

The Oregonian

Mayor wants to bring self-driving vehicles to Portland

By Elliot Njus

April 19, 2017

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler declared the city "open for business" to companies developing autonomous vehicles.

Wheeler and Transportation Commissioner Dan Saltzman directed the transportation bureau to draft policies for autonomous vehicles that would give developers a path to apply for permits to test them within the city, including on open, public roads.

Wheeler, speaking before the Portland Business Alliance, said the framework to create a "fair and level playing field" for autonomous vehicle companies.

"We can't simply dismiss the idea that autonomous vehicles are going to be a big part of our transportation system," Wheeler said. "Instead of waiting for this new technology to come here and have us confront it, the responsible thing to do is to prepare for this future."

He said getting ahead of the issue would help Portland shape the technology to suit the needs of the city and its residents.

Wheeler said companies wishing to test their vehicles in Portland, whether on closed courses or on public roads, would have to demonstrate that the vehicles are safe. Transportation bureau staff said they would likely hew closely to guidelines released last year by the federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Leah Treat, the transportation bureau director, said the city would aim to craft policies that would reduce congestion, vehicles-miles traveled and pollution, largely by prioritizing shared fleets over privately-owned vehicles.

"If we simply replace all of the cars on the road with driverless cars, we're not going to be any better off today," she said.

Wheeler has previously expressed enthusiasm for embracing self-driving vehicles. He said in a March city council meeting that he would like to see the city conduct a pilot focused on autonomous vehicles.

"We're all warming up for a race, but we don't know what the race is yet," he said at the earlier meeting. "We don't know what the trajectory of autonomous or linked vehicles will be and we don't have a clear understanding on what that means in terms of infrastructure and policy. But we know it's coming."

In his former role as deputy director for the transportation bureau, Wheeler chief of staff Maurice Henderson coordinated the city's bid to win the U.S. Department of Transportation's Smart City Challenge, a competition for \$50 million to implement technologies that included autonomous and wirelessly connected vehicles. Columbus, Ohio, eventually won the competition.

Others on the City Council are skeptical. In the same city council meeting, Commissioner Amanda Fritz questioned whether the city should embrace self-driving cars.

"I think we need to take a step back," she said. "I'm concerned about a future where people go from morning to night not talking to anybody. You call yourself an autonomous vehicle, you go by yourself to pick up the groceries that have been collected for you. ... Is this something that we want?"

Autonomous vehicles are already on the streets in some states that have explicitly legalized testing.

Legacy carmakers are making major pushes into self-driving technology, including testing on contained course and road tests.

They're also competing with Silicon Valley. Companies like Google's Waymo and Uber have made headway -- and headlines -- by testing their self-driving vehicles in public. Tesla, too, is testing fully automated vehicles, and it's made its "Autopilot" adaptive cruise control available to customers.

Portland-based Daimler Trucks North America is also testing self-driving semi trucks in Nevada.

Carmakers say the hardware necessary for self-driving cars is available today; it's the software that needs to catch up, primarily by putting their cars through millions of miles of road tests.

They've have pushed for a national framework of laws, hoping to avoid dealing with a patchwork of regulations that might force self-driving cars to turn the wheel over to a human at some state borders.

The Obama administration was bullish on self-driving cars, and its National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released guidelines last year intended to help foster the industry while strictly regulating it for safety.

The Trump administration's transportation secretary, Elaine Chao, [said she was reviewing those guidelines](#), but said self-driving cars could dramatically improve traffic safety.

Wheeler and Saltzman testified earlier this year against a bill that would have ordered the state transportation department to regulate autonomous vehicles. They said the bill would override city authority and prematurely authorize the widespread use of automated vehicles.

But the city has previously sought grant money to pursue pilots related to self-driving cars. It's offered Portland International Raceway as a test track, and it's proposed self-driving circulating shuttles to supplement existing transit service in parts of the city.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Just Clunking Along

By Dirk VanderHart

April 19, 2017

In this divided age of demonstrator versus riot cop and sharp outcry over officer-involved shootings, there appears to be one thing everyone can get behind (besides hating Pepsi, I mean): the fact that the bewildering, dispiriting labyrinth that Portland calls a police oversight system needs big changes.

The process needs to be restructured so that citizens aren't put off by filing a complaint, or by the crazy-straw route that the complaint takes through the system, or by the interminable process of appealing its outcome.

It needs to be streamlined so that everyone can easily grasp our plan for holding officers accountable. Both the public and powerful city officials are at present often befuddled by its specifics.

And for the love of god, it could use changes that make it so discussions about the subject don't give Commissioner Dan Saltzman a serious case of the sleepies, which he plainly suffered from during a city council hearing on police oversight last week.

"Our system is hard to explain and harder to navigate," City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero said at that hearing. "The US Department of Justice has called it 'byzantine.'"

Now for the bad news: There's absolutely no indication we'll get to meaty reforms anytime soon.

Because while anyone will nod emphatically when you ask whether Portland could do better on police oversight, there is sharp disagreement—and the unyielding heft of a powerful police union—blocking the path to serious change.

The latest proof lies in a series of code changes [\[PDF\]](#) the city's Independent Police Review (IPR) brought before council last week, slated to come up for a vote this Wednesday, April 19.

This was a long-anticipated piece of legislation, in the works for years and designed, in part, to help the city comply with an ongoing settlement with the US Department of Justice. But in its present form, it amounts to only the barest wisp of actual change.

The meatiest tweak, which Portland City Council appears primed to pass, would create a system where minor complaints are forwarded to a cop's supervisor rather than being formally investigated by IPR or the Portland Police Bureau's Internal Affairs Unit. That should free up precious staff time to investigate more serious allegations, which is a good thing.

The changes would also ensure that IPR is informed if cops are accused of committing crimes, and bolster the office's power to request that police investigate an officer's use of deadly force.

These are fine suggestions, but tiny steps in the right direction. Meanwhile, a host of major (and highly controversial) reforms the Auditor's Office proposed last year has given way before public outcry and officials' concerns. Other long-sought changes—such as giving IPR investigators the power to actually force an officer to speak to them—are held at bay by the cops' union.

So here we are, making small changes by consensus.

That, you might have heard, is the much-vaunted "Portland Way." And, right now, it's ensuring that our police oversight system—a vital piece of civic machinery—is merely clunking along.

In Other News

By Mercury Staff
April 19, 2017

MAYOR TED WHEELER just experienced a rite of passage: his first-ever complaint from a police union.

On Friday, the Portland Police Commanding Officers Association (PPCOA) [publicly accused](#) Wheeler and his chief spokesperson, Michael Cox, of divulging secret information to the public.

The PPCOA says Wheeler's office broke city rules when it released an initial findings memo about Police Chief Mike Marshman penned by the city's human resources director—a document that specifically describes the information as "confidential."

The mayor released the memo along with his announcement that Marshman was being reinstated atop the police bureau. The chief was placed on leave in March, amid allegations he'd had his assistant, Lieutenant Mike Leasure, sign Marshman into a training session he never attended. Kanwit's memo said that Leasure had initially claimed that was the case, but later recanted.

The problem, in the union's mind, is that Leasure's conduct is still under investigation. The union says details of potential employee discipline needed to remain confidential.

The release, then, displayed "a shocking disregard for the due process right of a city employee," the PPCOA says. It asked Wheeler's office to apologize. Wheeler refused.

"The Mayor's office determined that the public interest required the release of this information to ensure transparency," Cox said last week. DIRK VANDERHART

IN A STAUNCH reversal, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners has decided to defend strong new campaign finance limits overwhelmingly approved by voters in November.

The reforms, put into place by last year's Measure 26-184, are potentially at odds with a 1997 Oregon Supreme Court ruling that found limiting campaign contributions unconstitutional.

County commissioners, [in a rare move](#), are petitioning the Oregon courts to validate the measure's constitutionality before it goes into effect, stating in a press release that "contributions that create unfair or unequal access in politics and the skyrocketing cost of elections are having a corrosive effect on our democracy."

But the county also originally stated it wouldn't defend the reforms, arguing neutrality would allow the courts to clear up any claims of unconstitutionality.

Supporters of campaign finance limits were outraged, and let it be known. After public outcry, the county backpedaled and announced it would be defending the measure in court.

"The Board agrees with the voters: It is time to take action," an updated press release says. CLAIRE HOLLEY

LLOYD DISTRICT businesses are dropping hints they'll oppose the relocation of respected homeless rest area Right 2 Dream Too into their neighborhood.

The Lloyd District Community Association (LDCA) told the Mercury last week it was caught off guard by the recent announcement from Mayor Ted Wheeler that R2DToo would move to a plot of city land just west of the Moda Center.

Not only were they not contacted, LDCA members say, they [worry for campers' safety](#).

"The distance to social services requires travel and the area's confluence of transit routes (bus and rail) may pose unnecessary safety risks," the group said in a statement. "There is also a safety concern with the site's proximity to the busy Union Pacific main line, just down the bluff."

Such "safety" concerns are nothing new for neighborhoods looking to block homeless camps, of course. It remains to be seen if the LDCA's remarks will find any purchase among officials keen on getting R2DToo moved to its proposed home by June. DVH

PORTLAND CITY COUNCIL'S newest members came in under the wire Monday, just beating the city-imposed deadline for posting their official calendars from January through March.

While most council members post their calendars week by week, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly and Mayor Ted Wheeler had been on more relaxed schedules.

Eudaly didn't post a single calendar to the web until minutes before Monday's 5 pm filing deadline—set by city rules dictating the records must be posted 15 days after the end of each calendar quarter. That's perfectly legit under city code, but doesn't offer the real-time glimpses into Eudaly's schedule that's been status quo for many offices.

Wheeler, meanwhile, had been posting his calendar regularly, but stopped in early March. According to spokesperson Michael Cox, that's because the staffer managing the calendar has been on leave since March 10. Wheeler's office, too, posted the required information by deadline. Most delightfully, it reveals that Wheeler accepted an award for Person of the Year from Dope magazine.

Not everyone complied. The directors of seven city bureaus didn't meet the deadline for sharing their full calendars through March. DVH

THE RECENT STREAK of Portland property developers offering up in-progress buildings as homeless shelters continues.

Two developers—Beam Development and Urban Development Partners—have given officials permission to establish a 100-person temporary shelter at the Shleifer Furniture Company building, near Southeast Grand and Stark.

The new shelter doesn't represent additional beds. It replaces a shelter at Southwest 4th and Washington that closed last week. That building was also supplied on a temporary basis by local developers.

Beam and Urban Development Partners plan to turn the Shleifer building into a hotel, and will allow its use as a shelter until fall, according to a release from the county.

Beam's leadership has stifled efforts to ease homelessness in the past. Principal Brad Malsin last year played a role in stopping R2DToo from moving to the Central Eastside. DVH

By The Way: Mayor Ted Wheeler Is Dope Magazine's Oregon "Person of the Year"

*By Dirk VanderHart
April 18, 2017*

Mayor Ted Wheeler [posted his official calendar](#) for the month of March on Monday.

That's a good and proper thing. By getting his entire first-quarter (January through March) calendar up for public inspection, Wheeler complied with [city rules](#) requiring all elected officials and bureau directors do so by 15 days following the end of the quarter (April 15 fell on a Saturday, so the deadline this year was 5 pm on April 17).

It's also a good thing because, were it not for Wheeler's calendar, we might not know that the mayor was named Dope Magazine's Oregon Person of the Year in February, and even had a brief ceremony around the honor.

That's right! The newly posted calendar details reveal that on Friday, March 10, the mayor spent 15 minutes formally accepting the magazine's Person of the Year honors in a conference room at his office. Wheeler had evidently missed the [February 26 Dope Industry Awards bash](#) at the Leftbank Annex.

Reasons behind the nomination, let alone the win, aren't entirely clear (we've reached out to Dope for some context), but the mayor's office notes that Wheeler is no stranger to pot issues.

"The Mayor took up [banking for cannabis businesses](#) as Treasurer and Portland regulatory reform during the campaign," says his chief spokesperson Michael Cox. "That may help explain it."

While Wheeler has indeed advocated allowing cannabis businesses to use banks, and suggested scaling back Portland's [strict pot regulations](#), neither of those have come to pass. Wheeler hasn't put forward new regulations for local pot businesses, something [that's been discussed since well before he took office](#), and which has been advocated by US Rep. Earl Blumenauer.

Speaking of Blumenauer, the indefatigable pot legalization advocate also took home an award from Dope this year.

Daily Journal of Commerce

So many projects, too little time

By Kent Hohlfeld

April 17, 2017

Explosive growth in Portland has brought with it numerous challenges. One is management of the pace of projects' movement through the city's often glacial design review process. A team working on a project planned within a design overlay zone that requires a Type III review can find itself in a laborious process before any shovel gets into the ground.

"If I have a client that has gone through the process, they know what to expect," said Leslie Cliffe, an associate principal at Bora Architects. "If I have an out-of-state developer, in those cases, they are super surprised at the level of input the city gets."

Even in normal times, the process can be slow. These are not normal times for development in Portland.

"Prior to the 2008 recession was the first wave of hyper-development," Portland Design Commission Chairman David Wark said. "The last three years, it's just gotten busier and busier."

The Design Commission's job is to make sure that proposals for new construction and modifications to existing structures meet the city's design guidelines. They apply to approximately 5 percent of the city, but some of its most prime real estate.

In hopes of accelerating the process, the commission, consisting of seven volunteers, has increased its workload from meetings twice a month to at least three times a month. Each meeting consists of four or more hearings, which last between one and three hours, depending on the size of the project. The meetings start at 1:30 p.m. and can last well into the night.

"It's a minor celebration if we are done by 7:30," Wark said. "We try to get them done (by then), but often we go past that."

It's a far cry from five years ago.

"During that recession, sometimes we didn't have a commission meeting because there weren't any projects," Wark said. "We came out of that around 2012 and 2013."

That recovery has resulted in a building boom, and the city has strained to keep pace.

“We have hired seven new employees since August 2015,” said Kara Fioravanti, supervising planner with Bureau of Development Services. “It is a significantly bigger boom than any I have experienced in my 20 years here.”

According to state law, a project has to navigate the review process within 120 days of submittal. A project’s first hearing has to take place within 51 days of submittal. But architects can sign waivers releasing the city from the state obligation.

“Every project gets a 120-day waiver,” Cliffe said. “We always sign the waiver.”

By signing the waiver, architects can return before the Design Commission if it denies a project proposal at its first appearance. The waiver also protects appeal rights.

If architects don’t sign the waiver, they can’t provide new or changed information later in the process. Also, if the project were denied, the team would have to start the process over.

Fees for the review process are dependent on a project’s size and range from a minimum of \$5,250 to a maximum of \$27,000.

“We hit that 51-day mark pretty regularly,” Fioravanti said. “The waiver just allows them to come back. It’s when the applicant chooses to come back for another hearing. That is when the timeline gets extended. They aren’t signing the waivers because the commission is too busy.”

The problem is that few projects receive approval on the first try. Of the seven projects scheduled for a full review by the end of May, four were on at least their second trip before the Design Commission.

None of that includes the time and money spent on a design advice request (DAR). The Design Commission advises architects and developers to seek a DAR, which costs an additional \$2,520, before the review hearing. During the DAR hearing, the commission informs a project team of aspects that could pose problems meeting the guidelines. This hearing takes place early enough in the process so that changes can be made without incurring large costs for developers.

While most architects seek a DAR hearing, scheduling can cause problems. Developers usually have a strict timeline. A long wait for a hearing can force contractors to delay when they seek bids for construction services.

“I had a project that it was going to be 11 weeks before they could schedule a DAR,” Cliffe said. “It required me to eliminate design advice because it would shift the hearing into the construction document phase.”

Commissioner Tad Savinar said that applicants can look to their colleagues for tips on navigating the process quickly.

“We have a lot of firms that get through on one DAR and one hearing,” he said. “Why are those groups getting through? There is a host of things that the applicant can do to improve their performance within this hearing.”

The city is trying to address developers’ issues. The number of staffers devoted to producing reports and making recommendations to both the Design Commission and the Historic Landmarks Commission has increased by seven since August 2015.

Also, in 2016 the Design Commission published “A Guide to the City of Portland Design Review Process” to serve as a best practices document for area developers and architects.

Project teams also can help accelerate the process, Wark said.

“The biggest thing that helps is if applicants are more responsive to the guidelines,” he said. “That way we don’t have the same project coming in time after time and taking up the spot of another project.”

Some architects are taking the advice to heart. More projects are gaining approval on their first hearing. Hacker’s recent Ladd’s Addition project received approval at its first hearing and won commissioners’ praise for meeting guidelines.

On the other end of the spectrum is developer Landon Crowell’s Ankeny Apartments. The project appeared before the Design Commission five times before denial was granted and an appeal was made to the City Council.

The delay, now several months, has cost Crowell and his investors nearly \$120,000, he said. Crowell and Yost Grube Hall Architecture, for their initial proposal, decided to rely on information from a pre-application meeting instead of a full DAR.

“Our idea was to have the superstructure in place by March (2017),” Crowell said. “You are always trying to get six or seven people to agree. Then they switch in the middle of the discussion or discuss things that aren’t in the guidelines.”

Keeping meetings on point and strictly focused on the guidelines is a major suggestion of the Design Overlay Zone Assessment (DOZA), which is intended to streamline the development review process.

Suggestions in the final DOZA report included imposing new thresholds of when projects would have to go through the full review process. Smaller projects would go through Type II reviews requiring only staff approval.

The report also suggested revising community design guidelines and narrowing the focus. That suggestion met with Wark’s approval.

“We need to simplify the design guidelines with the same level of flexibility,” he said. “The biggest things to aid the process are the design guidelines need to be updated and the community standards need to be updated.”

The report also suggested looking at adding a commission for areas outside of the Central City. That proposal got a mixed reaction.

“It sounds like a good idea, but then you get into all kinds of specifics,” Wark said. “How do you find seven qualified people consistently? How is it set up? We’re open to something refined.”

It could also affect the way that city staff does its job. Currently, the BDS staff manages cases seen by both the design and landmarks commissions.

“It’s a lot of work,” Fioravanti said. “It would be managing with seven more people and would be very important to coordinate among the two commissions.”

Stephanie Fitzhugh, a project manager at DiLoreto Architecture, said that long waits to appear before the city’s commissions are adding to delays and increased project costs.

“Everybody is feeling it; everyone is frustrated,” she said. “Basically, it comes down to: Does the city really want to prevent people from building their projects?”

The Portland Business Journal

Portland plan: Turn waste into clean fuel

By Pete Danko

April 18, 2017

Portland will turn methane produced at a wastewater treatment plant into marketable renewable natural gas — and use it to fuel city vehicles — under a plan proposed by the Bureau of Environmental Services.

The \$12 million proposal, in the works for years, is scheduled to come before the City Council on Wednesday.

[Janice Thompson](#), who tracks Portland's public water and wastewater utilities for the Citizens' Utility Board, said the proposal pencils out for the city, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

“Our analysis emphasizes economics and we've urged careful assessment of the payback periods,” Thompson said. “BES has done their homework and city of Portland customers will benefit because BES will make money from this project on a quite reasonable payback period.”

In its own analysis, the city said that “at the current market prices for RNG ... the gross revenue to BES would be \$3 million to \$10 million a year, and the payback would be less than three years.”

The city already takes advantage of all but 23 percent of the 600 million cubic feet of biogas produced by anaerobic digesters at the Columbia Boulevard Waste Treatment Plant. Some is used onsite for heat and to produce electricity, and some is sold to Malarkey Roofing Co. for use in their manufacturing process.

The last portion is flared off, transforming the methane into carbon dioxide, a less-potent greenhouse gas, but still a climate no-no.

Under the plan from BES Commissioner [Nick Fish](#), the waste gas would instead be upgraded to natural gas quality. BES believes the facility needed to do that [will cost \\$9 million](#), but a solicitation process will determine the final price tag.

The city would also spend [just over \\$1 million](#) for an interconnection agreement with Northwest Natural to move renewable natural gas “to the out-of-state market, as well as in-state and local markets, for distribution and sales.”

According to the proposal, the city has partnered with Clean Energy Renewables, through a request for proposals, to act as the off-taker for the renewable natural gas.

While most of the gas will go into the natural gas pipeline, BES wants to use a portion of it to fuel city-owned CNG vehicles as well as contractor and privately owned vehicles that go in and out of the treatment plant.

To make that happen, the city proposes [spending about \\$1.9 million](#) for a compressed natural gas fueling station, to be built by Northwest Natural at the treatment plant.

“The advantages for direct use of RNG are higher financial benefits (from higher price offset for diesel compared to commodity price) and the social and environmental benefits can be kept locally,” a city analysis said.