

The Oregonian

Portland's former 911 director who gave false data to council still employed by city at high pay

By Jessica Floum

June 7, 2017

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler called inaccurate reporting of 911 call hold times to the City Council and the public a "failure of leadership" Wednesday. Yet the city still employs the leader responsible for the false reports.

Former 911 director Lisa Turley, who gave the City Council overly rosy statistics as recently as March despite knowing they were wrong, retired from that post on March 31. But the city is still paying her to advise it on creating a non-emergency 311 call system.

City officials did not say Wednesday how much they are paying Turley, but Jen Clodius, spokeswoman for Wheeler's Office of Management and Finance, characterized Turley's new role as a highly paid analyst.

A city salary schedule suggests Turley could make as much as \$40,000 for three months of work.

Clodius said her bureau agreed to place Turley in the position for April, May and June because then-911 Commissioner Amanda Fritz asked the finance office to do so. The 911 agency is covering her pay, she said.

In a report released Wednesday, City Ombudsman Margie Sollinger explained that the 911 center had omitted all but a few seconds of hold time for all 911 calls from cell phones, which represent 75 percent of the calls Portland 911 receives, from its public reports.

The problem stemmed from a flaw in the technology tool used by the 911 center to screen cell phone calls to make sure they are not accidental "pocket dials."

The ombudsman found that bureau leadership knew about this problem as early as 2015 and should have known more than a decade ago. Even so, Sollinger reported, the bureau reported the falsely positive numbers to the City Council and the public in the last two year's budget sessions.

"I believe this was a failure of leadership," Wheeler said. "I believe this was a failure of accountability. I believe the City Council was misled."

Turley told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Tuesday that she's tried to forget her time at the city and with the bureau since retiring in March. But the 911 bureau is still paying her while she finishes a report explaining the city's options for implementing the 311 system. Her employment, first reported by the Portland Mercury, is set to expire at the end of the month.

Fritz managed the emergency communications bureau from 2009 to 2012, and again from this January to April, when the mayor took over management of all bureaus. Fritz did not respond to requests for comment about hiring Turley for the 311 role.

Turley also did not respond to requests for comment.

Mayoral spokesman Michael Cox noted that the mayor is in charge of overseeing the management office, where the non-emergency call system is likely to land.

"We are committed to exploring the possibility of a 311 system here in Portland," Cox said. "We are not committed to housing that in (the Bureau of Emergency Communications)."

The Portland City Council voted 3-0 Wednesday to improve oversight of the city's 911 center and to examine its call-time data, following the recommendations in Sollinger's report.

Commissioners Dan Saltzman and Chloe Eudaly were absent.

Wheeler, Fritz and Commissioner Nick Fish agreed that the City Council needs to examine operational decisions and data reporting in the 911 office, which, unlike most bureaus, operates without the direction of city code and rarely brings decisions before the council.

But Fritz sparred with Fish and Wheeler over the cause of the bureau's problems, which she attributed largely to staffing, both at the council meeting and in an interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive Tuesday.

With its unanimous vote, the council directed the 911 bureau to work with other bureaus to accurately measure the bureau's performance and charged Portland's Technology Oversight Committee with reviewing any technology changes.

Wheeler said he believed that data problems in the 911 office are "more serious than it has been characterized" and that he did not believe the cause was a staffing problem.

Fish raised a palm to Fritz when she attempted to help interim 911 director Lisa St. Helen answer his question about why the bureau reported false numbers after discovering the mistake. He told Fritz he wanted to hear from St. Helen, whom he later asked if the problem could be attributed to short staffing.

"It does not have anything to do with the short staffing," St. Helen said.

Fish pressed on.

"You have identified something very very serious, and that is incomplete information coming to decision makers," Fish said. "We are free to make bad decisions. Our system allows us to make bad decisions. But we rely on having good data upon which to make good or bad decisions."

Fritz later returned a subtle jab to Fish.

"The city budget office, which I know Commissioner Fish shares my pride in having helped create... also missed this issue when we were evaluating whether performance measures were met," she said.

Homer Williams is back with a new plan to create affordable housing

By Molly Harbarger

June 8, 2017

Homer Williams has a new idea for homelessness. The well-known Portland developer is in the preliminary stages of pitching a plan to trade a 86-year-old golf course for low-income housing.

So far, Williams has the support of at least two city officials. But he's wary of moving too quickly after his last pitch -- turning city-owned Terminal 1 into a giant homeless shelter -- became mired in controversy and then died.

Williams wants his Harbor of Hope -- a nonprofit organization made up of business leaders -- to buy the Broadmoor Golf Course near the airport in Northeast Portland. The course is zoned as open space, but is surrounded by industrial land on Northeast Columbia Boulevard.

Portland needs usable industrial land, so Williams wants the city to rezone the 125-acre golf course as industrial land. He would put together a group of investors to buy the land and sell it for industrial development -- or, other developers could buy it directly.

In turn, the city would take pockets of tracts now zoned industrial throughout the city and redesignate them as residential property for low-income housing projects.

By the end of the zoning swap, he hopes the city will have 12,000 to 15,000 new units of affordable housing.

Harbor for Hope would raise money to buy the rezoned residential land and then sell it or donate it to developers and homelessness nonprofits to build affordable apartments. Williams hasn't identified the smaller industrial properties targeted for rezoning.

His selling point is that the city basically just needs to make decisions on zoning to make this happen, without ponying up money. The attraction for developers is more altruistic than monetary in the short-term. But Williams frames the issue of homelessness as one that could hurt the bottom line for the business community long term.

Williams' last plan was to use the city-owned marine warehouse Terminal 1 in Northwest Portland into a campus that would sleep up to 400 homeless people, as well as hosting service providers on site. He planned to raise the money to run the operation from the private sector. Former Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioners Dan Saltzman and Steve Novick supported exploring the idea initially. But it faced criticism from other commissioners, neighbors, business leaders and environmentalists over concerns of "warehousing" the poor and whether the building should be sold to the highest bidder instead.

The deal eventually fell apart amid the backlash, coming to a head when Williams named homeless advocate Ibrahim Mubarak as the director.

Williams said his commitment to combatting homelessness hasn't waned. He thinks the private sector can fill a crucial role that local government can't because it faces fewer obstacles and regulations to move quickly on solutions.

"The idea is really to try to unleash the private side, and working with the nonprofit side, to try to scale it up," Williams said.

He envisions about 15 of the housing projects scattered throughout the city. Homeless people who hold jobs or have children, or seniors on fixed incomes, would be the target audience.

The apartment buildings wouldn't be high rises or elaborate, but what Williams calls "workforce housing."

"These aren't going to have green roofs and lots of bells and whistles, but they'll be high-quality, good solid buildings," he said.

Multnomah County has about 4,000 homeless people, according to the latest survey in 2015. More than a third of them live on the streets, which is who Williams tried to help with his Terminal 1 plan.

In this case, he's focusing more on whoever could move into an apartment today -- if there were any in their price range.

"There's a number of people that are living in cars and couch-surfing and in tents," Williams said. "It's staggering. Most of these people have jobs. That's the scariest part."

He has met with most city commissioners so far.

Mayor Ted Wheeler said the plan is still in its early stages and he wants many more details nailed down before discussing it in public in detail, but he's glad to have Williams exploring the idea.

"Homelessness in this community is at a crisis level, and business as usual isn't going to work. We need better approaches, we need stronger approaches -- we need all of the above," Wheeler said. "Homer has demonstrated an ability to execute on visionary ideas in the past. And frankly I'm pleased someone of his talent is willing to put his talent behind this very important issue."

Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who operated the city's Housing Bureau under Hales, is also optimistic and interested to see the idea develop.

"I think Dan has very open ear to what Homer is thinking about," said Brendan Finn, Saltzman's chief of staff. "I think we're waiting at this point to see something a little more refined before Dan actually gets behind something."

Commissioner Nick Fish, who was a critic of the Terminal 1 proposal, and Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, a proponent of affordable housing, declined to comment on the proposal at this stage.

Williams also met with Multnomah County Chairwoman Deborah Kafoury, even though the decision to move forward lies solely with the city.

"One of the things I really appreciate about his vision is that I think he's realized, yes we need to have shelter, but we actually need housing. That's the ultimate solution here," Kafoury said. "So anyway we can work on creating more permanent affordable housing in our community -- that's the ultimate goal."

Portland to up its contributions to Joint Office on Homeless Services

*By Jessica Floum
June 8, 2017*

Portland will contribute an additional \$1.4 million from its budget next year to the Joint Office of Homeless Services that it heads with Multnomah County.

The City Council affirmed Thursday that it will increase its contribution to \$26.5 million as part of a 4-0 vote to adopt next year's budget, which will take effect July 1. Commissioner Chloe Eudaly did not vote because she was representing Portland in a "Fearless Cities" conference in Barcelona.

Next year's budget will allow for \$522 million in discretionary spending from the general fund, the pot of money that pays for everything from police and the commissioners' staff to parks and programs. That's a four percent increase from discretionary spending this year.

"In collaboration with the City Budget Office, we determined that we could find some additional money that wouldn't affect frontline services or critical needs at this time and that could be dedicated to homelessness," mayoral spokesman Michael Cox said.

Portland will draw on \$750,000 left over from this year's budget in order to up its contribution. It will also put off giving \$400,000 to the Bureau of Emergency Communications to replace the bureau's power source that went out in April, temporarily blocking 911 calls. The city's facilities department has enough in reserves to front the replacement costs, said City Budget Officer Andrew Scott, at least until the city reevaluates its budget in the fall.

The city will also reduce the funds it planned to give each bureau for new hires by 10 percent, freeing up an additional \$267,000. Again, Scott said, that could be readdressed in the fall.

"The expectation is bureaus will be hard-pressed to fill those (positions) by July 1," Scott told the council Thursday.

The change follows tough negotiations between Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler over how much their respective governments should contribute to the homeless office. The mayor initially proposed contributing \$25 million next year, which would have represented a \$600,000 increase from this year and fell \$3 million short of the Joint Office's request of the city. Meanwhile, the county also proposed giving \$25 million -- \$4 million more than was asked of it.

Kafoury and Wheeler publicly clashed over their contributions days after they proposed their budgets in May, The Portland Mercury reported.

Now, both are touting their "highly collaborative" efforts, as Cox called them.

"I appreciate the partnership with the City of Portland in the Joint Office of Homeless Services, and I am committed to continuing to work closely with the city to expand our efforts and ensure that everyone in our community has a safe place to sleep," Kafoury said in a statement.

The adoption of next year's budget was the first under Wheeler's new administration. The mayor promoted a \$50 million investment in fixing roads and other infrastructure as one of the flagships of this year's budget process. The mayor will bond against expected future revenues from Portland's urban renewal areas.

Wheeler said he also looked forward to a pilot program in the police bureau that will pay 12 non-sworn, non-armed "community service officers" to communicate and work with the public.

The budget also gets rid of the Portland Police's costly but beloved mounted patrol unit, which has narrowly escaped past mayors' chopping blocks.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz commended Wheeler for directing funds to hire park rangers for the Springwater Corridor and parks in East Portland. She said she was also pleased to extend funding for bus passes to students in multiple school districts.

"It was a lot of fun at the end of the day," Wheeler said of the budget process.

The Portland Mercury

Following Dispute, Portland's Final Budget Has \$1.4 Million More For Homelessness

By Dirk VanderHart

June 8, 2017

There was more money for Portland's homeless crisis, after all.

When Portland City Council formally adopts Mayor Ted Wheeler's first budget this afternoon, it will contain a big boost in funding for the city/county Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS): \$1.4 million more than was included when council approved a draft of the budget last month.

That's a big chunk of the money county officials had pushed for after **tensions flared** over Wheeler's initial proposal to pour \$25 million in city money into the office in the next year.

Following public disagreement between Wheeler and Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury over the allocation, county officials **announced they'd reached a deal** to secure \$1.7 million more in city funds. The mayor's office was less specific about its commitment.

But the city's budget now gets much of the way there. According to Wheeler spokesperson Michael Cox, the \$1,417,054 in additional allocation for the homelessness office comes from a combination of unspent homelessness funds from last year, reshuffled funds that were intended for the city's 911 service (and will be replaced later this year), and savings from not filling city positions.

"The last few weeks of coordination were collaborative and cordial," Cox said this afternoon.

It's unclear exactly what services the \$1.4 million extra will go toward. A spokesperson at JOHS couldn't immediately answer that question, and Cox says "conversations are ongoing."

In an **April memo**, JOHS Director Marc Jolin wrote that \$2.6 million more in city funding was necessary to continue "ongoing and temporary shelter capacity" and "programs that provide housing placement from the streets and shelter."

It's possible there's more money coming to the homelessness office in coming months. Sources suggest the city could find cash via its next "budget monitoring process" this fall.

"I appreciate the partnership with the City of Portland in the Joint Office of Homeless Services, and I am committed to continuing to work closely with the city to expand our efforts and ensure that everyone in our community has a safe place to sleep," Kafoury said in a statement.

The push and pull over homelessness spending—what Wheeler referred to in May as "city-county budget poker"—comes as the city awaits the results of its latest "point-in-time" homeless count, which should be released next week. The report is expected to reveal that Portland's homeless population has grown since the **last count** in 2015.

At the heart of the funding dispute are varying views on how the city and county should pay in to the new joint office (the governments managed their own discrete homeless services offices before JOHS **was created last year**). Wheeler has argued that the city and county should pay equally into the office each year. Kafoury believes that they should match any increases in funding, but that the city's role should be larger since it provided a larger initial stake.

Despite his eventual capitulation, Cox says Wheeler still thinks the city and county match each other's disbursements evenly.

"We continue to view this as a 50/50 partnership," he says. "It's a principled position, but I think we've also demonstrated our willingness to compromise."

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Rent stabilization dies in Oregon Senate

By Chuck Slothower
June 6, 2017

A bid to end Oregon rules prohibiting local rent control programs is dead after a Senate committee stripped the provision from a broader renters' protections bill.

House Bill 2004 is expected to come to the Senate floor soon with a number of protections for renters, but rent stabilization, or rent control to its critics, will not be part of it.

"I could not find the votes to do that," said Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, who sponsored the bill in the Senate. "I would have personally liked to keep that in, but I want to get something for tenants now, and these are robust protections."

Landlords have opposed any move to allow local governments to cap rent increases. A lobbyist hailed the changes to the bill.

"It's an acknowledgment that rent control or rent stabilization, whatever you want to call it, is not an answer to the lack of affordable housing," said John Di Lorenzo, a lobbyist and attorney with **Davis Wright Tremaine** in Portland.

"If we're really going to address this issue, we need supply-side strategies, not demand-side strategies," Di Lorenzo said.

The bill does include some new protections for renters that were created in the Senate Committee on Human Services:

- Landlords would be limited to making one rent increase per year.
- Tenants would be protected from a no-cause eviction within 60 days of notifying their landlord in writing of repairs needed for the habitability of the apartment.

The bill also requires 30 days' notice before eviction during the first nine months of tenancy.

Gelser acknowledged that tenant advocates are disappointed by the lack of rent stabilization, but said she'd rather have a bill with some renter protections that could be passed this session.

"It's better to have some protections, and these really are very meaningful protections," she said. "It's a pretty robust start and something we can be proud of."

Multifamily NW, an industry trade group for landlords, opposes the bill but is open to finding a solution to the housing crisis that works for both sides, spokesman John McIsaac said.

"I don't believe it's reached its final form yet, but we're working to make it work for both sides, and ultimately, it's going to, I believe," he said.

Gelser said she expects the bill to move forward without rent stabilization.

"It is my full expectation that we will have a vote on (House Bill) 2004 on the Senate floor, and I expect it to pass," she said.