

The Oregonian

Mayor Ted Wheeler takes over Portland 911 center, rebukes poor leadership under Amanda Fritz

By Jessica Floum
June 15, 2017

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler will take over management of Portland's 911 center from Commissioner Amanda Fritz after criticizing a "failure of leadership" and botched operations during her tenure.

Two reports by the city's ombudsman revealed that bureau officials [knowingly reported false wait time data for emergency calls](#) to the City Council and that [tens of thousands of emergency calls went untracked and unreturned](#).

That will leave Fritz to run just one bureau: Portland Parks & Recreation. It marks the first time in at least 30 years that a Portland commissioner has been put in charge of just one bureau.

In a statement, the third-term commissioner said she is "disappointed that my staff and I will not be able to see the process through" to carry out planned improvements at the Bureau of Emergency Communications.

Fritz told The Oregonian/OregonLive Thursday that she is looking forward to refocusing her time on meeting with community coalitions like Portland United Against Hate, supporting marginalized communities and helping bring their interests before the city council.

The mayor signed an executive order Thursday that assigned the 911 bureau to him. The order also reassigned the rest of the bureaus to the commissioners to whom he initially assigned them in January.

The mayor had temporarily taken over all of the bureaus during the city's budget session to help commissioners think "enterprise wide" about the budget and to peek under the hood of each city office, spokesman Michael Cox said.

Speaking of the 911 bureau, Wheeler said at a June city council meeting, "There are few services the city provides where life and death is on the line, and this is certainly one of them, so it's got to be a top priority."

Wheeler said the problems at the emergency communications bureau stemmed from a "failure of leadership" and were a "failure of accountability."

Fritz managed the 911 center from 2009 to 2012 and again from this January to April.

In a statement issued Thursday, Fritz thanked interim 911 bureau director Lisa St. Helen and "all the staff."

"I continue to value working with Mayor Wheeler," she told The Oregonian/OregonLive Thursday.

She said that she and her staff worked with 911 center employees to set the bureau "on a new course which will effectively address the concerns raised in the ombudsman's reports."

But before Thursday, Fritz gave no indication that she intended to clean up the problems at the 911 center. She repeatedly brushed off questions from The Oregonian/OregonLive about how she intended to fix a flawed screening system that caused [18,000 cell phone calls to get lost in 2015](#) after the ombudsman revealed the problem. At a March budget session, she prompted former 911 director Lisa Turley and interim director St. Helen to dismiss the ombudsman's December findings before the City Council.

"If you would drop 18,000 people, we would have certainly heard about it from somebody other than the ombudsman," Fritz said in March.

At a June council meeting where the council voted to increase oversight of the bureau, Fritz chalked up the inaccurate data reporting to understaffing, even when St. Helen said that had nothing to do with it.

The mayor decided to move the emergency communications office into his already packed portfolio. Wheeler also manages the Police Bureau, the Housing Bureau, the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, the Bureau of Emergency Management, the Office of Equity and Human Rights and Prosper Portland, formerly the Portland Development Commission.

Wheeler said in a statement that he moved the 911 office to his portfolio to help better coordinate disaster preparedness efforts with the public safety bureaus he already oversees. He said he intends to rely on Fritz for advice and draw on "her tremendous amount of experience and expertise" with the bureau.

"The mayor introduced resolutions on (the 911 center's problems) and we want to see that through," Cox said. "He's ultimately going to be held accountable for the performance of that bureau."

The rest of the bureaus will return to the commissioners to which the mayor assigned them in January.

Commissioner Chloe Eudaly will again oversee the Office of Neighborhood Involvement and the Bureau of Development Services.

Commissioner Nick Fish will keep the Bureau of Environmental Services and the Portland Water Bureau.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman will keep Portland Fire & Rescue, Portland Bureau of Transportation and Fire & Police Disability & Retirement.

The Portland Tribune

Wheeler takes troubled 911 center from Fritz

By Jim Redden

June 15, 2017

Mayor Ted Wheeler took the Bureau of Emergency Communications from Commissioner Amanda Fritz when he reassigned agencies to the members of the City Council on Friday.

The switch was not completely unexpected. The City Ombudsman accused BOEC of underestimating hold times at the 911 center it oversees for many years last week. Fritz had been in charge of it for much of that time, along with former Commissioner Steve Novick, who was defeated by Commissioner Chloe Eudaly last year.

After the ombudsman's report was released, the council voted to study 911 response times. BOEC has been chronically understaffed for years and will likely need additional employees to meet its goal of answering 90 percent of 911 calls within 20 seconds. The report found the average response time is now 23 seconds, not one second as BOEC had been reporting.

Other major assignments remained the same as when Wheeler took all bureaus at the beginning of this year's budget process. For example, he is keeping the Portland Police Bureau and the Bureau of Housing. Commissioner Nick Fish is keeping the Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services. Commissioner Dan Saltzman is keeping the Portland Bureau

of Transportation. Commissioner Amanda Fritz is keeping Portland Parks & Recreation. And Commissioner Chloe Eudaly is keeping the Office of Neighborhood Involvement and Bureau of Development Services, where she was in the process of changing director before Wheeler assigned them to himself.

The memo announcing the assignments can be read [here](#).

Downtown waterfront to get 25 life rings to help rescue folks in the Willamette

*By Steve Law
June 15, 2017*

For a city that grew up along the Willamette River, Portland has given scant attention to basic water safety for those who fall into the cold waters.

Until now.

The all-volunteer Human Access Project has secured agreement by the city to install 25 life rings, purchased by the nonprofit, along the downtown sea wall. The goal is to get them all installed by July 1, says Human Access Project ringleader Willie Levenson.

The life rings — also known as life preservers — will be attached to 90 feet of floating rope, available by punching a plexiglass window in a fiberglass cabinet.

"If you can throw a Frisbee, you can save a life; that is what is so important about a life ring," Levenson says.

The Willamette runs cold and quickly for all but the summer months, and can be perilous for people in the water due to motorized vessels and floating logs that can run the size of telephone poles, says Mark Herron, a sergeant with the Multnomah County Sheriff's River Patrol.

"If we can mitigate that liability, potentially with some kind of inflatable device, that saves lives every time," Herron says.

The rings could prove valuable when someone falls in the water, Levenson says, especially on the downtown side where the sea wall forms an imposing barrier. And even people that try to take their own lives by jumping off bridges often regret the decision as soon as they hit the water, Herron says.

Levenson credits a spirited discussion at last week's City Council hearing — on ways to improve active use of the river downtown, along with riverfront habitat — with clearing the way for the project. The Portland Bureau of Transportation quickly agreed to install the cabinets and life rings along the sea wall, which it controls.

It's hoped that the Parks bureau, which controls the esplanade on the east side of the river, will agree to install another 25 life rings later, Levenson says.

The parks bureau will seek guidance from Portland Fire & Rescue on where to put life rings on the esplanade, says bureau planning manager Brett Horner.

Levenson, whose group has been working to improve swimmers' access to the Willamette, says he was struck by the sight of life rings along the Chicago River during a recent speaking engagement there. Then, when he was traveling in Amsterdam, he came across a display of what's believed to be the first life ring — invented 430 years ago by none other than Leonardo da Vinci. The artist and scientist created a life preserver made of waterproof leather, sewed and filled with air. Da Vinci's basic design "has not been improved upon," Levenson marvels.

The fiberglass cabinets protect the life rings from damaging ultraviolet rays, and tend to fend off pranksters and vandals who might otherwise tamper with the life rings, says Scott Summers, sales manager for Cheyenne Manufacturing, which built the cabinets in the Salmon Creek area of Vancouver, Wash.

The Human Access Project purchased 25 of the cabinets, which come with the rings inside, for \$10,850.

Cheyenne sells the rings nationally, including many in Washington.

"I haven't seen too many on the other side, on the Oregon side," Summers says.

"The need hasn't been there, to be frank," Herron says. But with increased swimming on the Willamette in the downtown area, it's time for safety measures to improve, he says.

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Wheeler: City must show progress to address homeless crisis

By Jim Redden

June 15, 2017

Mayor Ted Wheeler says his first six months in office have been more challenging than he expected, largely because of a series of unexpected crises.

"First we had incredible weather followed by incredible weather," Wheeler told the Portland Tribune editorial board during a Monday interview to highlight his accomplishments so far.

After Trump was elected president, Wheeler said, that "led to protests and counter-protests, followed by a rise in hate crimes, including the attack on the MAX train, that we are still responding to,"

Wheeler said he is proud of how the City Council reacted to the unpredictable events, even though some of the responses revealed additional issues that need to be addressed.

"We were right to reaffirm our role as a sanctuary city, even though much of the testimony showed that many immigrants and minorities are not sharing equally in Portland's economic recovery. That's something we need to work even harder on," Wheeler said.

At the same time, Wheeler said he has successfully worked to keep the council focused on the priority issues that fueled his winning campaign for mayor last year. They include addressing the related homeless and affordable housing crises, and reforming the Portland Police Bureau with a new chief from the outside, if necessary. Monday was the deadline for applications in the national search for a new chief that Wheeler promised during his campaign.

"We've had many applications and are aimed at making a choice in late July, after discussing the candidates with advisory committees of interested citizens. But the final decision is mine, and I will make it," Wheeler said.

Wheeler briefly reviewed his accomplishments since taking office. They included launching a 20-year, \$600 million infrastructure maintenance program in the coming fiscal year's budget and committing the city to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050. But he repeatedly returned to the homeless and affordable housing crises, saying the city must show progress on them soon.

"Portlanders are kind and generous and want to help the homeless. But they are also saying people camping outdoors in the city are creating health, safety and livability problems that need

to be addressed before they take matters into their own hands, which would be the worst thing that could possibly happen," Wheeler said.

Asked about complaints that the police are too heavy-handed dealing with protesters, Wheeler reaffirmed that he has questions about some responses to the dueling demonstrations on Sunday, June 4. Wheeler said he was especially concerned that officers corralled protesters marching on Southwest Fourth Avenue in the afternoon and would not let any of them go without displaying and being photographed with identification. Those detained included several journalists, including a reporter and photographer with the Portland Tribune.

"I am sending a letter to (Portland Police Chief Mike) Marshman asking for the legal framework of the policy and the disposition of the information that was collected. As police commissioner, I don't make strategic decisions, but I need to understand the justification for what happened. As I understand it, only two people were arrested, which means the rest of them weren't doing anything that rise to the level (of being detained and photographed)," Wheeler said.

You can read the letter [here](#).

At the same time, Wheeler said he was proud of how the police handled the competing protests.

"Everyone had a chance to speak their minds and no one was seriously hurt. There were a lot of threats exchanged between the two sides before Sunday, and I was concerned it could have turned out much worse."

Wheeler was scheduled to reassign city bureaus to himself and the other members of the council on Thursday, after this story went to press. To read that and other city stories, visit portlandtribune.com.

Willamette Week

Mayor Ted Wheeler Takes 911 System Away from Commissioner Amanda Fritz

*By Rachel Monahan
June 15, 2017*

In a surprise move, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler is reassigning the Bureau of Emergency Communications to himself—and not to Commissioner Amanda Fritz—after an ombudsman report documented dramatic management failures at the bureau that oversees the city's 911 system.

In a report issued last week, ombudsman Margie Sollinger documented that the failure of the bureau to accurately report 911 hold times—the key way the bureau measures its own performance. For more than a decade, the bureau had failed to account for how long 911 callers were waiting for an operator to pick up the phone.

Fritz oversaw the bureau before budget season, when the mayor assumed control of all the bureaus. Former Commissioner Steve Novick oversaw the bureau until December, but before Novick, Fritz had overseen it.

Assigning the bureaus is a main power that elevates the Portland mayor over his City Council colleagues under the commissioner form of government.

Today marks the second time that Wheeler is taking a bureau away from Fritz over management problems.

When he took office in January, the most significant decision was to take the Office of Neighborhood Involvement away from Fritz, citing management problems at the bureau. An auditor's report had documented the problems.

The mayor has not given Fritz an additional bureau this time to replace the one he's taking away.

The mayor's spokesman, Michael Cox, said the mayor's office was in the best position to coordinate between other bureaus as the work of improving BOEC's management is under way.

"Commissioner Fritz and our office have enjoyed a collegial and cooperative working relationship and we expect that to continue," says Cox. "Assigning BOEC to ourselves is by and large a product of our proactive agenda for the bureau."

Fritz's office issued an immediate statement, saying she was "disappointed" not to see through changes the bureau.

"The Mayor has decided to keep BOEC within his portfolio in order to manage the recruitment of a permanent director and to coordinate the response to the Ombudsman's report," says Fritz.

"While I am disappointed that my staff and I will not be able to see the process through at BOEC, I am very grateful to Lisa St. Helen for her leadership of the bureau as Interim Director, and to all the staff at BOEC who work so hard to get help to callers."

Wheeler had temporarily taken control all the bureaus as part of the budget process in an effort to unite his colleagues on decisions and discourage infighting over funding for their respective bureaus. Wheeler ran a smooth budget process with no significant clashes with the city commissioners. (There was a fight with the county over funding for the joint office for homeless services.)

But the longer hold times, first reported by WW, were a bombshell in City Hall.

Sollinger's report documented that BOEC had known for more than a year that they had failed to properly account for cell phone times. From December 2016 to April of this year, the average wait time for all calls to 911 was 23 seconds. In past years, the bureau had reported that callers only had to wait 1 second on average.

The bureau quietly disclosed the problem in budget hearings earlier this year.

The Portland Mercury

In Rare Move, Mayor Ted Wheeler's Giving Amanda Fritz Just One Bureau To Manage

By Dirk VanderHart

June 15, 2017

As expected, Mayor Ted Wheeler re-assigned city bureaus to city commissioners today, and the outcome isn't great for Amanda Fritz.

Wheeler's elected not to give Fritz back the troubled Bureau of Emergency Communications, which she controlled from January to late April. Taking into account a [recent damning report](#) that showed the bureau has offered misleading performance statistics for years, Wheeler opted to leave BOEC in his own portfolio.

What's particularly interesting is that Wheeler didn't tap another department for Fritz to manage. That leaves the commissioner with only one bureau, Portland Parks and Recreation, in her

portfolio—a fairly damning statement about Wheeler's confidence in her management capabilities, and an arrangement City Hall staffers can't remember ever occurring.

It also marks the second time Wheeler has snatched a troubled bureau away from Fritz: When he handed out initial assignments in early January, Wheeler angered the commissioner by giving the Office of Neighborhood Involvement to Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.

"It's a reflection of his judgment of the right way to achieve our policy goals," Wheeler spokesperson Michael Cox tells the Mercury. He says those goals include hiring a permanent bureau director, setting standards that meet national best practices, and collaborating more closely with the county on medical response.

Cox downplays any suggestion that Wheeler has doubts about Fritz as a manager. "The mayor and Commissioner Fritz have enjoyed a collegial working relationship," he says. "We expect that to continue."

Still, the move will leave bruised feelings in City Hall. In a statement, Fritz says she's "disappointed" by Wheeler's decision, but planning to turn her attentions elsewhere. While overseeing BOEC, the commissioner had been working toward establishing a 311 system to handle customer service calls—and hired now-controversial former BOEC Director Lisa Turley to help.

"Looking forward, we welcome the opportunity to focus our time on other urgent and important issues," Fritz says. "Most crucially, we will be working to combat systemic racism and the rise in hate crimes in the City of Portland. My staff and I are committed to listening to and providing greater support for marginalized communities in Portland."

The BOEC reshuffling is the only dramatic decision of the mayor's reassignment. Before taking office, Wheeler signaled he'd use the "stick" of his authority to assign bureaus as a means of ensuring commissioners were meeting his expectations. He's apparently satisfied enough in general performance to dole out assignments along the same lines he did on January 3.

Speculation that Fritz wouldn't get BOEC back was rampant in City Hall in recent weeks, as the building braced for a report from City Ombudsman Margie Sollinger that the 911 system had been unable to properly calculate average hold times—a central performance measure by which such systems are evaluated—for more than a decade. Perhaps worse, the bureau's former executive director had falsely claimed BOEC was achieving its targets for hold times even after learning that couldn't possibly be true in late 2015.

Here's the thing, though: Fritz wasn't in charge of BOEC in 2015. Commissioner Steve Novick had the run of the bureau until he left office at the end of last year. He recently told the Mercury he had no memory of learning of the problems with calculating hold times as early as 2015, but took responsibility for not making the issue known.

Still, while Wheeler and Commissioner Nick Fish offered dire assessments of the problem at a recent hearing, Fritz was more inclined to downplay the issue. Her central point was that BOEC has had staffing issues for years, and that an accurate reflection of 911 hold times wouldn't have changed council's approach to that problem.

"At no time that I can remember has the council made decisions based on, 'The call time is fine, we don't need to worry,'" Fritz said at a recent hearing, while also mentioning a "shared acknowledgment of the problem."

"I don't know how the council would have reacted one way or another based on getting accurate information on call times," Fish responded. "In my 9 years on the council, this is one of the most sharp reviews by an independent body on the quality of the information that the public and the council receives."

After handing out initial bureau assignments on January 3, Wheeler reeled the bureaus back in in late April, as budget discussions warmed up. Cox says the mayor doesn't plan on making any adjustments to the assignments in the near term, but that he'll likely take control again come budget time next year.

[Here's](#) the executive order detailing assignments [PDF].

Here's Fritz's full statement:

During the brief time I was Commissioner-in-Charge of the Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) this year, my staff and I worked closely with BOEC management to set BOEC on a new course which will effectively address the concerns raised in the Ombudsman's reports. The Mayor has decided to keep BOEC within his portfolio in order to manage the recruitment of a permanent director and to coordinate the response to the Ombudsman's report. While I am disappointed that my staff and I will not be able to see the process through at BOEC, I am very grateful to Lisa St. Helen for her leadership of the bureau as Interim Director, and to all the staff at BOEC who work so hard to get help to callers.

Looking forward, we welcome the opportunity to focus our time on other urgent and important issues. Most crucially, we will be working to combat systemic racism and the rise in hate crimes in the City of Portland. My staff and I are committed to listening to and providing greater support for marginalized communities in Portland.

I will continue to advocate for and help implement the Open and Accountable Elections system that Council passed in 2016. I will collaborate with my colleagues and the community on issues that affect us all. The challenges facing our city are daunting, and I continue to feel honored to be in my position where I can work on solutions in multiple ways.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

BDS offers permit help for cannabis industry

*By Garrett Andrews
June 16, 2017*

To speed up Portland's beleaguered permitting process, the city is offering to help people interested in starting new marijuana-focused businesses save multiple trips through the Permit Center.

The city already offers personal sit-downs with prospective applicants for fees determined by the scope of each proposed project. What's new is that times will now be set aside for marijuana businesses, said Ross Caron, spokesman for the Bureau of Development Services.

Along with adhering to building code requirements, which are overseen by BDS, marijuana businesses have the added burden of maintaining a marijuana business license, which is administered through the Office of Neighborhood Involvement. Because two offices are involved, Caron said, the city wants to do more to assist marijuana businesses.

The assistance meetings will be staffed by professionals specializing in fire prevention and other life safety issues, plans examination and mechanical engineering. They'll be on hand to assist applicants with submitting completed project applications and preventing costly slip-ups.

Two tiers of meeting will be offered – one for simpler, retail-only shops, and one for more complicated projects involving production, processing and wholesaling.

Tier 1 meetings will cost \$511, with the option of having a structural engineer attend for \$152. Participants must complete a preliminary packet prior to the meeting and submit all materials for review five days ahead of time. If a Tier II meeting requires zoning and infrastructure professionals on hand, the fee is \$2,074.

Caron said the move is intended to help streamline the city's overworked permit process, which has struggled to hit performance measures in recent years.

BDS is rapidly staffing up after operating shorthanded for most since the recession hit in 2008. More than 160 employees have been added in the last two years (the average time to train a BDS employee is considered nine months). Over a recent 12-month period, only 56 percent of permits taken for review by BDS were returned on time.

The Portland Business Journal

Portland addresses 'derelict RVs' that vex residents, businesses

*By Clare Duffy
June 15, 2017*

The Portland Bureau of Transportation is working on a more permanent solution to the issue of proliferating "abandoned" RVs parked around the city.

The problem is, often these vehicles aren't actually abandoned – many of them are being used as housing and bring issues like trash, drug use and general unsightliness to the neighborhoods where they're parked. The city has heard complaints of RV occupants trespassing in neighbors' yards and leaving used needles lying outside the vehicles.

"We've been getting a massive amount of constituent concerns about what we're calling 'derelict RVs'," said [Brendan Finn](#), chief of staff for PBOT Commissioner [Dan Saltzman](#).

"There are unlawful acts happening in and around them, issues like drug paraphernalia and human waste. We consider these to be a health hazard for the community."

PBOT Public Information Officer [Dylan Rivera](#) said the city receives more than 100 [abandoned vehicle reports](#) each day, which include these RVs and other broken down cars.

PBOT does have [regulations in place when it comes to parking RVs and other large vehicles](#):

They may be parked in commercial areas for no more than four hours, residential areas for up to eight, and adjacent to or across from public parks with a permit from the city.

However, enforcement of these rules is based largely on complaints. And, based on state law, Portland has had a policy of only towing truly abandoned vehicles, which are clearly no longer drivable or in use. If someone lives in the vehicle, it's not considered abandoned, making the RV problem even more complicated.

The rules are beginning to shift, though, in response to the hundreds of RVs popping up around town. Often, the vehicles arrive in conditions that leave few clues as to how they could have traveled to their new parking spots in the first place. The issue may, in part, be a result of ordinances passed in [San Francisco](#) and [Seattle](#) that make it illegal for RVs to park on most city streets, while the rules are less stringent in Portland.

Many of the impounded RVs have had Washington license plates, Finn said.

Now, PBOT is dealing with the RVs through a new program it's calling "Community Care Tows." Written tow warnings will be left on reported RVs for 72-hours, giving occupants a chance to move them. If the vehicle remains after the warning period has ended, police will come to help remove any inhabitants of the vehicle before it is towed.

Some worry that solving the problem of illegally parked RVs may exacerbate Portland's homelessness problem.

Rakiya Birge is an advocate for the nonprofit [Human Solutions](#), which provides shelter and services for Portland's homeless community. She said the organization often gets calls from people living in their vehicles, asking for referrals to services or simply for information about where they can park their RVs.

"Unfortunately, we can't help them when it comes to wondering where they can park those vehicles," Birge said.

But by towing illegally parked RVs, the city may be "taking away the only thing that these people have," she said, adding that Human Solutions can refer those living in vehicles to one of its two shelters, assuming they meet certain qualifications and there is space available.

"They should really be able to park their RVs anywhere, so long as they aren't doing anything else illegal, because it's what they consider home."

For its part, PBOT is trying to tackle the problem in a "humane and strategic way," Rivera said.

The city has developed the [One Point of Contact](#) system for businesses or citizens to report a suspected homeless camp. Officers investigate the claims as well as those of abandoned vehicles and, if they find people camping in a neighborhood or living in a vehicle, will make an effort to connect those people with homeless social services.

Finn said the same happens through the "Community Care Tows" program; if RV inhabitants stay on scene after the vehicle is towed, officers work to connect them with housing or drug treatment programs.

In recent months, the city has towed so many of these abandoned RVs — which aren't as easy to dismantle and recycle as cars — that the towing companies it contracts with are running out of space to take them in and store them.

"We've frankly been overwhelmed by abandoned vehicles, and especially RVs," Rivera said.

As the city examines where to go next, it is considering ways for Portlanders to dispose of unwanted RVs that don't include abandoning or giving them away to members of the homeless community. This could include a program through which the city would collect old RVs and oversee their proper disposal.

"It's been an amazing increase observed on our streets, creating a real livability issue for citizens and businesses," Finn said. "We need to do something about this and get these RVs off the streets."