

The Oregonian

Public agencies shouldn't hide behind feel-good words (Guest opinion)

By Carl Abbott

May 26, 2017

The Portland Development Commission, a public agency whose name has lasted since 1958, is renaming itself "Prosper Portland." This is one more example of a perplexing trend. Public agencies in Oregon have been going stealth by adopting new names that mask their basic character.

Once we had an Oregon Department of Economic Development. Now we have "Business Oregon." It used to be clear that it was part of state government. Now it is easy to confuse with the private Oregon Business Council, which I assume is the reason for the name change.

Once we had a Housing Authority of Portland. Now we have "Home Forward," a name that doesn't conjure much of anything in the way of an image.

And now comes PDC turning itself into "Prosper Portland." I've been trying to figure out the grammatical implications. Is this an imperative statement that commands Portland to move forward: "Prosper Portland! Or else!" Get your act together and get moving. Or is it a fragment of a larger phrase like "Prosper Portland Style," which makes someone of my age think of the classic cinema comedy "Marriage Italian Style" starring the incomparable Sophia Loren?

Seriously, the pattern here is disturbing. What is lost in the name change is any acknowledgment that these organizations are parts of the apparatus of democratic government. Gone are "administration," "commission" and "department." Public agencies are hiding behind feel-good words like "progress" and "home" and trying to avoid the nation's testy anti-government mood.

I admit that the trend goes way back, and not just in Oregon. The United States had a War Department for 158 years, starting with the administration of George Washington, before it became part of a less belligerent sounding Defense Department in 1949.

Words matter, nevertheless, especially when certain people in Washington, D.C., resemble a character from Alice in Wonderland: "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less."

I believe deeply in the public good. Our most important institutions are public schools and public libraries and public parks. When we are thinking straight, we elect public servants. I spent my career in public universities because that's where the educational action is to be found, teaching for many years at Portland State University in which is now the College of Urban and Public Affairs.

I fear more obfuscation. Maybe the Oregon Department of Agriculture will become "Seed Oregon" and the Forestry Department will become "Saw Oregon." Will TriMet (really the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District) become "Seat Forward?"

The agencies and departments and commissions that do the tasks of government that we have set for them are community builders and nation builders. That is proud work, not work to be hidden with vague, squishy rebranding.

The Portland Tribune

City working to put more parks bond money in play

By Lyndsey Hewitt

May 25, 2017

Among the many things there are to love about Portland, residents certainly cherish the many city parks.

The bureau tends to 11,712 acres of land, or about 14 percent of the geographic area within Portland. Within that acreage, the Portland Parks & Recreation staff care operate 13 swimming pools, 11 community centers, three music and dance centers, six golf courses and one motor raceway.

Over time, some parks, pools and other structures become dilapidated through public use. The city hit a critical point with needed park repairs a few years ago, and Band-Aid fixes were no longer cutting it. Some play areas were closed or at risk of closing due to poor equipment and problems, including lead paint; other areas lacked access for disabled people. To address some of these issues, Portland voters approved Measure 26, the parks replacement bond in 2014.

Now the city is getting around to figuring out how to spend the final \$20 million remaining from that \$68 million bond, which replaced a similar bond from 1994 that expired in 2015.

Use of the bond money was broken into two phases, with the first phase of \$48 million in spending focusing on projects that were "immediate safety concerns," says Maija Spencer, who oversees the bond projects.

Phase two of bond projects recently was approved by the Parks Budget Advisory Committee, a group that helps guide use of the bond money. The City Council will look to approve the final list in June and authorize the second round of cash — \$20 million.

While the money is helpful, the parks bureau estimates a \$258 million funding gap for major maintenance needs and a \$480 million gap in unfunded growth needs, resulting in a total \$738 million funding gap over the next 10 years.

The bond, which only funds improvements and not new projects, is addressing the needs of 31 out of 797 of what the bureau deems as the most urgent capital improvement projects.

"There are particular areas like outer East Portland that are still waiting for growth and things built in their communities," Spencer says.

For use of the bond money, the bureau prioritized projects that would reduce costs down the road, and boost energy efficiency. Bond language specified fixing playgrounds and trails, while improving park facilities, safety and accessibility.

According to the bureau, there are more than 30 projects underway from the first phase, while five projects have been completed.

Projects are broken up into types, including playgrounds (\$9.7 million spent on seven playgrounds), trails and bridges (\$3.7 million), pools (\$3 million), accessibility, such as Americans with Disability Act improvements (\$2.3 million), restrooms and other repairs (\$8.9 million), protecting parks bureau workers (\$10 million), and Pioneer Courthouse Square, the city's most visited park (\$10 million).

What's actually finished?

The few projects from the replacement bond completed so far include pool and restroom facilities.

Resorting to temporary fixes for years, "the conditions deteriorated to the point where temporary measures were no longer feasible," according to parks spokesman Mark Ross. So they tackled Grant Pool, the first bond project, completed in July 2016. Without the bond money, the pool would have been shuttered entirely, causing the roughly 80,000 users each summer season to find another place to go. It has the highest attendance of Portland Parks & Recreation's outdoor pools.

"Closing Grant Pool would have displaced many casual users, swimming lessons students and swim teams to already-crowded pools and create a loss in revenue for aquatics," Ross says. The pool was still using mechanical systems from the 1920s and '40s, including plumbing, pumps and filters, while work also addressed lack of wheelchair access.

Another completed project is improvements to the Matt Dishman Pool and Spas. The spa was leaking 1,000 gallons of water per day and used five old sand filters that were replaced to save energy.

Other completed projects include the Sellwood Bathhouse roof, two new restrooms to replace porta-potties at Wilkes Park at Northeast 154th Avenue and Parklane Park at Southeast 155th Avenue and Main Street.

The bureau has determined that vandalism is not as prevalent in permanent restrooms, nor do they have to pay a contractor to service them — and they're wheelchair-accessible.

Under construction

Five projects currently are under construction from phase one, including improvements at Pioneer Courthouse Square, Washington Park Rose Garden, Lents Park playground, Colonel Summers Park, and renovations to Mount Tabor Park summit restrooms.

Pioneer Courthouse Square construction is expected to be completed by July 27. With 10 million visitors a year, it's one of Oregon's most visited public sites. Starting in January, construction is addressing the deteriorating bricks that make up the plaza, cracks and other structural failures.

Meanwhile, anyone venturing up to the International Rose Test Garden in Washington Park has likely noticed construction right in the middle of the garden. It's been in dire need of better access for people in wheelchairs, using strollers or walkers.

The garden gets thousands of visitors each season, and users with limited mobility had a tough time getting down to the heart of the garden, previously only accessible by stairs.

"It was kind of embarrassing to watch. This is one of our top destinations in the city, and yet three stairs on either side of the fountain stop getting some people into the heart of the garden," Spencer says.

Lents Park also is seeing a plethora of improvements, including demolition of its old playground to make way for a new one. The playground is closed until the fall.

"Lents is really a neighborhood that feels as though they haven't gotten support from the community over the years," she says, "I think it's really going to make a difference."

"I know several families who are watching the renovations closely," says Judy Low, president of the Lents Neighborhood Association. The overall Lents Park has been a hangout for homeless people in tents and cars for a number of years. Low is hoping improvements might change the way the park is perceived and used.

"Because of the renovations, we are hopeful that the disruptive (people) who used to hang out at the end of the park will relocate," she says. Low applauded the design, calling it "very forward thinking."

"It's building-appropriate, so people with disabilities can use the park. I think it will attract more kids and families," she says.

Playgrounds were a big point of discussion during outreach for the second phase of the bond.

"We said in the original language to voters that we'd do between 10 and 20 playgrounds, and we did seven. So we know we need to do at least three more," Spencer says.

In phase two of the parks bond, proposed playground projects include playgrounds at Gilbert Primary Park in East Portland, where there is still equipment from 1966, Gabriel Park in Southwest Portland, which is listed as having "no accessibility," and Glenhaven Park in Northeast Portland, where there's old equipment that contains lead.

Going forward

Other projects include replacement of trail bridges on the Springwater Corridor, Marshall Park and Foley-Balmer Natural Area; upgrades at Peninsula Outdoor Pool; accessibility issues at Multnomah Arts Center and Mount Tabor Park; and a number of roof replacements.

"The biggest challenge right now is that we're operating in a really healthy economy, but contractors are really busy," says Spencer. As a result, many contractors aren't bidding on their projects.

"The private sector is so busy right now, some of those things are just taking a little bit longer than a year or two. ... It just makes it challenging to get the interest. There's construction happening everywhere," she says. That causes lower bid rates especially on "smaller-scale projects like roof projects, that aren't as exciting," Spencer says.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees the parks bureau, will make an announcement on the phase two projects in mid-June and then the list will go to City Council later that month, with release of the money by July for the new projects.

Projects from the 2014 bond are all expected to be completed by 2020.

Completed bond projects

- Grant Pool
- Matt Dishman Pool and Spa
- Wilkes Park loo
- Parklane Park loo
- Sellwood Bathhouse roof

Under construction

- Pioneer Courthouse Square

- Washington Park Rose Garden
- Lents Park playground
- Colonel Summers loo and splash pad
- Mount Tabor Park summit restroom renovations

Future projects

- North Park Blocks playground
- Ventura Park playground
- Forest Park bridges (on Lower Macleay, Maple and Wildwood trails)
- Rieke soccer field
- Argay Park tennis courts
- Bloomington Park restroom renovation
- Glenwood Park restroom renovation

Residents challenge missing-middle plan

By Jim Redden

May 25, 2017

Southwest Portland residents are challenging the City Council's plan to increase density in single-family neighborhoods at the state agency that must approve it.

The Multnomah Neighborhood Association has filed two objections to the Comprehensive Plan update approved by the council last year with the state Department of Land Conservation and Development.

One 20-page objection claims the council violated public involvement policies when it included a so-called missing-middle housing policy in the update. The policy seeks to rezone most single-family neighborhoods to allow the construction of smaller multifamily housing projects, including duplexes, triplexes, cottage clusters, multiple accessory dwelling units, and small apartment buildings.

Council members said the policy will increase the supply and types of available housing in Portland. But Eben Fodor, the Eugene land-use consultant retained by the association, says both the process and rationale were flawed.

"The policy was introduced very late in the process without enough public notification for anyone to realize that two-thirds of single-family neighborhoods would be rezoned. There was no analysis to prove the new housing would be affordable, which was a stated goal of the policy," Fodor says.

A second 22-page objection challenges the public involvement process leading up to the council's decision to designate the small Multnomah Village commercial district in Southwest Portland as a Neighborhood Corridor instead of a Neighborhood Center. According to Fodor, nearby residents had been repeatedly assured by the staff of the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability working on the update that the new designation would not substantially increase redevelopment in the area.

But, Fodor says, a map released after the change showed that, when coupled with the missing-middle policy, much of the area had been designated for higher densities.

The association is asking that the DLCD not approve the two changes and instead send them back to the council for a greater public involvement process. Citizen involvement is the first of the 19 statewide planning goals that state-required land-use plans must comply with.

"There needs to be an adequate public involvement process based on quality information that is balanced, neutral and objective," Fodor says.

But Eric Engstrom, a project manager with the planning and sustainability bureau, says the city is confident the public involvement process in the comp plan update meets state requirements.

"There were hundreds of neighborhood and stakeholder meetings, and we received thousands of pages of public comments, all of which are in the record," Engstrom says.

Engstrom also says the fact that the council added a late policy is part of the process, not a violation of it.

"The council holds hearings and takes testimony and reacts to that. It took testimony on missing-middle housing and decided to add a policy," says Engstrom, who adds the bureau is still reviewing the objections submitted to the DLCD.

Several other objections also were filed by the May 19 deadline, including one from the Multnomah Neighborhood Association criticizing the citizen participation process that was not prepared by a consultant. Others concerned the process and proposed changes for the the Beaumont Business District, the West End and a number of individual properties.

The DLCD will determine if the objections meet minimum legal standards before considering their merits. Portland has waived the 120-day deadline for filing objections because of the complexity of the update.

Any objection not upheld by DLCD can be appealed to the appointed Land Conservation and Development Commission that oversees it. The LCDC's decisions can be appealed to the Oregon Court of Appeals and Oregon Supreme Court by either side.

A previous objection to an earlier portion of the update submitted by the city was rejected by the DLCD. Multnomah Neighborhood Association Land Use Chair James Peterson challenged the adequacy of the city's index of the record, growth projections, housing capacity in Multnomah Village and household size trends.

The missing-middle housing objection is complicated by the ongoing work of the Residential Infill Project. It was created by former Mayor Charlie Hales in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability before the comp plan update was approved.

Project staff currently are drafting changes to the City Code to implement the missing-middle policy. But Fodor says the policy has not yet been approved by the state and may not be.

"Work on the project has gotten way out ahead of itself," he says.

The 2017 Oregon Legislature currently is considering a bill to allow missing-middle housing in single-family neighborhoods in many parts of the state.

An informational hearing on House Bill 2007 is scheduled for today, May 25, before the House Committee on Human Services and House. Opponents are unhappy because only 10 invited witnesses will be allowed to testify, and just one of them is known to be against the bill.

It is unclear how passage of House Bill 2007 would affect the Comp Plan challenges. The bill is currently in the Ways and Means Committee.

Find out more

- Read a recent Portland Tribune story about the bill at: tinyurl.com/m8om3ks.
- Find out more about the land-use planning process at: tinyurl.com/mcfyz6l.
- Learn more about the legal challenges at: tinyurl.com/m4jwbep.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Portland development fees scheduled to rise

By Chuck Slothower

May 25, 2017

Development fees for the Portland Bureau of Transportation are due to rise July 1.

A range of fees will be hiked as part of the city's 2017-18 budget.

Developers have long complained the city's fees contribute to the rising cost of housing in Portland. City agencies such as the Bureau of Development Services and Bureau of Transportation are largely funded by user fees.

"We try to keep our fees as low as possible," said Dylan Rivera, a spokesman for PBOT. "They only cover PBOT's cost of administering the program. This is the lowest increase in fees in the last five years."

Fees are set to increase for a wide range of reviews that are required of new developments. For example, a Type IIX development review – a common procedure for new proposals – will cost \$1,617, up from \$1,551 – a 4.3 percent increase.

A review of a new type III master plan, or a major amendment to one, will rise to \$13,351, up from \$12,801 – also a 4.3 percent increase.

The fee for a pre-application conference would rise 4.2 percent to \$1,150, up from \$1,104. An early assistance meeting would cost \$632, up from \$608. That's a 3.9 percent increase.

The City Council approved the fee increases Wednesday.