

The Oregonian

Portland Arts Tax is Legal, Oregon Supreme Court Rules

By Jessica Floum

September 21, 2017

Portland's controversial arts tax is legal, the Oregon Supreme Court unanimously ruled Thursday.

The tax does not violate the Oregon Constitution's ban on a "head tax" because it exempts some taxpayers based on income and household resources, the court ruled.

Justice Jack Landau wrote the opinion, which was unanimously agreed to by all six justices who deliberated on the case. Landau announced this week that he will retire later this year.

Retired Attorney George Wittemyer sued Portland in March 2013, asserting that the city's arts tax violated the Oregon Constitution's prohibition on a "head tax" that levies a flat rate on individuals. The district and appeals courts who heard his case upheld the legality of the tax.

Individuals and households at or below the federal poverty line are exempt from the tax, as are taxpayers earning less than \$1,000 per year who live in non-poverty households. The arts tax also does not apply to income from Social Security or Oregon public employee pensions.

Portland voters in 2012 imposed the arts tax of \$35 per person to help expand arts and music education in schools. It applies only to taxpayers age 18 and older with certain levels and types of income.

Wittemyer said he supported funding arts for children — like his trumpet-playing grandson — but filed suit because he could not condone an unconstitutional tax of any kind.

City officials countered that the tax is not a head tax, in large part because many people, including children, low-income individuals and households and retired public employees, are exempted.

Deputy City Attorney Denis Vannier argued those exemptions make the tax legal. The Portland Public School District and the League of Oregon Cities, which represents 241 incorporated cities, filed briefs supporting the city.

"Today's decision is a big win for Portland's kids," Portland Commissioner Nick Fish said in a statement. He is the city council's liaison to the Regional Arts & Culture Council that staffs the tax's oversight committee.

Jeff Hawthorne, interim director of the Regional Arts & Culture Council, said in a statement that continuing the tax will enable every grade school in Portland to have at least one art, music or dance teacher on staff and for further investment in nonprofit arts organizations.

"We are grateful to the Oregon Supreme Court for affirming the legality of the arts tax once and for all," Hawthorne said.

The city has struggled to collect the arts tax since its implementation. It has only collected an average 74 percent of the tax each year, according to a report presented to the Portland City Council last week.

City officials have also overspent on collections, the report found. They exceeded a voter-mandated 5 percent cap on administrative expenses, diverting almost \$1 million more from arts grants than they should have from 2012 to 2015, the report said.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler does not yet have a position on how to address the excessive administrative spending, his spokesman Michael Cox said in a text.

"He continues to work with his council colleagues on the issue," Cox said.

The Portland Tribune

Portland Arts Tax Upheld Again

*By Nick Budnick
September 21, 2017*

Oregon Supreme Court backs \$35-a-year tax that funds teachers in city schools

The arts tax approved by Portland voters in 2012 is constitutional, the Oregon Supreme Court has ruled

The \$35-a-year income tax was levied on adult residents earning above a certain income, a way to add arts teachers in schools and lower the barriers to local arts programs.

A retired local attorney, George Wittemyer, had challenged it in court. He called it a "head tax," meaning everyone is required to pay the same amount without taking income into account. Such taxes were outlawed by an amendment to the Oregon Constitution in 1910.

The Supreme Court on Thursday unanimously rejected his arguments as two lower courts had before it.

"Because the city's arts tax exempts residents based on their amount of income, household resources, and sources of income, it does take income into account and so is not a poll or head tax," said a summary of the ruling issued by the court.

City Commissioner Nick Fish issued a statement calling the ruling "a big win for Portland's kids ... Thanks to the ruling of the Oregon Supreme Court, over 30,000 Portland children will continue to have arts education in school."

As of last year, the tax had raised less money than expected — \$35 million, including \$6.8 million in 2015-16.

Before the tax started, in the depths of the Great Recession, there were 30 arts teacher positions in Portland. As of last year, supporters counted 91, meaning an art, dance or music teacher in every K-5 school in Portland.

Old Town Chinatown Community Association doesn't want City's Proposed Homeless Shelter

*By Lyndsey Hewitt
September 20, 2017*

Update: City plans to proceed despite the association's lack of support. Association calls city, county hypocritical for continuing to concentrate services there.

The Old Town Chinatown Community Association has one word for the city and county's proposed 200-bed homeless shelter at Northwest Hoyt and Northwest Third Avenue: Nope.

After holding two forums on Sept. 6 to hear from the community and area business owners about their thoughts on the shelter, they issued a statement on Wednesday, addressed to Mayor Ted Wheeler, Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Marc Jolin, director of the city-county Joint Office of Homeless Services saying they "cannot support" the proposal.

They say they recognize that the city is in a homeless crisis, but that overconcentration of homeless services in that district — which has the highest number of homeless individuals sleeping on its streets on a given night, at around 350 — poses a detrimental impact to the neighborhood, inviting crime and a negative effect on business and tourism.

"As you saw in our presentation during the September 6th meetings, Old Town Chinatown has the highest crime-rate concentration in all of Portland. You also heard the feedback from our residents that they are not just fearful for their lack of safety and security, but are pleading with the City for more support after having a neighbor recently stabbed to death, watching open drug deals on our streets, and the recent drive-by shooting on NW 4th and Everett," the statement reads.

But the biggest reason for their resounding no is linked to previous promises made between the city and Old Town/Chinatown associates — the No Net Gain agreement, a deal made back in the 1980s to prevent more homeless services concentration there.

"That is inconsistent with everything the City has told us over the years. It is hypocritical to continue concentrating high-needs, homeless individuals in this neighborhood using the circular reasoning that there are already services here that they need to access, and it is irresponsible to continue steering vulnerable people into the lowest-income, highest crime area of the City," their letter reads.

Mayor Ted Wheeler's office and the Joint Office of Homeless Services are still reviewing the letter and plan to meet this afternoon to discuss their next steps, according to Michael Cox, spokesman for the mayor's office.

It's unclear how they'll proceed, but officials put much stock in having neighborhood support for a project earlier this year: the tiny-home village for homeless women in the Kenton neighborhood.

Update: City and county officials have responded, and are still planning to proceed and look at siting a shelter in Old Town/Chinatown, despite lack of support by the neighborhood association.

The statement, signed by the mayor's office, county chair's office, and the joint office:

"This conversation started because more than 300 people are sleeping without shelter in Old Town Chinatown every night. The neighborhood understands that's a crisis.

A well-run, strongly supported, high-quality shelter like the one we've proposed would help, not hurt, the neighborhood. This kind of shelter can provide a warm, dry place, and a stable connection to services, for many of those neighbors without shelter. It would help them from doorways and sidewalks and into housing.

We have heard concerns from some community members about this proposed shelter. Over the past year, we have enjoyed a positive working relationship with the neighborhood, including the recent move of Right 2 Dream Too and the closing of the Royal Palm Hotel. We do not believe this proposed shelter represents a significant increase in services in the area. Instead, we think this proposal represents an opportunity to improve the services offered in Old Town Chinatown, leading to better results.

We will continue to explore this opportunity. As that process unfolds, we remain committed to working with the neighborhood to shape shelter operations and address specific concerns. We also remain committed to enhancing public safety, livability and economic growth in the neighborhood."

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Wheeler's Rosy Red Herrings

By Dirk VanderHart

September 20, 2017

The Mayor's Boosting a Highway Expansion, But Does He Have His Facts Straight?

Last week marked a notable transformation: Mayor Ted Wheeler became a leading booster for the controversial I-5 Rose Quarter project.

Both in a Portland City Council hearing and on an appearance on OPB, the mayor went to bat for the \$450 million proposal, which would add lanes on I-5's chaotic path through the Rose Quarter and create improvements for surface streets in the area.

Wheeler's support has weight. As a growing contingent of activists seek to put an end to the massive project, he's one of just two City Council members who haven't voted in the past to approve it.

But the mayor's advocacy would have more heft if it wasn't polluted by the fuzzy and inaccurate arguments he's been using to present the project in a positive light. A couple of these were refuted by Jonathan Maus of the Bike Portland blog last week. One deserves more investigation. Let's dive in!

"Overwhelming" minority support

The most frustrating and threadbare claim Wheeler made last week came on OPB, when he was talking about the proposal's massive "caps," which would cover part of I-5. The city has argued those caps would ease the gaping wound left by the interstate, which displaced members of Portland's African American community when it was built.

"That's why people who have testified overwhelmingly in favor of this tend to be people from communities of color who understand that history," Wheeler said.

Maus and I both asked: Where were these people? The mayor's office pointed to a September 7 council hearing that touched on the freeway project. At the hearing, just four people testified in favor of the project (and many more testified against). Two of those supporters were people of color, and both were testifying in formal capacities (one for the city's planning commission, the other for the Oregon Department of Transportation, which loves the project).

It's doubtful that anyone listening imagined Wheeler was referring to just two people.

The 50-50 Rumor

On OPB and in a hearing last week, Wheeler suggested that the I-5 project wasn't as highway-centric as its detractors believe. After all, the project also includes that cap, and a new bridge for pedestrians and cyclists.

In fact, he said, about half of the total cost would pay for those surface street projects. That caught my attention, because Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) officials had previously told me that was an unreliable estimate.

When I asked Wheeler's office for clarification, they pointed me to a document PBOT had sent over. So I followed up with PBOT, which asked me what the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) had to say.

An ODOT spokesman said "we have no such breakdown on costs and [are] not sure of the source of those calculations."

I pressed PBOT for more. After several days, they offered a generic statement saying roughly 50 percent of "biddable expenses" were part of the surface improvements. Puzzlingly, they cited ODOT.

More puzzlingly, ODOT cited a "rough estimate" when I went back to them again, not offering any more details.

Check the Definition

Wheeler's last misleading statement is smaller. On OPB, he scoffed at the notion that the I-5 proposal was a "megaproject," as media had termed it.

In fact, I termed it a "megaproject." Because ODOT classifies every project that costs more than \$360 million as a "megaproject."

It's a megaproject. And for Wheeler, who's not been shy about knocking media reports, last week's claims weren't a great look.

Another Shelter in Old Town Wouldn't Break City Planning Promises, Ted Wheeler Now Says

*By Dirk VanderHart
September 20, 2018*

A new 200-bed homeless shelter would not represent a "significant expansion of services" in Old Town, Mayor Ted Wheeler's office now says.

Citing the recent departure of a self-run homeless camp and transitional living facility from the neighborhood, the mayor is arguing that adding a large shelter wouldn't run afoul of long-held city planning policy to not meaningfully expand social services in Old Town. The so-called "no net gain" policy has been a central argument of Old Town businesspeople, who say their neighborhood is already full up with nearly 330 beds among four year-round shelters.

"The mayor believes that the new shelter under discussion does not represent a significant expansion of services," Wheeler spokesperson Michael Cox told the Mercury this week.

That argument comes as the battle over the shelter is poised to heat up.

Earlier today, the Old Town Chinatown Community Association (OTCTCA) sent officials a three-page letter describing the neighborhood as overrun with predatory drug dealing, sex trafficking, and gang activity, and called on officials to find a space elsewhere. The letter was addressed to Wheeler, County Chair Deborah Kafoury, and Marc Jolin, director of the county's Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS).

"Our neighborhood knows first-hand the unintended consequences of services and shelters being over concentrated in a single area," says the document, first noted by the Portland Tribune. "The issue is not with those receiving services or seeking shelter, but rather with those who prey on vulnerable populations."

The association's conclusion? That it "cannot support" the proposal to develop a shelter in an unused warehouse at NW 3rd and Glisan. To make its case, the group offers up reasons cited by every neighborhood facing the possibility of a new shelter: safety (the OTCTCA says Old Town has the worst crime rate in Portland) and economic impact (it mentions businesses that have recently moved out).

But as the Mercury reported recently, Old Town stakeholders have a more unique argument, too: decades of commitments by city officials to not meaningfully expand social services in Old Town. Current city planning policies say officials should "not locate additional major social services in the district."

That verbiage was included in a plan approved by Portland City Council in 2015, and it's repeated in another plan—dubbed Central City 2035—that the council is currently considering. Even so, Wheeler says the language doesn't apply to the proposal for the new shelter, which could become the city's largest.

How does the mayor figure? Cox cites the recent closure of the Royal Palm, a building a NW Third and Flanders that he says served as transitional housing for 32 people experiencing mental health issues, and had dorm space for 20 more. He also notes the recent relocation of the self-run homeless camp Right 2 Dream Too, which Wheeler's office helped move to the Rose Quarter. The camp hosted around 70 people on a typical night (Cox maintains it maxed out at 100 people, and that its relocation was a big priority for Old Town businesses).

It's not an argument likely to satisfy the OTCTCA. After all, a 200-bed shelter would represent a 60 percent increase in the neighborhood's current institutional shelter beds. Even lumping in the beds lost via the departures of the Royal Palm and R2DToo, it's a net gain.

As the mayor argues a new shelter comports with the city's commitments, Cox says Wheeler is also considering changing the language about expanding social services that's currently on the books.

"We will continue to look at the language in the 2035 Central City Plan," he says. "We want the language to accurately reflect City policy, and any changes we can make to help get us there are worth considering."

While this debate might be headed toward open conflict, remember that Portland is struggling with a growing homelessness crisis, and that officials have a hard time finding shelter space that meets zoning criteria and is near social services offerings. Boosters for the new Old Town shelter say it would do both—and also argue that it will help improve the neighborhood.

"This conversation started because more than 300 people are sleeping without shelter in Old Town Chinatown every night," reads a freshly released statement from Wheeler, Kafoury, and the JOHS. "A well-run, strongly supported, high-quality shelter like the one we've proposed would help, not hurt, the neighborhood. This kind of shelter can provide a warm, dry place, and a stable connection to services, for many of those neighbors without shelter. It would help them from doorways and sidewalks and into housing."

Bottom line, the statement says: "We will continue to explore this opportunity."

Here's the full letter from the OTCTCA [PDF].

The Arts Tax is Broken

By Dirk VanderHart

September 20, 2017

Now the City Might Tweak It Without Asking Voters

THE PORTLAND ARTS TAX has underperformed and overspent.

When voters approved the oft-derided \$35 tax in 2012, they did so with the understanding that about 95 percent of the money they forked over would pay for arts teachers and culture-related nonprofits. No more than 5 percent of the revenues, averaged over five years, was supposed to go toward administering the tax.

These days, that assurance looks laughable.

“I think 5 percent polled very well in 2012 as a number to shoot for, but it was never realistic,” Thomas Lannom, the city’s revenue director, told Portland City Council last week. “That’s all come home to roost now.”

Since 2013, the city’s Revenue Division has spent 7.7 percent of the arts tax cash it collects trying to get citizens to fork over their \$35. In the last three years, administrative costs have been closer to 9 percent, a figure the city says is “the most accurate representation of ongoing expenses.”

The tax is also falling short. When it passed in November 2012, Lannom was confident the city could get 85 percent compliance from taxpayers. So far the Revenue Division has maxed out at 73 percent compliance.

Now, another surprise might be on the horizon: The tax that 62 percent of voters approved might take on a new shape without their input.

In a frank memo to council members in August [PDF], Lannom laid out reasons the arts tax cannot continue in its current form, and presented a series of possible improvements. They include ratcheting up the proportion of arts tax revenue that can be spent on administration—upping the limit to 12 percent of collections, or setting a \$1.2 million budget, or doing away with a limit altogether.

Another option, favored vocally by one member of council earlier this month, would be for the city to kick in hundreds of thousands of dollars a year from Portland’s general fund to prop up the tax—a move that could make it harder to pay for priorities like housing, homeless services, and road maintenance.

These tweaks would help city tax collectors rake in more money for arts programming, Lannom said last week. But there appears to be disagreement as to whether fundamental changes to the tax should go to citizens for a vote.

“I know no one wants to go there because no one wants to dare ask the voters to reconsider the arts tax,” Commissioner Dan Saltzman said at the September 13 hearing. “To me, that’s the most straightforward, straight-shooting approach.”

Commissioner Nick Fish disagreed.

“I don’t think we need to go back to the voters,” he said. “I think the city should step up with the general fund and supplement the difference” between the 5 percent cost cap and the price of

enforcement. Fish has since walked back those comments, telling the Mercury he has “not settled on a fix yet.”

There’s little question that the arts tax has made a difference. Since its inception, the tax has collected nearly \$48 million, with revenues rising each year. The tax’s central promise—to fund arts teachers for elementary students—is being met. It currently pays for more than 60 teaching positions among six Portland school districts.

“We went from one music teacher in the entire district to one in every building,” Carolynn Langston, a music teacher in the Parkrose School District, told council. “We are so grateful that the residents of Portland value the arts.”

But the tax’s secondary goal of funding local arts nonprofits has fallen short. Since collections have come in at lower-than-anticipated rates, there’s less money left for the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC), which was tapped to distribute arts tax funds. RACC has received between \$1.4 million and \$2.2 million less than planned each year, according to RACC interim Executive Director Jeff Hawthorne.

When approved, the arts tax promised something on the order of \$12 million a year for arts funding. Council quickly cut into that potential revenue with a 2013 vote that created exemptions for people who make less than \$1,000 a year.

Even taking that into account, the tax has underperformed. Lannom says that’s because it’s difficult to convince more than 360,000 people to pay \$35 on top of their yearly tax filings.

The lower-than-anticipated revenue presents a thorny issue: With less revenue coming in, the city more quickly runs up against its 5 percent cap, meaning it has less money to convince people to pay.

Lannom uses 2016 as an example. By April of last year, the city had collected around \$8.2 million in Arts Tax payments, but had already burned through more than \$425,000 administering the tax, hitting its 5 percent cap. Officials pressed on anyway, spending an additional \$524,000, which Lannom credits with scaring up \$2.54 million more in revenue.

All told, the city reaped \$10.75 million from the Arts Tax last year—the most successful haul to date. Lannom argues the extra spending—for collection letters, emails, phone calls, and payment processing—amounted to a “pretty good deal.”

Now, Lannom and his revenue division are recommending that council eliminate the 5 percent cost cap, and instead let them spend \$1.2 million a year to collect the tax (more than has been spent in any year to date). A citizen committee overseeing the tax agrees.

RACC, meanwhile, is asking council to prop up the tax using general fund money—costs that could reach as high as \$680,000 per year, depending on how the city moves forward—or even to dedicate more general fund money directly toward RACC.

It’s unclear when the matter will come before council for a decision.

“It is not going to be an easy conversation and it gets to the question of priorities,” said Mayor Ted Wheeler, who has called the arts tax “probably the most poorly implemented tax” in the city’s history. “We’re willing to be transparent with the public about the mistakes that we made and what we’re going to do to fix them.”

The Portland Arts Tax is Legal, State Supreme Court Finds

By Dirk VanderHart
September 21, 2017

The Portland Arts Tax has big problems, but it's not unconstitutional.

In what should amount to the final say in the matter, the Oregon Supreme Court this morning issued an opinion finding that the \$35 dollar annual charge doesn't amount to an illegal "poll tax" or "head tax," as long argued by George Wittemeyer, a Portland retiree who's challenged the tax in state-level and appellate courts.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court agrees with lower courts, saying that exemptions for people at or under the federal poverty line—or people who live in households above that line, who make less than \$1,000 a year—mean the tax is okay.

"We conclude that a tax that takes into account the income, property, or other resources of taxpayers is not a

"poll or head tax" within the meaning of Article IX, section 1a," reads the opinion from Justice Jack Landau. " In this case, the City of Portland arts tax exempts certain residents based on their income and household resources. Thus, the tax does take income into account and, as a result, does not amount to a "poll or head tax" within the meaning of the state constitution."

The ruling clears the way for the tax to continue, but that doesn't mean it's going to have smooth sailing. We reported this week on structural flaws within the tax that city council will likely try to correct in coming months.

Update, 8:29 am: Commissioner Nick Fish's office issued a press release shortly after we posted this news.

"We are gratified that the Supreme Court has affirmed the judgments of the Court of Appeals and the trial court," City Attorney Tracy Reeve said in the release, "and held that the Arts Income Tax is fully constitutional."

It also quotes Fish, who says: "Today's decision is a big win for Portland's kids. Thanks to the ruling of the Oregon Supreme Court, over 30,000 Portland children will continue to have arts education in school."

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Multimillion-Dollar Boathouse Proposed Near OMSI

By Chuck Slothower
September 20, 2017

A nonprofit group is partnering with the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry to build a new structure to serve recreational human-powered boating on the Willamette River.

Portland Boathouse Inc. is proposing to erect a two-story, 29,000-square-foot boathouse on the north end of OMSI's campus. The facility, to be called the Portland River Center, would house rowing canoes, kayaks and other watercraft, classroom and instructional space for OMSI and office space for environmental group Willamette Riverkeeper.

Portland Boathouse's lease of space in the RiverEast Center, at 1515 Water Ave., is due to end in August 2019. The looming timeline led boating enthusiasts to plan for a new facility.

The Portland River Center is included as part of OMSI's master plan that has yet to be unveiled, River Center proponents said.

OMSI's master plan, crafted by architecture firm Snohetta, is awaiting internal approvals, OMSI spokesman John Farmer said. The master plan sets forth a plan to redevelop vacant areas around OMSI that are owned by the museum.

There's no formal agreement in place between OMSI and the Portland River Center, but OMSI has set space aside for river-related use, Farmer said.

"We're super excited about it," he said.

The proposed Portland River Center site is within a designated greenway, but River Center supporters believe their river-related use would allow construction there. The supporters plan to meet with Bureau of Development Services staff to gauge the feasibility of building near the river.

"It's designed to sit into the existing landscape there," said Patrick Quinton, a former economic development official who is volunteering in support of the Portland River Center. "It's a relatively long, narrow facility, and it tries to hug the river as much as possible."

Proponents are beginning to raise money for the project. Bernie Thurber, president of Portland Boathouse's board, said the project would cost an estimated \$10 million to \$12 million.

Supporters plan to open the facility in 2020.

"We believe there's a lot of support in the community for this kind of project," Quinton said. "If we can demonstrate that private support, I think there's an opportunity for public support as well."

The Portland River Center would serve as the home of Rose City Rowing Club, Station L Rowing Club, Wasabi Paddling Club and Portland State University club rowing teams. On a busy summer day, the existing Portland Boathouse facility serves about 1,000 river users, Thurber said.

An unresolved question is whether the proposed River Center would use an existing dock or a new one.

"We're open to a variety of possibilities," Quinton said. "Obviously, the River Center needs a dock. If a new dock is going to be built, we would prefer it be as close to this facility as possible."

The river groups would step up to fund and build a new dock if necessary, Quinton said.

Broadly, the Portland River Center fits with an increased emphasis by city leaders on opening the river for more recreational use. Mayor Ted Wheeler has hosted much-publicized swims across the Willamette, and plans for future development at the South Waterfront call for a dock that would allow recreational access to the river.

Increased recreational use comes as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prepares to clean up a stretch of the river designated as a Superfund site.

"This is a project that takes advantage of that renewed interest in the river," Quinton said. "I think Portland is kind of on the verge of a renaissance in terms of how people interact responsibly with the river."

The Portland Business Journal

5 Things to Know for Thursday, Including a Look at Portland's Comically Impressive Influence

Andy Giegerich
September 21, 2017

What's the word, Portland? Hope you stayed dry and away from the lightning yesterday. Yeah, we're not sure what's up with the weather either (although ... you may not want to put your summer clothes away just yet).

Hope you enjoy today's Five Things.

What the...?

The old Abercrombie & Fitch spot at the northwest corner of Broadway and Morrison has been empty for a year. It seems like it's been a lot longer.

Early next year, though, Capital One (!) will open a coffeehouse (!!) at the spot. It's a weird story. The PBJ's Jon Bell spells it out here.

On the road again

The it'll-be-striking renovation of Providence Park will start once soccer season ends.

So reports the Oregonian's Jamie Goldberg, who writes that the work will force the team to spend its first few weeks of the 2018 campaign on the road.

Derrick Tellez, MVP

And, oh man, speaking of soccer, the Timbers made their best signing of the year yesterday.

Meet Derrick Tellez, a five-year-old goalkeeper who'll suit up for next Sunday's game. Tellez collected the contract with the help of Make-A-Wish Oregon. And, yeah, those pictures with the story ... he's cool. Super-cool.

A good crowd for a good cause

The final attendance figures are in for Feast Portland 2017. And ... it's another record. The deets are here.

Net proceeds, BTW, go to Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon.

A Portland page-turner

You might remember a few months ago when the PBJ's Erik Siemers chronicled the rise of Portland as Comic City, USA— a detailed look at the city's growing influence in the nearly \$1 billion comic book industry. This week, some new evidence emerged proving Portland's outsized imprint on the comic book universe.

The SyFy network, as part of its ongoing celebration of its 25 th anniversary, on Monday released its list of the 25 most influential comic book writers of the past 25 years. These lists are subjective, and it's fun for fans to quibble over, but what caught our attention was the number of writers on the list who live in or near Oregon.

Here's the rundown: No. 3, Brian Michael Bendis (Portland); No. 5, Kurt Busiek (Camas, Wash.); No. 6, Kelly Sue DeConnick (Portland); No. 19, Greg Rucka (Portland); and No. 20, Gail Simon (Eugene.)