

The Oregonian

Portland City Council gives up oversight role for many six-figure contracts

By Jessica Floum

July 20, 2017

Portland city managers can now approve most six-figure consulting contracts without bringing the spending proposals before the City Council, where commissioners and the public can weigh in.

The council unanimously voted Thursday to increase the value of contracts for expert services that require council approval from \$100,000 to \$500,000. This means 95 contracts—or more than \$9.5 million worth of deals—approved by the city council in the last 17 months would have been selected without council oversight.

Mayor Ted Wheeler acknowledged there were "trade-offs" between public transparency and increasing the efficiency of the bureau projects when it came to accepting this policy change.

"If I'm sitting in the audience, I'm still wondering 'what about transparency?'" he said before voting yes on the policy.

Commissioner Nick Fish also pressed on the issue of transparency. He asked if the contracts could be found at a central location on the city's website. Interim Chief Procurement Officer Larry Pelatt said all contract solicitations are online. Chief Financial Officer Ken Rust noted that there are already a lot of contracts that don't come to council at all, saying "if you think it's difficult to get that information, it's not different from what we're proposing."

"I still think there needs to be a centralized place where people can go to find this," Fish said. "Otherwise we're requiring people to jump through a lot of hoops to find information."

It's not clear if that will happen. Fish did not formally introduce an amendment that would create a centralized tracking system before voting to approve the policy change. Procurement officials didn't agree to heed Fish's request.

Although Wheeler noted the transparency questions highlighted in an Oregonian/OregonLive story Wednesday, he made clear that he supports the oversight change that his office brought forward Thursday.

He emphasized his desire to speed up bureaucratic processes and the criticism he's received, reported in a Willamette Week story Wednesday, for not moving quickly enough to address Portland's housing crisis.

"You'll see I'm being excoriated broadly for being too slow to respond to the housing crisis," Wheeler said. "This is a way to speed things up"

Saltzman and Eudaly also supported the change. Commissioner Amanda Fritz did not vote. She is visiting her mother in England until Aug. 1.

Pegged as a pilot program, the procurement officer's increased signing authority will last through December 2018.

The proposal would also increase the value of public improvement and construction contracts, as well as goods and services contracts, the procurement officer could execute without council approval from \$500,000 to \$1 million.

Jen Clodius, city finance office spokeswoman, said the change will help "improve efficiency in getting infrastructure projects from 'Bid' to 'Notice to Proceed' more quickly."

When asked how raising the threshold for council review of consulting projects would help increase construction project efficiency, Clodius noted that it takes two months to get an ordinance through council.

Three members of the public testified against the policy change Thursday, saying that increasing the value of contracts that can be decided without the council's approval diminishes public trust.

"When standards fall, so does community trust," Craig Rogers said during public comment.

Portland planning new commission to draw public input on police reforms

By Maxine Bernstein

July 20, 2017

City officials plan to create a new commission to draw public input on Portland police policies and performance, partly to comply with a federal mandate for community engagement in the city's settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Nearly half a year has passed since the city dissolved the struggling Community Oversight Advisory Board, which the council created to monitor Police Bureau reforms required under the settlement agreement. The settlement stemmed from a 2012 federal investigation that found police engaged in a pattern of using excessive force against people with mental illness.

The city hasn't replaced the board or held public meetings on the ongoing bureau reforms since.

Instead, it's met behind closed doors in formal mediation sessions with lawyers from the federal Justice Department and the Portland Police Association for several months. The parties started mediation after the city challenged a district judge's order for Portland lawyers to update him in open court on the status of the reforms more frequently than the scheduled annual conferences. The city had petitioned the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to review the judge's order and authority.

A document filed in federal court Wednesday afternoon gives the first indication -- though in extremely general terms -- of what Portland city officials are considering in order to come into compliance with the settlement's community engagement requirement.

"The City is preparing to establish a new commission to interface between the public and the Portland Police Bureau, to provide public input and recommendations regarding police performance in key focus areas, to facilitate better community engagement and outreach, and to ensure community-engaged policing both during and beyond the pendency of the Settlement Agreement," the report says.

Michael Cox, spokesman for Mayor Ted Wheeler, who serves as police commissioner, said he expects a proposed ordinance to come before the City Council in August on the new community engagement plan.

But he gave some more details of the plan on Thursday.

The new group would be called "Portland Commission on Community-Engaged Policing," and be made up of five to nine members. It would meet twice a month, but those meetings would not be open to the public, Cox said. The commission would hold quarterly town hall meetings that are public.

"We need a process that's efficient and effective to allow its members to focus on their work and research," Cox said.

The volunteer community members would be appointed to the commission by the mayor, and report to the mayor's office. The commission would make recommendations to the Police Bureau and city about police use of force, officer interactions with people who suffer from mental illness, handling of citizen complaints involving racial justice and the best way to expand public outreach and community involvement.

In contrast to the lack of response the defunct community oversight board received from the Police Bureau or the mayor's office, Wheeler pledges "thorough and timely responses" to this commission's future recommendations, Cox said.

City lawyers also say they expect to resolve their differences with Justice officials through mediation, without the appellate court's intervention.

City attorney Tracy Pool Reeve, police union attorney Anil S. Karia and U.S. attorneys signed the latest status report.

The Albina Ministerial Alliance's Coalition for Justice and Police Reform has attempted to fill the void this year, hosting two community forums to solicit public input on the settlement agreement and share information with the public.

Its lawyers, J. Ashlee Albies and Kristen Chambers, in a separate court filing said they were dismayed that the city didn't make public earlier this year the Multnomah County district attorney's legal advice to delay compelling police officers who use deadly force to talk to internal affairs investigators until criminal investigations are done, which could take weeks. As a result, little public input has been permitted on the subject, they wrote.

The settlement agreement, approved by a federal judge in August 2014, called for the city and Police Bureau to review and revise its policy for compelling officers who use deadly force to speak to internal affairs investigators "as appropriate so that it's complaint with applicable law and current professional standards." Further, a federal Justice Department compliance report issued last year urged the Police Bureau, in collaboration with the district attorney, request that officers who use deadly force "provide a voluntary, on-scene walk-through and interview, unless the officer is incapacitated."

U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon recently canceled the scheduled third annual conference on police reforms set for Oct. 5 because of the city's pending mediation and challenge of his order before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

But city officials and federal Justice lawyers have jointly urged the judge to hold the conference Nov. 16. Though the city's challenge is pending before the appellate court, the city did not seek to halt the annual federal court conferences, city attorneys noted in their latest report.

City attorneys also briefly identified other areas of the settlement agreement that they've worked in the past year: revising the Police Bureau's policies on use of force, "coordinating" with the Multnomah County District Attorney to "revise protocols for reporting and investigating" police use of deadly force "in light of applicable state and federal law," and

working to partner toward the opening of the Unity Center, a specialized psychiatric emergency department in Northeast Portland.

Solving Portland's homelessness with heart, not rejection (Guest opinion)

By Sam Sachs (Guest Columnist)

July 20, 2017

Fining and jailing homeless people for camping in any city park is dehumanizing and criminalizes people who desperately need solutions rooted in compassion and understanding.

I feel qualified to offer my opinion regarding the Laurelhurst Neighborhood's recommendation to ban camping in the park and fine or jail homeless people. I served as park ranger for five years and a human rights commissioner for two years with the City of Portland.

In September 2016, I was one of three park rangers who organized and planned the relocation of homeless campers living on the Springwater Corridor. We worked very closely with many homeless advocates, outreach workers, counselors, probation and parole officers, police officers and the Mayor's office in an attempt to give everyone the chance to move to a hotel, treatment facility or housing. Unfortunately, whether it was by choice or a lack of resources, many of the homeless campers could not avail themselves of these options.

As you know, there are very few shelters for homeless people who need a place to live until they get back up on their feet or get the mental health or substance abuse treatment they need.

Fining or jailing homeless people for camping is not only dehumanizing, it's also unrealistic.

Portland Parks and Recreation has more than 200 properties, including parks and community centers, with approximately 20 park rangers to cover them all.

The city's 20 park rangers work daily to engage as ambassadors with the homeless community. And yes, on occasion they must write exclusions or even call the police to have someone arrested for a crime. But park rangers do not have the authority or the ability to arrest or fine anyone.

City leaders should embrace an idea I proposed two years ago: Designating an undeveloped property as a "village" for those community members who experience homelessness, similar to "Right to Dream Too."

The city should work to provide a property with tiny homes, restrooms and shower areas, a resource center focused on jobs, education, re-entry and treatment. It should include a community meeting area and a garden to grow vegetables. Before I lose you, all of this is achievable through agencies and partnerships already in place, unifying to create a five-year plan to assist people off the street.

Park rangers could team with advocates to determine what each homeless person's needs are and how they can best assist them to find housing and other services.

The greatest thing Portlanders can give to other Portlanders who are homeless is support and a sense of community, not a message of rejection that sends them away. We must acknowledge and accept that homeless people are still our neighbors, our friends, our family.

The problem is ours together. And together, we must lead with our hearts and the goal of protecting the humanity of those community members in need by restoring citizenship, participation and trust.

We do this through a welcoming back into community; by supporting rehabilitation and empowerment, and also by assuming collective responsibility.

The Portland Tribune

Health official recommends most expensive crypto treatment option

By Jim Redden

July 20, 2017

Letter from Dr. Paul Lewis arrives as lower cost estimates are emerging on construction of either choice City Council is expected to make on Aug. 2.

Multnomah County Health Officer Dr. Paul Lewis has recommended the City Council approve the most expensive option for fighting a potentially deadly parasite in the Bull Run watershed — a filtration plant instead of one that kills cryptosporidium with ultraviolet light.

In his July 18 letter to Commissioner Nick Fish, who is in charge of the Portland Water Bureau, Lewis noted a filtration plant would solve many more potential problems, including mud from landslides and ash from wildfires in the Bull Run Reservoir, the primary source of water for Portland and many surrounding suburban communities.

"Multnomah County urges the Portland City Council to consider the many health and resilience benefits of filtration over ultraviolet treatment as it makes decisions about improving water quality while also helping the region respond to the threats of climate change and the risk of a major earthquake," Lewis wrote.

Lewis also cast doubt on the so-called hybrid option of building the UV plant first and the filtration plant later.

"A hybrid timeline — ultraviolet first then filtration in 20+ years — incurs substantial cost but provides no measurable health benefit and delays enhancements to make Portland and Multnomah County more resilient," Lewis wrote.

The council is scheduled to make a decision on Aug. 2. The Oregon Health Authority will revoke the variance it granted the city from treating Bull Run water — as otherwise required by U.S. EPA rules — on Sept. 22. The variance was granted in 2012 because Bull Run water has historically been so clean, but it required the city to test for crypto, as the parasite is commonly called. It was repeatedly detected earlier this year.

"We understand that City Council must balance many factors when making decisions about management of the utility bureaus but from the health, safety, and emergency preparedness perspectives, filtration is the best choice," Lewis wrote.

The letter was sent as lower cost estimates of building either a UV or filtration plant are emerging. Ever since the OHA announcement, the Portland Water Bureau has said a UV plant would cost \$105 million and a filtration plant would cost between \$350 million and \$500 million to build.

But both figures include between \$17 million in upgrades at the Bull Run Reservoir that have already been approved by the council and covered by current water rates. The upgrades include an expanded chlorine treatment facility and a new backup emergency generator.

Because of that, the addition cost of building a UV plant at the reservoir is actually \$88 million. The actual cost of the filtration plant could be up to \$22 million less than the current estimate, depending on whether additional upgrades are underway by then.

The Portland Tribune first noticed the discrepancy when Commission Nick Fish, who is in charge of the Portland Water Bureau, met with the editorial board and reporters on Tuesday to answer questions about the treatment options. At the time, Fish referred to the cost of the UV plant as \$88 million. Later that day, he used the same figure when addressing the Portland Utility Board, an 11-member citizen committee that advises the council on utility issues and was meeting to determine a recommendation to the council.

When contacted by the Portland Tribune, the water bureau confirmed the estimated cost of the UV plant is \$105 million. But it then said that includes \$17 million in upgrades at the reservoir where the plant would be built. The council has approved \$22 million in upgrades at the area known as the Headworks. Of that amount, \$17 million would coincide with construction of the UV plant, if approved by the council at the Aug. 2 hearing schedules to choose an option.

The filtration plant would be built at another location that currently houses the Lusted Hill Treatment Plant in Southeast Portland. Construction would take longer to begin because, online the UV plant, it has not been designed and permitted yet. But the bureau says the Headworks upgrades would still be considered part of the project.

All options would require water rates to be raised. According to the bureau, a UV plant would raise rates as much as \$3.01 a month by 2024. A filtration plant would raise rates as much as \$18.14 a month in 2030. The hybrid option would raise rates as much as \$7.54 by 2034, with additional increases required to complete it.

Crypto is transmitted through animal feces. It can cause cryptosporidiosis, a respiratory and gastrointestinal illness, which killed 104 people and sickened thousands of others in 1993 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That outbreak prompted the EPA to adopt its treatment rule.

You can read Lewis' letter [here](#).

The Skanner

48-Hour Rule to Return?

By The Skanner News

July 20, 2017

Last week the Portland Police Bureau proposed a policy change that could delay police interviews of officers involved in deadly force -- possibly by weeks. Mayor Ted Wheeler is pushing back, but has declined activists' request for a hearing on the matter.

The union contract between the Portland Police Association and the city last fall did away with the "48-hour rule" -- a clause allowing officers to wait two days before giving a statement after being involved in deadly use of force cases. Wheeler had promised to do away with the rule during his campaign.

PPB's proposed change is based on Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill's citation of an Oregon Supreme Court ruling that he says requires internal investigators to wait until after a criminal investigation and grand jury review have been completed before they can compel a statement from officers.

Underhill cited *Oregon v. Soriano*, a 1984 Oregon Supreme Court case that he believes requires someone forced to make a statement by an employer to receive automatic immunity from prosecution for a crime related to those statements.

The Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition, in a July 12 press release co-signed by Portland Copwatch and the NAACP Portland Branch, has called on the city council hearing to conduct a public hearing before this policy is adopted, saying criminal investigations can take weeks.

"That criminal investigation usually takes at least three weeks, or ten times longer than the previously carved-out 48 hours. If the person in question does not die, it is up to the discretion of the Professional Standards Division (PSD) whether the officer has to file Force report at all," the release said.

The Oregonian reported Monday that the National Lawyer's Guild had joined the AMAC in criticizing the ruling, and Wheeler's spokesperson, Michael Cox, has said the mayor's office is talking to city attorneys, the district attorney and officials from the Oregon and federal justice departments. Cox said Wheeler's team is reviewing whether the DA's interpretation of the ruling is accurate.

OPB

Critics Of Portland Police's New Deadly Force Rules Want Mayor To Intervene

By Conrad Wilson

July 20, 2017

Portland Police Chief Mike Marshman is set on Friday to sign new rules governing how the city's police officers use force.

It's a critical component of the city holding up its end of a 2012 settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice surrounding how officers use force.

But it's also a step that has quickly become deeply controversial and potentially problematic for Mayor Ted Wheeler. The mayor has pushed for reforms in the police bureau, but those efforts may have also set up the latest conflicts with reform advocates.

While many of the new policies coming Friday have broad support across the city, one that would govern how the Portland Police Bureau internally investigates after an officer uses deadly force has drawn resistance from some community members.

Compelling Statements

In March, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill published a legal analysis that cited a 1984 Oregon Supreme Court ruling. Underhill's office argued departments shouldn't compel officer statements in internal affairs investigations after using deadly force.

To do so before a criminal investigation is complete, the district attorney wrote, could effectively grant officers immunity from criminal prosecution by violating their right to remain silent.

That legal analysis has found its way into the Portland's new use of deadly force policy, which now states "the Bureau shall not compel statements from involved members without express approval of the DA" except in extenuating circumstances.

Still, critics of the policy worry delaying those internal affairs interviews will only keep the public in the dark longer surrounding officer-involved shootings.

Some angered by the policy want Wheeler, who oversees the department as the city's police commissioner, to intervene and order Marshman to prevent the new deadly force policy from becoming official.

'We're Not Going To Delay'

Despite the growing controversy, Wheeler's office said the mayor won't delay implementation.

"We're not going to delay," said Michael Cox, a spokesman for the mayor. "We have a duty to maintain the integrity of a criminal investigation."

Portland NAACP president Jo Ann Hardesty said she finds the new policy "absolutely appalling."

"I find it inexcusable that they're even proposing a policy that basically says, 'Police don't even have to tell you what happened until after the DA has cleared them,'" Hardesty said.

The Multnomah County District Attorney has only once in recent history brought charges against a Portland police officer. In 2011, Dane Reister became the first Portland officer indicted for using force while on the job.

"So, what are we protecting?" Hardesty said.

Defining 'Concurrent'

For some, the DA's memo that in part prompted the new policy stands in contrast to the city's settlement with the federal Department of Justice, which requires the Portland Police Bureau to conduct administrative and criminal investigations concurrently.

"At some point, the city, the federal Department of Justice, the Multnomah County District Attorney will have to be able to explain this to the public," said Constantin Severe, the director of Portland's Independent Police Review.

Severe said he too would like to see Wheeler hold up the deadly use of force policy.

"Up to this point, I have not heard a credible argument from, particularly, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office that will meet the public's expectation that there will be a robust criminal and administrative investigation," Severe said.

In an interview, Underhill said concurrent investigations are possible under Oregon law and "actually should occur."

But when it comes to the bureau's internal review, Underhill said, "There are a lot of things within the investigation to be done that don't include the interview of the involved officer. That's where I'm saying, 'Don't do that part of the investigation on the administrative side until the criminal investigation is complete.'"

But Severe argues that's not a concurrent investigation and violates the DOJ settlement.

"You can't really truthfully call that an administrative investigation if you are not talking to the most critical person to that event until 30 days or several months after an incident," Severe said.

Underhill countered that even if officers were compelled to make statements early on in an internal affairs investigation, those same investigations rarely — if ever — become public.

Under the new policy, officers who use deadly force also won't be required to complete a use of force report until after the criminal investigation is done.

What Prompted The DA's Memo?

The mayor's spokesman said the DA's interpretation of the law is the best, most current one out there.

"We took an oath to the Oregon Constitution and would be derelict to not follow (Underhill's) understanding," Cox said.

Wheeler favors interviewing officers during administrative investigations as quickly as possible and even campaigned for the mayor's office on that position.

On Feb. 9, after PPB officers used deadly force twice in the same day, Wheeler demanded compelled statements from the officers within 48 hours.

But ironically, Wheeler's actions — at least in part — prompted Underhill's March memo.

"As we've moved into this calendar year, I believe that that IA side — (the) administrative, compulsory interview of the involved officer — has gotten in front of the criminal investigation," Underhill said.

During a use of deadly force incident in May — after Underhill's memo — the Portland officer who was involved was not compelled to provide a statement to internal affairs until after the criminal investigation was done.

Amending The DOJ Settlement

Wheeler's staff is in the process of drafting three ordinances to bring before the City Council in August, Cox said.

While he declined to offer specifics, Cox said one would propose amendments to the DOJ settlement.

"Another would change city code, and a third would establish a public engagement process around public safety issues," Cox said.

In addition, Wheeler is looking into whether Underhill's interpretation of the 1984 Oregon Supreme Court ruling is correct, or if there's a way to effectively wall off an internal investigation from a criminal investigation.

The mayor's office is also exploring whether there are "other procedural changes we can make to the way internal investigations are conducted that will satisfy our desire for a quick interview while protecting a criminal investigation," Cox said.

U.S. Attorney for Oregon Billy Williams is intimately involved in ongoing settlement mediation with the city. He said he respects Underhill's perspective.

"I do not want to, at this point in time, take a position opposing his position because I don't want to jeopardize any potential future prosecution," Williams said.

The Oregon Department of Justice has also reviewed the memo and determined the analysis by Underhill's office is legally correct.

“If the mayor is concerned, he’s not concerned enough to not pass the policy,” said Hardesty, the president of the Portland chapter of the NAACP. “He’s not obligated to do what the DA tells him to do.”

Rural Areas, Suburbs In SW Washington Not Immune To Homeless Crisis

By Molly Solomon

July 19, 2017

Debbie Perrine finds a corner table and sets down her tray of food. It’s lunchtime at the Longview Salvation Army food pantry.

When she’s not here, she’s usually quilting or reading a book at the library. Sometimes she has a doctor’s appointment downtown.

But when the sun starts to go down, she packs everything up and heads toward the river. Like many homeless men and women in rural or suburban parts of the Pacific Northwest, she has few options for getting indoors — and in her case, the list of available shelters is shrinking.

Perrine says she fell into homelessness a couple years ago when her husband, Daniel, passed away from cancer. Most of their savings went toward his medical bills.

“Me and him was together for 26 years,” Perrine said. “After 26 years of being together, you don’t think that one moment to the next you’re going to all of a sudden be homeless.”

Debbie and Daniel Perrine lived in Colorado, but she couldn’t afford to keep their apartment on her own after he died.

“I didn’t have a place to stay, and I knew I was going to be homeless,” she said. “So, I ended up coming home.”

Before Perrine met her husband, she was a Washingtonian, born and raised in Snohomish County. She moved back after his death to figure out her next steps.

Perrine knew she didn’t want to go to a big city like Seattle. Too many drugs and too much danger there, she said. Instead, she set her sights on Kelso, a small town with a low-barrier emergency shelter called Love Overwhelming. She was there for about eight months when the shelter announced it would be shutting down.

“When the shelter closed, I knew I was going to have to camp out somewhere,” Perrine said. “But then that brought up issues like where would I be able to go.”

Perrine is one of about 60 people who ended up back on the street after Love Overwhelming closed in late March earlier this year.

The nonprofit started as a grassroots organization to help the homeless and those in need in Cowlitz County. After receiving \$575,000 in grants from the county — including just under \$200,000 for a low-barrier shelter — Love Overwhelming opened in 2015.

There were two other shelters already open that served the area, one run by Emergency Support Shelter for domestic violence victims and Community House on Broadway, a more selective shelter that requires guests to be drug and alcohol-free.

Love Overwhelming wanted to reach a different group of people: the chronically homeless. Their model was based off what's known as a "housing first" approach. That means sobriety isn't a requirement, and there aren't as many rules. Instead, service providers try to get people indoors first, then work to address the underlying problems that may have led guests to the streets.

Such flexibility opened up the option of shelter to an entire population that was not being served in Cowlitz County.

"We had projected around 350 people coming through for the whole year," said Love Overwhelming Executive Director Chuck Hendrickson. "And within the first weekend, we had that many people come through our doors."

Hendrickson said the shelter's clients had been living in people's garages, under bridges, in the woods by the river.

The shelter also attracted complaints from nearby residents and businesses. Kelso Mayor David Futcher said the response was immediate.

"Love Overwhelming opened up and all of a sudden our calls for services at the city spiked. Police calls, calls to the fire department, those spiked," Futcher said. "It made the problem a lot more visible."

County records show that within the first six months of the shelter opening, 445 calls were made to local police and the county sheriff's department. The year before, the department recorded only 39 calls for that same period.

Homeowners began showing up at city council meetings complaining that their property values were going down. Others said they believed the shelter was a haven for drug use.

"It's been a hot button issue ever since they opened up," Futcher said. "The folks who live near it were really frustrated with having that in their backyard."

The City of Kelso even went so far as to file an injunction to permanently close the shelter less than six months after Love Overwhelming had opened. City leaders and shelter operators ended up settling under the condition that the shelter must beef up security.

It didn't help that the shelter was also located next door to the county office buildings, and some of the people complaining were government workers. They had the ear of commissioners and county employees with significant political influence.

"We had reports from our own employees at night," said Dennis Weber, vice-chair of the Cowlitz County Board of Commissioners. "They were going to the parking lot, they felt scared and very insecure because the homeless were hanging out there on their route. We had reports from folks coming in to pay taxes having to step over the homeless who were passed out on the doorsteps. Unfortunately, the programs just weren't working."

Weber says county leaders felt they only had one solution: buy the shelter building. A timeline of the sale requested by OPB shows that Cowlitz County purchasing manager, Matt Hanson, approached Emergency Support Services, the building's owners, in May 2016 to ask if it was available for sale. In October, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously agreed to spend \$250,000 to purchase it.

"That seemed to be the only thing that was going to put an end to the nightmare that we were experiencing," said Weber.

In order for the property to change hands, Love Overwhelming had to leave. The shelter's last day was the end of March earlier this year. The building is still in escrow and remains empty. The county has not made any announcements for how they plan to use it.

Executive Director Chuck Hendrickson spent the last morning passing out tents, portable stoves, food and clothing.

"It's really unfortunate," he said. "We want to serve the people the best we can. And we lose track of people a lot of times. We really were a hub."

Sixty people ended up on the streets when the shelter closed because Love Overwhelming could not simply pick up and reopen elsewhere. There were no other suitable sites in Kelso. And neighboring Longview has a ban in place on any new shelters.

Longview City Councilor Steve Moon said he and his colleagues got the idea after paying close attention to Love Overwhelming and its deteriorating reputation in Kelso.

"We wanted to make sure that when a shelter moved into our community, they were zoned properly and to the best location that seemed fit," he said.

The initial ban was put in place two years ago, but it's been extended several times since then. Moon says the city is close to finalizing a zoning plan for future shelters and recently presented a proposal to the public. But it still has to go through a more formal comment period and be approved by the full council. For now, Longview's ban on any new homeless shelters remains in effect through September.

The closure of Love Overwhelming and the moratorium on shelter in Longview left homeless men and women in the area with few options. Caleb Luther, who is in charge of the outreach program at Love Overwhelming, says the closure of the shelter has made it more difficult for him and his team. Now that there's no shelter, Luther often drives to the outskirts of town to track down former clients.

"They're in sheds, alleys, camps out in the woods," he said. "That makes it tough for us to look for them when there is assistance, and also we spend our time and energy helping them survive."

On one search for people in need, Luther slows down along the train tracks by the Cowlitz River, about 10 minutes outside of town. He points to several blue dots among the trees.

"I can see camps up in there," he says pointing to tarps hung up by people sleeping in the woods.

Luther says he or someone from his team come out here once a week. They offer rides into town if people need to go to work, get food or see a doctor. He says the number of tents in the woods has ticked up.

"We knew some of them had gone to camp," he said. "We asked a guy staying here last week if it had increased, and he said, 'Oh, yeah.'"

But camps aren't a stable solution. Luther says a lot of camps closer to town, and more visible to law enforcement, end up getting cleared.

"Everybody's question is, 'Where do I go?'" he said.

"We see camps cropping up all over the place," said Longview resident Chris Pegg. "A lot of camps down by the river. You see people sleeping under the bridges. So I think they're just finding whatever place they can for the night."

Pegg is the CEO of Housing Opportunities of Southwest Washington, which helps find affordable housing for low-income people in the region.

Pegg says there are many reasons people end up homeless. Some have mental health issues or addiction problems. But a lot of times, men and women end up on the streets for financial reasons. Cowlitz County was hit hard by the recession and has been slow to recover.

“There’s not a lot of jobs available. The housing costs are skyrocketing. The availability of housing is really limited,” she said. “And we’re really limited in our shelter space.”

In 2015, the number of people living on the streets of Cowlitz County grew by 54 percent. The most recent Point in Time count estimates about 344 homeless individuals and families in Cowlitz County. Those numbers may not seem like much compared to larger cities like Portland or Vancouver, but they mirror a national trend: Across the country, poverty is growing faster in suburbs than cities.

Homelessness is challenging enough in urban areas but can be even harder to overcome in suburbs and small towns because it’s often hidden and, for a lot of residents, brand new. Rural counties often don’t have an infrastructure for dealing with a rising and more visible homeless population.

Pegg, who has lived in Longview for nearly 40 years, says she’s seen a shift in the community over homelessness. Voices, especially those in opposition, have gotten louder — and uglier — at public meetings.

“We’re seeing a level of hostility and a willingness to say things to people and about people that I haven’t seen before,” she said. “Really contentious, divisive conversations.”

The debate intensified after word got out that Love Overwhelming was considering relocating to nearby Longview. City council meetings grew from 20 people to a packed room of 150 people.

A recent meeting to reconsider the city’s shelter ban was held in an assembly hall that could accommodate 300 people. At one point, it was standing-room only.

“A lot of it is about Love Overwhelming,” said Pegg, who has attended several of the meetings to discuss homelessness. “The meetings turn into more of a discussion about Love Overwhelming, rather than talking about a homeless ordinance.”

With a ban on new shelters still in place, Longview city councilors hope to have a new ordinance passed by the end of the year.

In the meantime, people like Debbie Perrine are still looking for a place to stay.

After the Kelso shelter closed in March, Perrine was able to buy some time. Her caseworker found her a family that was in the process of selling their home, so for a couple of months, she stayed in their extra room and left during the day when a real-estate agent came by to show the house.

But the property recently sold, and Perrine is once again in survival mode.

She plans to start looking for a new place to set up camp — one that will likely take her back to the woods.