

The Oregonian

Portland and Multnomah County will look at pairing housing with services to keep homeless housed

*By Jessica Floum
October 13, 2017*

Portland and Multnomah County next week will vote on setting goals for creating housing opportunities for chronically homeless people who struggle with addiction and mental illness.

The goal would be to add, by 2028, 2,000 additional apartments that include access to physical and mental health care, drug addiction treatment, employment coaching and other social services. City Commissioner Nick Fish served as the city's first housing commissioner in 2009 and has long advocated for City Hall to help increase housing with services.

"It's time for us to be bold ... and invest in a national best practice that gets people off the streets and into recovery with the hope of a productive life," Fish told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday.

About 3,300 of these units already exist in Portland and Multnomah County, funded in part by federal vouchers, the city and county's Joint Office of Homeless Services, nonprofits and health-care providers, said Marc Jolin, the joint office director.

The number of people who've experienced homelessness for 12 months or more in Multnomah County increased by 25 percent from 1,033 people in 2015 to 1,209 in 2017, according to a federally mandated point in time count. More than 70 percent of people sleeping outside reported having a mental illness, a physical disability or a substance use disorder.

Housing with services is the way most of the chronically homeless will get off the streets and remain housed "for the long-term," Jolin said.

"In that sense, it is an absolutely essential tool," he said.

A March 2017 report by the Corporation for Supportive Housing estimated that each studio or one bedroom apartment with services costs around \$220,000 to build and about \$17,000 per year for operating costs and services. A two bedroom, the report found, would cost around \$340,000 to build and about \$17,000 for operations and services.

The City Council resolution estimates that housing with services costs from \$24 to \$54 per night. It compared that to the 2014 cost of a Multnomah County jail bed, which it said cost \$200 per night. It noted that an overnight stay in a hospital cost more than \$2,700 per night in 2013 and that an average emergency room visit costs \$2,000.

"The upfront cost is a little more, but because you're adding the services component over time, it saves taxpayers money that's being frittered away in inefficient interactions," Fish said.

Jolin said the joint homeless services office plans to draw on resources from the city, county, the local housing authority, nonprofits and health-care providers to help pay for the services.

The county already provides services for people transitioning out of jail and runs health clinics where people can receive mental and physical health care, Jolin noted.

"Right now, a lot of these people are receiving services," Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury said. "They're just not being targeted and focused around housing."

The city and county's resolutions will help start a conversation about how to connect those services to housing, Kafoury said.

"This resolution affirms our commitment to keep going," Kafoury said. "We need more."

Creating housing where Portland's homeless and mentally ill can receive support services is the latest action taken this month in a series of proposals to alleviate Portland's struggles with affordable housing and homelessness.

Last week, the city extended its declared "housing emergency" for the second time in part to continue increased spending on housing, maintain flexible rules on where homeless shelters can be places and keep up the fast-tracking of affordable housing projects. It also extended a renter protection rule that requires landlords to pay from \$2,900 to \$4,500 in relocation costs to renters they evict or who must move as a result of a rent increase of 10 percent or more.

The council on Wednesday approved spending guidelines for a \$258 million housing bond approved by voters in November. Among the goals: creating 300 affordable housing opportunities with access to social services.

Fish wrote the group of advocates responsible for developing the bond spending guidelines in August urging the group to include creating 300 units with services to the spending goals. He told The Oregonian/OregonLive that this money is meant to go toward building and preserving affordable housing.

He said the city, county and the regional Metro government will work to find more resources.

"It's less important what the ultimate split is and more important that we've collectively committed to fund it," Fish said. "The public at the end of the day expects us to get the job done."

Hoods, headphones on protesters prompt Portland police explanation after questions

By Everton Bailey

October 12, 2017

Portland police released a video Thursday and a longer explanation of why they placed hoods and headphones on several protesters who blocked traffic at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office the day before in Southwest Portland.

The video, taken by police, shows officers cutting a "sleeping dragon" – devices that use pipe, tape and other materials to bind arms together -- off one man wearing one of the form-fitting hood.

Some demonstrators at the scene complained about the tactic, and police spokesman Sgt. Chris Burley said the Police Bureau received questions about what officers were doing as stark images of the hooded protesters flew out on social media.

Protesters lined up Wednesday afternoon in front of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices in Southwest Portland, with several taping their arms together and blocking a bus taking undocumented immigrants to a Tacoma detention center.

Using the equipment is part of training from the Federal Emergency Management Agency on how to safely remove sleeping dragons and similar devices, Burley said. Sometimes protesters fashion them out of cast iron, metal, concrete, tar and other materials, he said.

The device typically works by having people put their hands inside a pipe and lock their arms and wrists together with chains, handcuffs or another method, Burley said. Officers have to remove the sleeping dragon device before removing any of the people attached to them so they're not injured, he said.

The flame-retardant hood protects people from sparks that come from the use of power tools and the headphones decrease the noise, he said. On Wednesday, officers used utility knives and wire cutters to cut the devices, which consisted of plastic pipe, chicken wire, yarn, fabric, steel bolts and chains. The hoods protected the protesters from flying debris, he said.

"It's not a common tactic, but other jurisdictions use similar methods when encountering these devices on protesters," Burley said. "We use all these materials as a precaution to make sure the person is safe. There have been instances in other places where a person sees or hears the tools being used to free them and tries to cause harm themselves with the tools being used to help them."

Burley said Portland officers used a similar tactic with a helmet and headphones in May 2015 when 41-year-old Tim Norgren blocked a private railroad line overnight at a Northwest Portland fuel terminal and locked his arm in a large barrel filled with cement and other materials.

Police used power tools to saw Norgren's arm free, Burley said. Norgren was charged with second-degree criminal trespass. The case was later dismissed after he completed community court, records show.

On Wednesday, no one was hurt when police to cut the devices, he said. Five of the protesters were bound together with the sleeping dragons, he said.

Amina Rahman, one of those protesters, told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Wednesday that officers also tied a tourniquet around her arm. She said they told her it would stop the bleeding if they accidentally cut her.

Rahman said she believed the officers were using a "scare tactic," not protecting protesters.

Authorities cited and released six protesters for failure to comply with verbal warnings and blocking a federal building, said Federal Protective Services spokesman Rob Sperling. He didn't release their names.

They were among a few dozen people with a group called End Deportations Now Collaboration who had gathered at the front of the ICE building, chanted and sang for hours as police and security guards looked on until arrests began.

Demonstrators blocked a bus carrying immigrants to a Tacoma detention center. Demonstrators also blocked more than 50 people, including workers, couldn't enter or leave the ICE building during the protest, Burley said.

Portland police arrested Eli Richey, 37, on suspicion of violating court-ordered restrictions at the same demonstration, but it wasn't related to the protest, police said.

The Portland Tribune

Wheeler, Fritz announce IndyCar return to Portland

By Jeff Zurschmeide

October 12, 2017

The first IndyCar race at Portland International Raceway since 2007 will be held over the 2018 Labor Day weekend

Mayor Ted Wheeler and Portland Parks Commissioner Amanda Fritz welcomed representatives of the Verizon IndyCar Series to Portland on Friday to announce that the professional open wheel racing series will return to Portland in 2018, with a three-year contract for races in 2019 and 2020.

"The return of IndyCar racing to Portland will give us terrific international exposure, a great deal of revenue, new jobs and an exciting experience for race fans," Wheeler said at an Oct. 12 press conference outside City Hall that featured an IndyCar raced by Graham Rahal, who was also present.

Commissioner Fritz focused on the economic benefit, while expressing awareness of neighborhood impacts.

"It is very exciting to see IndyCar racing coming back to the Rose City," Fritz said. "An event of this magnitude means \$12 million to \$15 million in revenue to the city, scores of jobs, and an exciting weekend of racing with new cars using clean-burning ethanol for fuel. I also acknowledge that there will likely be noise impacts in nearby neighborhoods. We will work closely with the organizers and the neighborhoods to mitigate the impact."

The new race will be called the Portland Grand Prix, and will be held on Labor Day weekend, August 31 to September 2, 2018. The Portland race will be promoted by Green Savoree Racing Promotions, Inc. The company also promotes IndyCar's races in St. Petersburg, Fla., Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, and in Toronto, Ontario.

"There's obviously a deep passion for motorsports in this part of the country, and it's been obvious to us as we've put this event together," said Green Savoree CEO Kim Green. "IndyCar races drive economic impact and create jobs. For instance, our race in St. Petersburg has an impact of over \$45 million. We're looking to do the same for this community."

raced by Graham Rahal after the press conference.

Because Portland has not hosted an Indianapolis-style race since 2007, some updates to the Portland International Raceway facility will be needed to bring the race course up to current FIA and IndyCar standards. IndyCar and Green Savoree have committed to bear the expense of necessary upgrades, and no investment of public money will be required from the City of Portland.

"There are safety-related items that have to take place," said PIR Manager E.C. Mueller. "Since these cars were here last some of the requirements have changed. We know that the fence height requirements have changed, so we'll be adding fencing and going through a list of track improvements. There's a stair-step model where we need to complete some items each year. We'll be working closely with Green Savoree and the FIA, but we already have a very safe race track and we're proud of that."

Portland hosted its first race for Indy cars in 1984, and the race was an annual event through 2007, when financial difficulties and internal strife forced the ChampCar World Series out of business. Indianapolis-style racing is now managed by IndyCar, and is on much firmer footing.

Green Savoree has not yet finalized the full schedule for the Portland event weekend, but the series is usually accompanied by several minor-league pro racing series that serve as training grounds for IndyCar drivers, and associated attractions are now a regular part of major professional race weekends.

"Nowadays most people don't want to buy a ticket and just sit in a seat all day," Mueller explained. "We'll have options for people who want a grandstand seat and we'll have options for people who want to do something with more hospitality and entertainment.

The website for the event is www.portlandgp.com. Ticket and schedule information will be posted there as details are finalized.

Will Portland see reprieve from 'zombie' RVs on city streets?

*By Lyndsey Hewitt
October 12, 2017*

Some are skeptical the city's new ordinance will yield positive results and wonder how it will actually help the homeless crisis. While PBOT plans for free RV disposal day, commissioners show interest in a motor home park.

While RV living has intertwined itself with Portland's homeless crisis, the city is trying to figure out how to deal with it.

In an attempt to mitigate the number of so-called "zombie" RVs being sold at little to no cost and ending up parked along neighborhood streets, the City Council unanimously passed an ordinance last week that would ban people from selling or transferring RVs with malfunctioning or nonfunctioning wastewater systems.

Over the past couple of years, the number complaints about these run-down mobile campers has skyrocketed.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation, which fields complaints about the phenomenon, received 4,000 calls about them in 2016. They suspect by year's end, they'll have received 10,000 — which doesn't include 20,000 complaints about cars.

The bureau has had \$150,000 of general fund dollars to dispose of unoccupied RVs since November 2016.

"More concerning is the amount of reports we receive from community members, businesses, business owners and others of the extreme cases of these recreational vehicles, ones that have caught fire due to improper electrical wiring, RVs that leak sewage, gas or other dangerous liquids onto neighborhood streets," said Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the bureau. "These are a clear public health and safety hazard that need to be addressed."

Saltzman said the city spends "significant resources" to dispose of hazardous waste and materials to pick up trash, tow and recycle the RVs, and they're "making it clear" that any tow lots, businesses or owners of these derelict RVs that they are putting the public's health at risk if they're putting them back out on the streets.

In tandem with the ordinance, the Bureau of Transportation announced a free RV Disposal Turn-In Day from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 29, at Portland International Raceway, 1940 N. Victory Blvd.

'We're not garbage collectors'

The idea behind the disposal day is to help people who still have these derelict RVs in their possession, sometimes selling them on Craigslist for as little as a buck, have a way to get rid of them instead of resorting to selling or donating.

According to PBOT, the disposal process for an RV can cost up to \$2,000 for an individual "if they're lucky enough to find facilities that will take them," while tow companies often aren't interested because they don't have much value in terms of scrap metal — and they're filled up.

"We pick them up, and they are literally filled with human garbage. Urine, feces, needles, you name it. The tow industry, we're not garbage collectors," says Michael Porter, CEO of Speeds Towing. Faced with an inordinate number of RVs on their lot and no more room, they sought out a third party, a man who had his own wrecking yard, to get rid of four RVs.

However, the man didn't actually have permission or proper permits to do it.

"We're like, OK, we're not going to do that anymore. So, I understand where the city's coming from in that. ... It was costing us hundreds to thousands of dollars to get rid of them," Porter said.

He isn't sure where the RVs are coming from, and often they're hard to track when VIN numbers are scraped off. But he speculates:

"There's a lot of folks now, they retired when they were 60-65, bought motor homes, and now they're like 'Well, I'm in my 70s or 80s and I'm not going to use it anymore, and so we're selling it,'" he said. He's not sure if that's truly a big source of them, but he said Speeds does see more RVs coming to them through auctions and charities they work with.

After adding more staff to PBOT's Abandoned Auto division, which only deals with unoccupied vehicles, as well as starting a Community Caretaking program with Portland police, which takes on those with occupants, the city has reduced caller wait time by 88 percent, when previously it was taking weeks, at times, to address the problem of an RV sitting in the street.

Neighborhoods like Lents had been dealing with an onslaught of RVs there, pushing the City Council since spring to address the issue.

But some are wondering where that leaves the otherwise homeless individuals who live in the RVs.

Who does it help?

Dave Benson, parking services manager, said they estimate there are between 650-750 RVs with people living in them. Parking an RV on neighborhood streets is illegal, and oftentimes occupants are dropping their waste directly into street storm drains.

While city officials say the ordinance will help keep homeless people from occupying these unsafe spaces in the first place, others aren't so sure.

"The people that are using their RVs and mobile homes and what have you, they're being used for shelter. They don't have anywhere to go. They're not in the position to dispose of their only source of shelter," said Jeff Woodward, a homeless advocate who works with Oregon Harbor of Hope, a group of developers and others in the city working to create new shelter.

Porter had a similar thought.

"I don't know if there's a bunch of people selling those motor homes to people now. I don't know how many of those folks who have broken down motor homes and just can't wait to bring it to the city so they can destroy them," he said.

Finding the dirt for an RV lot

While Portland police officers work with social service workers to attempt to place people impacted by the Community Caretaking program, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, as well as Commissioner Nick Fish, expressed interest in finding a place to park RVs. However, most existing RV parks in the city require proper permits and tags, as well as newer model RVs, leaving those with older RVs that may not be in total disrepair with little choice than a street somewhere.

Eudaly said they're in conversation with the Joint Office of Homeless Services about the possibility of opening up a lot, although Seattle didn't have the best results trying that approach, finding that it cost just as much to get the person into an apartment. They ultimately closed down their lot.

"It makes me very concerned that our homeless count might be grossly off," Eudaly said. Though she supported the ordinance, she added, "It's [a parking lot for RVs] still something I'm interested in pursuing, for those few that might fall into that middle category."

Fish pointed to an RV park in Hayden Island where people can hook up to utilities, and wondered if PBOT or anyone else was considering ways to create a similar safe place for people. He said it might be a conversation for the Housing Bureau.

Benson wasn't entirely convinced.

"The RVs that we see on our streets ... are almost universally in poor condition. They're not going to hook up to anything," he said.

Fish even suggested that maybe the city could find a way to contract with the Federal Emergency Management Agency "or some disaster agency" to get low-cost trailers for people to use temporarily, while they wait for more permanent housing to come online.

"My guess is we could find some dirt ... close to utility structures, because we're looking for just water, electricity and sewer," Fish said, adding that "We have some ideas in my bureau."

Have an old RV?

Get rid of it at the city's Free RV Disposal Turn-In Day

When: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 29

Where: Portland International Raceway, 1940 N. Victory Boulevard

Requirements:

- Registered owner is a city of Portland resident
- Only one per household
- Owner must be present to sign title to City of Portland
- No vehicles from dealerships or businesses
- No personal belongings inside
- Tanks must be drained
- Sign up online by Oct. 27 to participate: portlandoregon.gov/transportation/75063

Read a previous story about vehicle homelessness in Portland: portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/356085-235364-living-in-your-car-is-no-camping-trip

The Portland Mercury

Chloe Eudaly's Landlord Admits Limiting Her Rent Increase Because of Her Relocation Law

*By Dirk VanderHart
October 12, 2017*

When Portland City Council extended the city's mandatory renter relocation law last week, a predictable phenomenon emerged.

Under the law, landlords are liable to pay between \$2,900 and \$4,500 if a rent increase of 10 percent or more leads a tenant to move out (or if they issue no-cause evictions). So landlords are keeping rent increases below that mark—barely.

One woman told the council her rent had increased by 9.97 percent, with the landlord also instituting fees on garbage collection and sewer service. Christina Dirks, an attorney with Legal Aid Services of Oregon, said her office has been getting reports about "9.99 percent" increases since the law passed (though she said that reports of no-cause evictions have slackened).

As it happened, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly—one of two renters on the city council, and the policy's champion— had a story of her own.

"I want to let you guys know that I also received a 9.7 percent rent increase this year," she said. "My rent has gone up 75 percent in the last six years now. I live in a shabby, small rental home that has had no improvements other than repairs of essential services for a decade, and that was substandard and unsafe when I moved in."

Eudaly's landlord isn't well known, but his presence is felt in City Hall these days. The commissioner won office on a platform dominated by a push for stronger tenants' rights, and frequently shares her frustrations and injustices at the hands of landlords over the years. Those clearly inform her policy proposals (though she's candid about different circumstance now that she makes more than \$110,000 a year).

So was Eudaly's recent rent increase actually tied to limited by the law she got passed earlier this year? Yep.

The commissioner's landlord is a Beaverton businessman named Matt Essieh, who hires a property management group to handle things. Essieh's got a solid success story—from being born in Ghana where he "didn't even know what a computer was" to serving as president and CEO of a company that creates computer systems that track investments. His online biography lists a history of civic involvement, including, apparently, a seat on the board of the Portland Opera (he's not currently listed as a member).

Records suggest Essieh's also got a stake in more than 20 properties throughout Portland, Beaverton, Tigard, and Hillsboro—including the Northeast Portland home Eudaly says she's been in since 2012. In that time, she tells the Mercury, her rent increases have ranged from 10 to 35 percent a year.

We asked Essieh: Did the renter relocation law figure into his rent policies? He didn't respond to an e-mail, but his attorney did—in the most jargon-choked, lawyerly way possible.

"Please be advised that my client takes the issue of compliance with State and local landlord tenant laws very seriously," wrote Lake Oswego-based attorney Bradley Blyth. "Please take further note that the recent increase in rent for said property was made in consideration of current rental market conditions and demand with the specific intent of complying with City of Portland protections against rent increases in excess of 10%, and not in contravention of them."

That won't be a surprise to Eudaly.

"I have no doubt that my landlord set the increase just below the threshold because it's never been less than 10 percent," the commissioner says. "However, the real issue is with landlords who haven't historically been raising rents by nearly 10 percent, but are doing it now. It's reactionary, and it's exacerbating our rent crisis."

It's worth noting that Essieh is probably not bound by the renter relocation law, even though he's got a bunch of property. Since he's created individual limited liability companies that correspond to his individual properties (including where Eudaly lives), he'd likely fall into a gaping loophole in the law designed to help out mom-and-pop landlords.

Photos & Video: Portland Police Put Hoods, Headphones On Activists for "Protection" From Power Tools. There Were No Power Tools.

*By Doug Brown
October 12, 2017*

The Portland Police Bureau put hoods over the faces and headphones on the ears of a group of activists linked together before they arrested them. The activists had been blocking the gate to the ICE building in SW Portland yesterday afternoon, protesting deportations under the Trump administration.

Police used hoods and headphones on the protesters, the bureau says, so the activists wouldn't get hit with sparks or get ear damage from the loud noises emanating from the power tools used to remove them from the "sleeping dragon" device connecting the five people.

But the police never used any power tools. There were no sparks that could have hit their faces. There were no loud noises that could have damaged their ears. The so-called "sleeping dragon" in this case—per police, it was made of a plastic pipe, yarn, fabric, chicken wire, bolts, and chains—only required the use of small, non-electric cutters. In short: the hoods and headphones were for "protection" from tools that the PPB did not once use.

Video that the Portland Police Bureau took shows what they used to separate the protesters:

A Mercury photograph shows a similar tool.

In a statement this morning, as they said to us last night, bureau says it was for their protection. They also say now the hoods and headphones strategy "also prevents the proestors (sic) from intentionally causing themselves injury during the removal and/or falsely claiming injury to halt the cutting." If they can't see or hear what's going on, the theory goes, they can't stop the cutting or try to hurt themselves.

There were five protesters linked together blocking the gate to the ICE building, with four "sleeping dragon" devices linking them together. As police worked on separating and arresting them, they put the hoods and headphones on two protesters at a time—the ones on either side of the device. When they were freed from the device and cuffed, the cops took the hoods and headphones off and hauled them to the back of the van. The federal cops didn't arrest the final two people in the chain because ICE employees and a GEO prison transportation bus were able to leave using the driveway once the first three were gone.

Three others not in the link were arrested before the cops worked on removing the "sleeping dragon." They refused to get out of the driveway.

Here's the Portland Police Bureau's full statement this morning (and see below for more photographs and video):

On Wednesday, October 11, 2017, at 2:44 p.m., Central Precinct officers responded to 4310 SW Macadam Avenue at the request of Federal Protective Services regarding a protest.

When officers arrived, they observed 20 to 30 protesters blocking the entrance and exit to a building that houses multiple government agencies. The Federal Protective Service (FPS) was the agency in charge of the police response, and the Portland Police Bureau responded to provide assistance to FPS.

FPS officers informed Portland Police Officers that there were people inside the building and in their cars who needed to leave for the day and others who needed to enter the building. More than 50 people were unable to enter or exit the facility and its driveway due to the protesters blocking the entrance/exit. FPS officers repeatedly asked the protesters to move and let the community members go home. The protesters refused. FPS officers also offered the opportunity of a grace period, asking the protesters to leave without arrests. The protesters refused.

The protesters who blocked access to the building wore "sleeping dragons." Sleeping dragons are homemade devices designed to link together multiple protesters to block a particular area, in this case the entrance and exit to the building and its driveway.

People using sleeping dragons, place their hands inside a pipe and lock their arms and wrists together by using handcuffs, chains and carabiner or another method. The pipe is often wrapped in materials that make it extremely difficult to cut. Oftentimes, the sleeping dragon is made of cast iron, metal or plastic pipes, concrete, tar, chicken wire, duct tape, feces and chains. Officers have no idea what is in the sleeping dragons until they begin the process to cut and disassemble them. Officers cannot physically remove protesters who are using sleeping dragons without disassembling the devices due to the fear of possibly breaking protesters' arms, wrists or somehow injuring them.

To remove sleeping dragons, police often must use power tools and because of the variety of materials, there is a possibility of sparks. Since safety is a top concern, officers use protective attire to ensure their safety during the cutting process. This kind of training to place protective attire is from the Center for Domestic Preparedness, which is operated by FEMA, and is national best practice for removal of sleeping dragons or other protesters' devices. PPB has had this training and protective gear for more than a decade. The gear protects the protesters' faces and ears. It also prevents the protesters from intentionally causing themselves injury during the removal and/or falsely claiming injury to halt the cutting.

The sleeping dragons used in this protest ended up being comprised of plastic pipe, yarn, fabric, chicken wire, steel bolts, and chains. The protesters' arms were connected by chains inside the pipe. As officers removed additional layers of the sleeping dragons, they determined they would

not require power cutting devices. Once the cutting was complete, the protective attire was removed.

Portland Police only cut the sleeping dragons and removed the protestors who were blocking the entrance/exits to the facility. Once they did so, the community members who were trying to leave were finally able to do so. There were no injuries reported as a result of officers carefully removing the sleeping dragons.

Once the protestors were removed, the community members were able to leave—some had been trapped in their cars for more than an hour-and-a-half.

OPB

Is Art Working For Everyone In The City That Works?

By April Baer

October 12, 2017

A couple weeks ago, at the East Portland Arts and Literary Festival, dozens of poets, craft makers and hip-hop artists were showing off their best. Most of the artists were young, and most of them were people of color.

At one table, Cesar Ramirez and his partner were showing their zines.

“Mine talks about my experience,” Ramirez said, “and my parents’ experiences navigating what it means to be a first-generation Mexican-American” in his hometown of Long Beach, California.

Along another wall, Georgina Brooks had laid out her silkscreen prints and watercolors, featuring vintage-style illustrations of animals and natural scenes. A few tables down, the textile artist Kolodi was selling a colorful range of fabric bags and showing off her grandmother’s elegant dressmaker’s square.

The crowd was representative of where the city’s cultural scene is headed. Portland is growing, and those moving to town are younger and more diverse.

And yet, the bedrock of the city’s arts administration is a middle-class, largely white institution known as the Regional Arts and Culture Council, or RACC. Its broad service menu includes taking care of public artwork, coordinating workplace giving for the arts, and administering millions of dollars per year in public funding.

A search committee has spent the last eight months laying the groundwork to replace Portland’s top arts administrator, Eloise Damrosch, who retired in June. The conversation about her replacement has been heavily seasoned with calls for change.

Andre Middleton does community engagement for RACC. He’s also spent time trying to identify new all-ages spaces for performance.

“I think they’ve got a relatively strong board of engaged people,” Middleton said, noting it was “a relatively diverse board.”

Middleton gives his former coworkers high marks when they’re set to the task of supporting diverse art and audiences.

“But I also think that there needs to be an examination of the distribution of resources and wealth,” he said. “Heretofore, a lot of those resources have been fairly concentrated among the usual suspects, so to speak.”

This can't help but have an effect, he said, on the next generation of cultural tastemakers, to say nothing of the people who may come of age on the burgeoning east side, with little cultural space for coming together.

In the late 2000s, when Sam Adams was mayor of Portland, he wrote provisions into RACC's city contract, insisting that both RACC and its major beneficiaries emphasize equity: more diversity in audiences, staff and boards of directors.

RACC's board of directors has become noticeably more diverse in recent years. Nearly half — 43 percent — of board members identify as people of color.

The staff is a different story. Thirty-four people work at RACC, and three quarters are Caucasian, including all four top managers. Statistics from RACC show this year's grant panelists came closer to representing the region's racial diversity, but they still looked geographically lopsided. Of 56 panelists, only two live east of SE 82nd — a dividing line between the have and have-not neighborhoods of Portland.

Jeff Hawthorne has served as RACC's interim director since Damrosch stepped down. He said the agency is working on its own internal composition.

“More than 50 percent of our hires over the last three years have been people of color, and we are still working on more strategies to recruit and retain those workers, to advance folks within the organization,” he said.

As far as programming, Hawthorne said efforts are afoot to retool RACC's granting process, making grants more accessible to arts groups that are too small to staff grant writers. Some arts tax money, Hawthorne said, is being used to help culturally specific arts groups grow and expand grants for the larger groups doing equity work.

“We are trying to be more flexible,” Hawthorne said, “because the end goal is not to fund an arts organization. The end goal is for citizens and residents to participate in the arts.”

Equity stats were conspicuously absent from RACC's last three annual reports to City Council, even though a 2013 equity plan said it would report yearly.

Seven years after Adams broached the subject, RACC has been unable to come up with metrics or best practices for gauging progress among its major beneficiaries: the Oregon Ballet Theatre, the Oregon Symphony, Portland Art Museum and 45 other groups from the top- and middle-tiers of the arts ecosystem.

Some institutions have definitely made shifts in programming, but with no measuring stick in place, it's hard to say who's delivering on taxpayers' investments.

RACC Board Chair Mike Golub said the organization is making progress on equity. (Note: Golub is also a member of the board of OPB.)

“The scope and breadth of RACC's programs are incredible,” Golub said. “I think many people out of the center of that circle don't realize all that RACC does.”

He said equity has surfaced as a major focus of the executive search.

The committee seeking RACC's next leader has been active for the better part of eight months now, but no one has seen a job description yet. And, it turns out, equity is part of what's taking so long.

About a dozen young, mid-career arts staffers and artists from around Portland — mostly people of color — have been meeting for a couple of years to talk about social issues including the normalization of audiences and institutions. It's called Arts Workers for Equity, or AWE. AWE went public last spring with concerns about the search.

Where was the transparency, its open letter asked, and would the search committee's parameters attract anyone other than upper-middle-class white candidates?

Candace Kita of APANO, who's part of AWE, said almost everyone in the group has had radicalized experiences working for or with mainstream arts groups in town. They wanted to make sure the language and ground rules for the search weren't cutting out people of color who might be qualified.

"How are you framing this job description?" she said. "Are you calling it something very academic that people might not be able to access in the same way?"

Kita, and another AWE member, Roya Amirsoleymani, explained that once they got in the door with RACC's board, progress started happening.

"They really shifted their own trajectory," Kita said. "There is now an AWE member who is on the search committee."

"I was also impressed by some of the shift in the composition of the committee," Amirsoleymani said, "adding people who did represent other perspectives, provide other perspectives and viewpoints."

The committee has severed its relationship with a traditional search firm, Aspen Leadership Group, which has worked with the Oregon Symphony and Portland Art Museum. It's now working with a Los Angeles company, Koya Partners, that specializes in finding nonprofit executives — with diversity as one of its guiding values.

Golub said the committee just needed to do some more internal work, and might have engaged Aspen a bit too early in the process.

Steve Rosenbaum, a tech marketing executive who stepped in to head the search committee this spring, said he thinks the process is on the right track. While AWE may not get everything members want from the hire, he predicted they'll be happy overall.

"Some of the type of equity leadership we're looking to do is somewhat cutting edge," Rosenbaum said. "It's one of the reasons I think it's going to be an attractive position to candidates. I think there are a number of qualified candidates both locally and nationally who could fill the role."

A few established arts players have asked the search committee to think about other priorities — like finding a strong advocate for arts funding. Cash from the city general fund is never a sure thing. Plus, the city's arts tax is underperforming.

But it seems clear the committee is in agreement with advocates: Portland's arts ecosystem can't go forward without a leader who can engage beyond conventional museums, galleries and shows.

I-5 Expansion In Portland Faces Opposition, Unanswered Questions

*By Jeff Mapes
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A \$450 million project to upgrade a highly congested stretch of Interstate 5 in Portland faces new opposition and big unanswered questions.

The Fight Over Tolls In Oregon's Transportation Bill

The trucking industry says the two-mile section that runs through Portland's Rose Quarter is the 41st worst bottleneck on the nation's interstate system. Sideswipes and fender benders are common as drivers maneuver through a tangle of ramps between Interstate 405 to the north and Interstate 84 to the south.

The project's main feature is additional lanes that make it easier for drivers to move on and off I-5. Officials hope the new lanes will result in fewer unexpected delays and slash the roughly 120 crashes that occur annually on that section of road.

"We fully admit that this is not going to eliminate congestion at the Rose Quarter," said Travis Brower, assistant director of the Oregon Department of Transportation. "But we do expect that it will make traffic much better."

ODOT is also working with the City of Portland on a variety of non-freeway improvements in the Rose Quarter aimed at improving pedestrian, cycling and local street connections over I-5.

Highway Wars

However, the project has become another chapter in Portland's long history of highway wars. Expanding some auxiliary lanes isn't as dramatic as the fight over the Mount Hood Freeway, which was killed in the 1970s after it threatened to take out some 1,500 homes and businesses in Southeast Portland.

Still, critics of the Rose Quarter changes have formed a group called "No More Freeway Expansions." They say it's long past time to stop spending hundreds of millions of dollars on freeways running through the middle of cities.

"Once these are expanded, they will fill up with cars and then we'll move on to whatever the next bottleneck is," said Aaron Brown, a walking and cycling activist who is one of the leaders of the anti-expansion group. "At what point do we say enough is enough — we don't think more lanes of freeways are solving our problem?"

Brown said the money should be spent on the more important city goals of ending traffic fatalities, encouraging alternatives to driving and fighting climate change. He said the vast majority of the crashes in this section of the freeway are minor and that other parts of the city are more dangerous for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

"We're facing serious hazards trying to cross streets like 82nd Avenue, and ODOT's response is, 'Well, we don't have the money,'" Brown said. Much of 82nd Avenue in East Portland is technically a highway under ODOT's control.

The "No More" group is trying to upend last session's big political deal on transportation.

What About Congestion Pricing?

After several years of controversy and negotiations, legislators earlier this year agreed to spend \$1 billion upgrading three of Portland's increasingly congested freeways, part of a broader statewide transportation spending plan. But they also said just pouring more asphalt wasn't enough. They directed ODOT to come up with a plan for levying tolls aimed at prodding people to avoid rush hour traffic.

Groups ranging from the Oregon Environmental Council to the state trucking association bought into the deal.

"Congestion pricing alone won't solve the problem," said Jana Jarvis, the truckers' president. "And adding a lane alone is not going to solve the problem. It's going to take a combination of the two."

Opponents say the state doesn't need to combine tolls with the roadwork.

"That's a lousy deal," said Joe Cortright, a Portland economist who focuses on urban issues. "I think economists are unanimous that congestion pricing, if we're really serious, is the way to go."

Cortright likes to use the example of a Louisville freeway bridge that now attracts less traffic than it did before tolls were imposed — despite expanding the number of lanes. As a result, he has suggested that the state first toll the Rose Quarter area and then see if the freeway expansion work is even necessary.

Generally, the Federal Highway Administration only allows tolling on interstates when it's tied to specific freeway projects. But there are some pilot programs the state might be able to apply for, and Cortright noted that the Trump administration has talked about easing the rules on the use of tolls.

Beyond that, however, ODOT's Brouwer raised doubt about whether it makes sense to even try to impose tolls in the Rose Quarter.

"This is a challenging section of freeway from a lot of perspectives," he said, "and it's not clear that it is one that would lend itself real well to congestion pricing."

Brouwer said tolls on that segment of I-5 could just drive more traffic — and congestion — to I-405 and local streets.

I Say, 'No And Hell No'

The Rose Quarter project does have strong support among many Portland leaders, including Mayor Ted Wheeler. He particularly praises the many non-freeway improvements that ODOT has worked with the city on.

These include proposals to place two caps over the freeway, one at the intersection of North Vancouver and Northeast Hancock and the other at Northeast Broadway and Northeast Weidler. In addition, there would be a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over I-5 near the Moda Center and other local street improvements.

"If somebody came to me and said, 'Ted, do you want to spend half a billion on a freeway expansion?', I say, 'No and hell no,'" the mayor said. "But that's not what this is."

Wheeler said he thinks those improvements would help revive a neighborhood that often feels lifeless when there's no concert or Blazers game. And he said it would begin to restore some of the community links lost when the largely African-American neighborhood of Albina was ripped apart by the construction of I-5 decades ago.

In addition, several legislators have also made it clear to opponents that they can't just take state money earmarked for the Rose Quarter project and sprinkle it around the city.

Wheeler asked about that when Rep. Susan McLain, D-Forest Grove and a member of the Legislature's House-Senate transportation committee, discussed the issue at a city council meeting last month.

"You're going to spend the money on this project," she said firmly. "That's what it's dedicated to in the package."

Mount Hood Freeway Memories

On this note, critics harken back to that 1970s fight against the Mount Hood freeway. Then-Mayor Neil Goldschmidt helped push the federal government — which was set to pay most of the freeway's cost — to instead let the region put the funds toward starting light rail and on a variety of local street improvements in the tri-county area.

But even beyond that issue, there's yet another big question about funding. That's because the money for the local improvements that Wheeler and other supporters are talking about is not all in place.

The state transportation bill included \$30 million in annual funding that will be used to float bonds to help pay for the I-5 project. ODOT spokesman Don Hamilton said it won't cover everything.

"That's not designed to pay for the entire cost of the project," Hamilton said. "We will talk to the city about exactly how the costs will be allocated between the city and the state."

Megan Channell, the ODOT manager for the Rose Quarter project, said the agency would be "looking at a variety of sources" at all levels of government to fund the entire project.

One possibility that has been discussed: a regional transportation bond that TriMet is looking at putting before voters in November of 2018.

Matthew Arnold, the director of urban design and planning at Serra Architects, said that the success of the project depends heavily on getting those local improvements. He worked as a volunteer on an advisory committee that helped design them.

"There may be moments when we have to make hard pushes to maintain some of those pieces," he said, adding that if "all we end up with is a freeway project and a couple of four-foot sidewalks, we've lost."

Questions And More Questions

The murkiness of the future of congestion pricing in the Rose Quarter area — and the questions about cost — suggest that the issues swirling around I-5 here won't be settled anytime soon.

The Portland City Council is expected to decide this spring whether to keep the Rose Quarter project in its Central City Plan. At a minimum, taking it out of the plan would complicate the project's future.

ODOT has just formed an advisory committee on "value pricing" — its phrase for tolling — and won't submit a proposal to the federal government until late next year. Washington lawmakers are making it clear they'll be closely watching the impact on Clark County commuters.

On top of that, detailed cost and traffic studies haven't been done yet. And state money for construction won't start flowing until 2022.

In front of the Rose Quarter project are the two other big freeway projects envisioned in the transportation bill. They would put auxiliary lanes on Highway 217 in Washington County and widen a stretch of I-205 from Oregon City to Stafford Road.

Arnold, the planner, said those projects appear more likely to encourage people to keep driving.

“For those advocates for whom freeway widening is a concern,” he said, “the 205 and the 217 projects might bear more scrutiny than this one.”

Members of the “No More Freeway Expansion” group say they also oppose those suburban projects. But so far, those proposals haven’t faced the same kind of critical scrutiny.