assignments on Jan. 3, 2017.

Wheeler said he will then assume control of all bureaus in April when the council process for adopting the next budget is underway, and reassign them in May after the budget that takes effect on July 1 is approved.

The reassignments might change in May, Wheeler said, depending on the progress he sees each commissioner make towards achieving his goals.

"Depending on how things have been going, there might be changes if there are problems of leadership," Wheeler said.

Assigning bureaus is one of the few powers of the mayor under Portland's system of government, where each member of the council oversees a set of bureaus. Although it is not unusual for mayors to assign themselves all bureaus during at least their first budget process, making an initial three-month assignment may never have happened before.

Although rumors are swirling within City Hall about Wheeler's initial assignments, he declined to discuss most of them. Wheeler said he would assign himself the Portland Police Bureau because he made improving the relationship between the police and the community a top priority of his campaign.

And he suggested he will take the Portland Housing Bureau from Commissioner Dan Saltzman because it is essential to addressing the issues homelessness and housing affordable, which were also top priorities of his campaign.

In response to a direct question, Wheeler declined to say whether he would allow Commissioner Amanda Fritz to keep the Office of Neighborhood Involvement. A recent audit by the City Auditor's Office found it riddled with administrative and management problems, in part because it has been many unrelated responsibilities.

Even if Wheeler keeps all the bureaus currently under Mayor Charlie Hales, who is leaving the council at the end of the year, two other important bureaus will need to be initially reassigned. They are the Portland Bureau of Transportation and the Portland Office of Emergency Communication, which operates the 9-1-1 system. Both are currently overseen by Commissioner Steve Novick, who was defeated by Eudaly and is also leaving at the end of the year.

On the subject of the budget, Wheeler said he was concerned by the recent forecast from the City Budget Office that said the council is spending money faster than it is coming in, despite record revenue growth because of the strong local economy. The forecast said the council will have to cut \$4 million in spending over the next five years to balance its books, in part because it has recently approved approximately \$12 million in new unfunded programs.

"I have some very deep concerns about the state of the budget. We need to focus on what works and fund it, not just on what is popular," said Wheeler.

## **The Portland Mercury**

### **Mayor-Elect Ted Wheeler Will Hand Out Bureau Assignments, Then Snatch Them Back**

*By Dirk VanderHart*

*December 21, 2016*

Portland's four city commissioners will know what city bureaus they've been tapped to oversee under Mayor Ted Wheeler on January 3. Then they'll have three months to prove they can handle it.

In an interview this morning, Wheeler told the Mercury that he's going a different direction than Mayor Charlie Hales as he prepares to take office. Rather than running every city bureau until the end of budget season—as Hales' staff did in a Herculean five-month effort—Wheeler says he'll first give commissioners bureaus, then snatch them back once the council begins budget talks in March.

"The reason I'm handing them out provisionally is to make sure the things I want done in the bureaus get done," Wheeler says. "The assumption is they'll get the bureaus back. There's no guarantee of that."

Pulling bureaus for budget purposes has been a fairly common tactic for new mayors. The rationale is that it might make commissioners less myopic about seeing their own bureaus flush with cash, and more likely to look at the big picture (though commissioners have downplayed the strategy's effectiveness over the years).

But it also comes with a risk. Hales wound up bruising feelings when he first pulled all the bureaus in February 2013, then dramatically reshuffled commissioners' portfolios in June of that year.

Wheeler's not revealing his hand, though he clearly knows where bureaus will fall. The most he would offer is that he'll be taking charge of the Portland Police Bureau—standard operating procedure for the Portland mayor.

But it seems likely at least some reshuffling is in the offing. Outgoing Commissioner Steve Novick had a full plate with the cash-strapped and massive Portland Bureau of Transportation, the challenged Bureau of Emergency Communications, and the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management. His replacement, Commissioner-elect Chloe Eudaly, will almost certainly not be

given all three. (Eudaly, a housing buff, has told Wheeler's staff what bureaus she feels qualified for, but has declined to reveal that list.)

Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz, meanwhile, have made plain they're perfectly happy keeping their current portfolios. Fish oversees the city's ratepayer utility bureaus, the Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services. Fritz has parks and the ever-expanding Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

In a city where the mayor has much of the same power as commissioners, Wheeler's also being clear that he's willing to use his office's largest power play: Pulling back bureaus if commissioners don't play by his rules.

"We will reach some clear understanding about how I want them to manage the bureaus," he says. "It's the only real stick the mayor has."

Wheeler clarified he wasn't looking to micromanage bureaus. But he said he "might have one or two specific asks" regarding how commissioners manage city services. "I'm not telling them line item by line item how to manage the bureau," he says. "There are certain things I want to see done in those bureaus."

One city hall staffer asked about this strategy said Wheeler hadn't made his plans formally known to all commissioners' offices, though there were rumors.

Commissioners will have around three months to show they're up to their assignments. Wheeler says he'll pull back assignments at the beginning of public budget deliberations, which are slated to begin March 13.

## **Portland's 911 System Has a Gaping Flaw**

*By Doug Brown  
December 21, 2016*

It was just after 3 am on May 7 when Betty Fry's small old house in Southeast Portland's Sunnyside neighborhood became engulfed in flames.

The 84-year-old's Salmon Street neighbors began frantically dialing 911. One got an operator quickly: "SE 33rd and Salmon, a house is burning down," the panicked caller told the dispatcher, "we're going to need an ambulance, the whole thing is fucking going up."

A fire crew arrived about four minutes after the first call, but it was too late to save Fry (her son, who'd been taking care of her, was hurt but survived). Others tried to call 911 as well, but found there was no one available to hear their emergency.

"Numerous people in the neighborhood called 911 and there was no response," a woman who lives across the street told a news camera on the scene that morning. "It was pretty frustrating... I finally just hung up."

Under city policy, a 911 operator was supposed to call the neighbor to check if there was an emergency. No one ever did.

In fact, the Bureau of Emergency Communication (BOEC), which runs the city and county's 911 center, had no record the woman's call ever existed, despite the neighbor obtaining her own

cell phone records proving she called (an investigation revealed the firefighters were already on the way).

That disconnect led the city's ombudsman, Margie Sollinger, to discover a massive flaw in the emergency response system: If people calling 911 on a cell phone hang up or get disconnected while they're on hold—after entering a prompt to prove it's an intentional call instead of a pocket dial, and before an operator gets to them—Portland's system retains no record the call occurred.

Operators can't call you back, and they can't figure out where you are. It's as if the call never happened.

"A system in which vital information about thousands upon thousands of intentional emergency calls disappears undermines federal and state rules designed to ensure a seamless and reliable emergency communications system," Sollinger's report says. "(P)otentially thousands of presumptively intentional emergency calls each year since 2004 were neither answered nor called back."

Portland's shortage of 911 operators has been well documented—it often leads to minutes-long waits on hold for people trying to get help. There are usually around five or six people working the phones at BOEC at night, and between 10 and 15 during peak call hours in the late afternoon and early evening, BOEC Director Lisa Turley tells the Mercury. She says they field between 2,800 and 3,300 calls per day.

Turley says her goal is to have calls answered within two minutes. But that doesn't always happen: There was one instance this summer where a caller waited more than 20 minutes. Ten minute waits aren't unheard of.

And a lot of people hang up.

In 2015 alone, 18,482 intentional 911 calls from cell phones were hung up or disconnected while on hold. They never got called back, according to a report released this week by Ombudsman Sollinger, publicly exposing the problem for the first time since the cell phone screening system was introduced to BOEC 12 years ago. The ombudsman is part of the City Auditor's Office and investigates complaints about city services. Sollinger was able to get raw data from BOEC, but records of these individual calls were lost.

The need for the screening system, introduced to BOEC in 2004, is simple: The number of accidental 911 calls from cell phones thanks to pocket dials took too much of operators' time. So BOEC implemented what it called the "Reno Solution" (because it was cribbed from Reno, Nevada).

The XMU+ screening system Portland purchased from a Canadian company called Interallia added another step between cell phone callers and operators. Callers now have to enter a prompt, either verbally saying "911" or pressing a number. If they do so, they get in line for an operator. If they don't, the call ends. (Calls from landlines and internet services go straight into the queue.)

The system is used in Clackamas County ("It's one of those unfortunate evils," the county's 911 operations manager, Mark Spross, tells the Mercury), Washington County, and elsewhere.

And the city has praised its efficacy in the past.

“The ‘Reno Solution’ has achieved significant reductions in cell phone call processing volume with very few complaints,” according to a 2006 BOEC report. “[T]he average number of cell phone calls dropped almost immediately from 580 to 184 per day. Previously, cell phone calls made up approximately 50 percent of overall call volume. If the trend following the ‘Reno Solution’ implementation continues, this number could drop to 25 percent.”

It wasn’t until this month that it was revealed publicly that cell phone callers completely vanished from the 911 system if they were disconnected while on hold. Turley acknowledges she didn’t know of the problem until Sollinger’s investigation. But she argues the system is still valuable.

“The work involved to go and track down if that person really meant to hang up on us or if there’s an accident—you’re talking about eating minutes for every one of those calls,” Turley says. “The best we hope for is if somebody gets disconnected that they call back. We can’t do that magic they do on TV.”

In the end, the revelation that Portland was losing reams of emergency call data comes too late to make much of a difference—the current screening system is slated to go away in mere months. A new 911 system, funded by the state, is scheduled to be introduced in the spring.

“The new system promises to preserve the call back information for all intentional phone calls,” Sollinger says.

## **The Portland Business Journal**

### **Mayor Charlie Hales finishes his term with a climate-change flourish**

*By Pete Danko  
December 21, 2016*

When there’s a clamor for fixes to homelessness, rising rents and potholes, what’s a city doing taking on the gargantuan problem of a warming planet?

Charlie Hales, who is wrapping up his tumultuous tenure as Portland’s mayor with a string of victories on climate change, says there’s no disconnect. As with progressive issues like the minimum wage and pay equity, green policies are an economic winner, he maintains.

“Portland is growing because we’re a climate leader, not in spite of being a climate leader,” the mayor said in an interview at City Hall late last week. “The fact that we do have enough money in the tills to pay for fixing potholes in large part comes from the fact that we are a green, sustainable city and trying to become more so.”

In recent weeks, the city has passed an aggressive plan for getting more electric vehicles on Portland’s streets, enacted a ban on new bulk fossil fuel infrastructure and instituted home energy scores for houses going on the market.

The latter two initiatives ran into strong opposition from business groups, but Hales said he knew the people were on his side in pursuing them.

"The Oregon value and beliefs study a couple of years ago found that over 75 percent of all Oregonians agreed with the statement that climate change was real and we need to make changes locally to address it," he said. "Obviously that number is bigger in Portland."

As he had at nearly every City Council meeting where climate-related issues were discussed, Hales in our interview made the case that cities in the C40 group, which Portland is part of, can combine to be a powerful force.

"The 90 cities in the C40 group — granted there are 600 million people living in those 90 cities — but if those 90 cities carry out their plans, that will account for 40 percent of what needs to be done to bend the curve to stay below a 2-degree temperature rise," Hales said. "That's significant. So it turns out local actions duplicated around the world do have an effect."

Given the zeal with which Hales has approached climate issues recently, it's remarkable to recall that he had once supported Pembina's proposal to build a propane export facility at the Port of Portland.

What was up with that?

"Initially, I thought it would be reasonable on a couple of grounds," Hales said. "Every mayor likes economic development, and I do too. Two, there was a description of that project and others like it that was founded on the idea that propane should be a bridge fuel from our fossil-fuel-based economy to the future.

"(But) it's become very clear — and I've learned a lot about this issue as I've worked on it — that we don't have time for bridge fuels. We need to leave a lot of the fossil fuel that we've discovered in the ground and use it much more sparingly."

Hales pointed to another factor in his evolution on the issue: a trip to the Vatican in July 2015.

"The pope didn't invite environment ministers from nations, he invited mayors and as he spoke to us, he kept saying, 'You world leaders are going to need to do this,'" Hales said.

And as it turned out, from a jobs perspective, fossil fuels weren't a winner in Portland, Hales said.

"We have 280 jobs in the city of Portland associated with moving fossil fuels around," he said. "We have 46,900 jobs associated with green technology and services. When those statistics came out, the Portland Business Alliance, which has opposed a lot of these climate actions, didn't even bother to testify at the hearing on the zoning code change because they had prosecuted the fiction during the Pembina debate that this had anything to do with jobs."