

## **The Oregonian**

### **Providence Park's history once included dreams of 100,000 seats**

*By John Killen  
May 9, 2017*

When news broke that the Portland Timbers were making plans to expand Providence Park to 25,000 seats, most fans of the city's Major League Soccer team were probably thrilled.

The proposal, which goes before the City Council this week, would raise the stadium's capacity by 4,000. If the plan makes it over various regulatory hurdles, the addition is sure to help raise the roar of the team's enthusiastic fans when the Timbers and the Portland Thorns play their home games.

But it might surprise many to learn that the stadium still would seat 10,000 fewer than it once did. As far back as the 1930s, the venue held up to 35,000.

The stadium evolved much like the city around it – in fits and starts, adjusting for dog racing, baseball and now soccer as interests changed over the years.

The genesis of what is now Providence Park goes back to the 1890s, when the site was an athletic field for the fledgling Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club, today known as the Multnomah Athletic Club.

The club was looking for a place to hold athletic events, and it leased a sunken field just south of the Portland Exposition Center, a massive brick-facade building near what is now the corner of West Burnside and 19th Avenue.

The area had once been home to vegetable gardens cultivated by Chinese immigrants who lived in the Goose Hollow area, along Tanner Creek. In those days, the creek wound its way down from Portland's West Hills to Goose Hollow, through the area where the stadium now sits, and proceeded to the Willamette River.

As the city grew, the creek was routed through brick-lined pipes, which were covered over. That created a space for the field, which squatted below street level in the former creek bed.

The club built the first "grandstand" along the west side of the field in 1893 and added a clubhouse along the east side in 1900, according to *The Oregon Encyclopedia*. Old photographs show the field being used for everything from school events to athletics.

Then, on July 14, 1910, a fire broke out in the Exposition Center. According to *The Oregonian*, it killed at least two men and several horses. The fire destroyed seven buildings including the center, the MAC's clubhouse and the grandstand.

A year later, the MAC broke ground on a new clubhouse with adjacent grandstands.

Before long, the organization began leasing the field for various events and its popularity grew. By 1923, interest in the field had grown to the point where the club decided to build a bigger structure: A two-tiered "horseshoe" stadium that would seat 100,000.

Eventually, that idea was scaled back to one tier and three-quarters of a horseshoe, but the new stadium, finished in 1926, still had a capacity of 35,000. For its coming-out party on Oct. 9, 1926, it played host to the Washington-Oregon football game, which the Huskies won 23-9.

Then, four years later, the stadium claimed what was then the record for the largest crowd to ever see a football game in the Pacific Northwest. On Oct. 18, 1930, the Ducks beat the Huskies 7-0 in front of a crowd of 35,266, according to The Oregonian.

Over the next 80-plus years, the stadium was home to the Multnomah Kennel Club (1933 to 1956), the Portland Beavers and Portland Mavericks baseball franchises (off and on from 1956 to 2010), college football, high school football, baseball and soccer. Rose Festival events were regularly held there as were ski-jumping exhibitions and the stadium also played host to Elvis (1957) and the Beatles (1965). Then, starting 1975, came the first incarnation of the Timbers.

Along the way, the name, ownership and look of the facility also evolved. Originally called Multnomah Field, it later became Multnomah Stadium, Civic Stadium and then, in 2001, PGE Park. That was followed by Jeld-Wen Field and finally Providence Park.

Ownership transferred from the private Multnomah Athletic Club to the city of Portland in 1966 for \$2.1 million and the city has since OK'd several updates of the stadium. "Tartan Turf" took the place of grass in the late 1960s, and the roof over the grandstands was replaced in the early 1980s. Further updates and improvements were done in 2001 and 2009.

It was during one of those updates — 2001 — that the capacity of the stadium was greatly reduced to about 19,000 when baseball outfield seats were taken out while other amenities were upgraded.

Since then, changes have brought capacity back up to 21,000 but the need for more seating has become obvious as the Timbers and Thorns have grown in popularity.

But will the stadium ever break its own crowd record? That seems unlikely.

The mark was set on Aug. 28, 1977, when then-Civic Stadium played host to Soccer Bowl '77, the championship game of the old North American Soccer League.

That day, 35,548 fans showed up to watch soccer legend Pele lead the New York Cosmos to a 2-1 win over the Seattle Sounders for the league championship.

## **Portland Timbers tout 'privately-funded' project, ask city for financial break**

*By Jessica Floum*

*May 9, 2017*

The Portland Timbers organization is publicly promoting its proposed stadium expansion as a "win" for Portland, including "millions" a Timbers executive says the city would receive in ticket taxes.

But the Timbers have instead sought a deal that would exempt them from paying any taxes for the next 10 years on tickets for the 4,000 seats it hopes to add. And Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler is urging the City Council to approve a resolution Wednesday supporting the tax break, worth at least \$200,000 a year.

When the team [announced the planned expansion](#) in April, Timbers President of Business Mike Golub told The Oregonian/OregonLive that "the city derives... a ticket tax on every ticket we sell. Adding 4,000 seats will have a material upside in tax remittance that they receive."

Even if the Timbers are successful in getting the council to suspend those taxes for a decade, the deal is still a win for city government anyway, Golub told The Oregonian/OregonLive in an interview Monday. "If the expansion happens, the city is better off financially," he said. "We are putting \$50 to \$55 million into a city-owned asset. It'd be like going into your home and having us pay for an addition to your house."

Wheeler supports the expansion plans, including the tax break, because the city won't have to pay for it, said mayoral spokesman Michael Cox. "This is a good deal," he said. "Private dollars will go to into a city-owned facility and an "exciting design" for a "beloved Portland organization," he said.

The city owns the stadium, and leases it to the Timbers for a rental payment and a share of ticket sales. The Timbers plan to finance the expansion with private funds, not taxpayer money.

Since their inaugural Major League Soccer season, in 2011, the Timbers have been obligated to pay 7 percent tax on all ticket sales under an operating agreement with the city. The organization has also paid the city an average rent of \$950,000 the last seven years.

Susan Hartnett, Portland's spectator facilities and development manager, says if the city agrees to forgo the tax on the added seats, that will increase the loss the city is already expecting from investing in the stadium, going back as far as 2001, when it was home to the Portland Beavers baseball team.

"What we're asking for is, for the first 10 years, not to realize money that they wouldn't have realized anyways," Golub said.

The city will have to bear some increased costs as a result of the expansion. Portland currently pays insurance on the building itself, but not the operations, and also pays for repairs and other capital replacement costs. The Office of Management and Finance did not respond to a records request for these costs in time for publication.

Hartnett estimated that without the stadium expansion, the city will spend \$100,000 on insurance next year and more than \$125,000 for capital repairs.

"We will see an increase in our costs," Hartnett said. "Obviously, with the expansion, it will go up. As will the repair costs, with more square footage."

Under the operating agreement between the city and the Portland Timbers, the team has paid the city \$1.6 million to \$2 million a year in rent and ticket taxes.

The deal gets sweeter for The Timbers beginning in 2018. Rent payments end, and Timbers owner Merritt Paulson gets to keep as much as \$1.1 million in ticket taxes each year to pay himself back for his initial investment in the stadium. The city will receive a far more limited payment: it will only collect the 7 percent ticket tax if ticket tax collections exceed the amount that Paulson will be guaranteed.

The city contributed \$11.9 million to remake the city's former baseball stadium into one fit for soccer in 2011, Hartnett said. Paulson's company, Peregrine Sports, contributed \$24.1 million. The city invested another \$33 million in the park in 2001, when the park was home to the since-departed minor league baseball team. Former park operator Portland Family and Entertainment also contributed \$5.5 million in 2001 to renovate the then baseball park. The 2001 renovation lost the city money, requiring the city to take revenue from Rose Quarter ticket sales and parking fees to "moderate those expenses," Hartnett said.

The city invested so much because the Timbers operation positively impacts the city through job creation and increased economic activity like spending on restaurants, stores and tourism,

Hartnett said. Because Oregon does not allow a sales tax, the most direct sports contributions to the city are ticket taxes.

"If we agree to that exemption, that direct and immediate benefit may not be realized, but that ... economic impact will be," Hartnett said.

Golub said investing in the Timbers also brings a psychic and economic benefit.

"This is a win for the fans, a win for the city that they have a private entity (adding) to their venue and that they can earn money they would not realize otherwise over time," Golub said.

The investment will also help Providence Park keep up with Major League Soccer's growing economics, Golub said. The stadium, he said, is now in the low half of the league in terms of its capacity of 21,000.

Without the expansion, the stadium runs the risk of no longer being a viable place to host professional soccer matches, he said.

"We're trying to prevent that," Golub said. "We're trying to ensure the Timbers and Thorns are in Portland for the long term."

Most cities raise taxes in order to pay for sports stadium expansions, Cox said. In March, Las Vegas began collecting an increased room tax to help fund the city's \$750 million contribution to fund a new National Football League stadium, the [Las Vegas Sun reported](#).

"This is a good deal that provides public benefit at private cost," Cox said. He said the mayor's office is following the advice of financial experts within the Office of Management and Finance, under which Hartnett manages the Spectator Venues and Visitor Activities fund.

Taxes and fees from Portland Trail Blazers games and related parking ticket sales contribute about 40 percent of the fund's revenue. Revenues from all Rose Quarter events, including concert ticket sales and user fees from Veterans Memorial Coliseum, contribute 75 to 80 percent of the fund's revenue, Hartnett said.

Providence Park, on the other hand, requires more money for debt payments and operations than it brings in.

"There is a large net positive for the Rose Quarter and a large net negative for the Providence Park," Hartnett said. "That makes it very clear we are taking funds from the east side venues and spending them on the west side venue."

Ending the Timbers' license and ticket tax payments as planned will make it more challenging to pay the stadium's debt, which the city has paid using largely revenues from the Rose Quarter, Hartnett said.

"Beginning next year...it gets pretty ugly, pretty fast," Hartnett said.

Hartnett declined to comment on the Timbers' proposed tax exemption on its expansion because the soccer stadium operator and the city are still in negotiations, she said.

Although the City Council will consider a resolution supporting the Timbers' proposal, including a 10-year ticket tax break, a detailed contract laying out terms for the expansion has not yet been drawn. Once negotiations come to a close, the deal will go before the City Council for approval, Cox said.

# **The Portland Tribune**

## **City Hall Watch: Wheeler wants rioters punished**

*By Jim Redden*

*May 9, 2017*

After last week's May Day riot, Mayor Ted Wheeler called on the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office to pursue stiffer penalties for protesters who repeatedly break the law during demonstrations.

Twenty-five people were arrested by police on Monday after downtown businesses and other property was vandalized, including the Target store in the historic Galleria Building, where a lit traffic flare was thrown in after the windows were broken.

Many protesters arrested after previous demonstrations turn violent are released without facing any charges or sentenced to community service for minor offenses, something Wheeler wants to end.

### **Gang violence continues decline**

Gang violence continues to fall in Portland, despite staffing problems at the Portland Police Bureau that has reduced the size of the Gang Enforcement Team.

According to the most recent statistics, GET investigated 29 incidents of gang violence through the end of April. That's a sharp drop from last year, when 61 incidents had been investigated by then. That's the lowest number since the 22 incidents investigated by the end of April 2013.

After peaking at an official 193 incidents in all of 2015, the total fell to 159 last year, with a sharp drop from 23 in November to just nine in December. That drop now has turned into a welcome trend.

### **Mayor's budget praised, criticized**

Although Mayor Ted Wheeler's first proposed budget was well received within City Hall, not everyone is thrilled with all of it.

Commissioner Nick Fish said Wheeler had many conversations with the other City Council members before releasing the proposed budget and it reflects their shared values.

But Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury thinks he should have recommended more than \$25 million for the city-county Joint Office on Homeless Services. Supporters of the Portland Police Bureau's Mounted Horse Patrol are disappointed he wants to eliminate the unit to save \$1 million. And Maurice Rahming, a member of the Commission on Equitable Contracting and Purchasing, questions a proposal to merge it with the Fair Contracting Forum in the Office of Management and Finance to save \$25,000 a year.

Budget hearings are set for May 11 and 17 at City Hall. The council is scheduled to adopt the budget June 8. It takes effect July 1.

**OPB**

## **Portland Considers 'Biketown' Expansion**

*By Rob Manning*

*May 8, 2017*

Portland's Biketown program drew criticism last summer when it concentrated the orange bike check-out stations downtown and in neighborhoods close to the Willamette River on the east side.

Now, city officials are looking to expand the bike share program less than a year after it launched.

The [proposed expansion](#) seeks to improve access to destination corridors like Northeast Alberta, as well as a smaller expansion east of Southeast Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard near SE Belmont and Hawthorne.

In Northeast, the Portland Bureau of Transportation would allow bike corrals on NE Alberta from around NE 10th Avenue east to NE 33rd to include Biketown bikes. Such "hybrid" stations, which allow both private and city-owned bikes, would be provided at intersections on NE Fremont, NE Prescott and NE Killingsworth.

City transportation officials would also expand in two parts of North Portland: the Overlook neighborhood and the new "satellite" area on Swan Island.

Transportation officials would also test so-called "super hubs," where cyclists can park at any bike rack without paying extra. One would be at Portland State University; the other would be in the Central Eastside Industrial Area.

Bike-friendly Portland [launched its own bike share after many other cities](#). Portland had some difficulties finding the right combination of contractors and financial backers. It launched in July 2016 after getting a major investment from Washington County-based apparel giant, Nike.

Transportation officials say they are impressed with Biketown's ridership numbers, especially in dry weather.

The city has opened an [online survey](#) and is accepting public comment through next week.