

The Oregonian

Portland Timbers to Move Forward on Providence Park Expansion

*By Jessica Floum
December 20, 2017*

The Portland Timbers are set to move forward on expanding the team's chronically sold-out stadium at Providence Park by up to 4,000 seats.

The Portland City Council on Wednesday unanimously approved the project, which is expected to cost the team's owners, Peregrine Sports, \$50 million. The decision makes official the terms of expansion that the city approved in June. Commissioner Dan Saltzman was absent.

The city will pay about \$3 million for system repairs and replacement costs, property insurance for the expansion and for a consulting team and lawyers to oversee the project for the city, according to a City Budget Office Analysis.

The city agreed in June to waive about \$5 million in ticket tax revenue over the next ten years to help lower the stadium expansion costs.

Portland currently collects taxes on Timbers, Blazers, Thorns, Winterhawks and Rose Quarter concert tickets, all of which go into a Spectator Venues and Visitor Activities Fund. Much of those funds get used to pay off debt payments for past stadium expansion and upgrades.

The city could miss out on more ticket tax revenue if the Timbers and the Thorns, Portland's women's soccer team, perform well, generating more ticket sales, or if other events are held at the stadium, the City Budget Office report said.

The Timbers will be exempt from paying ticket taxes on existing seats at Providence Park from 2018 to 2021 or 2022, depending on when construction is finalized. They will be exempt from paying taxes on newly constructed seats until 2026. The city council in September voted to allow the team to start construction early so they could stay on schedule.

Still, the city's Office of Management and Finance projected that expanding the park will have a positive impact overall.

Taxing the additional seats is projected to make the city an additional \$2 million to \$5 million, Portland's Chief Administrative Officer Tom Rinehart said Wednesday.

"At the end of the day, this is a very solid deal," Mayor Ted Wheeler said at Wednesday's meeting. "There is no question that the asset we're improving here can only benefit the city. I'm very appreciative of this and very excited about the potential."

Commissioner Amanda Fritz raised concerns about a provision in the agreement that would allow Peregrine Sports to sell the Thorns, considered one of the most successful teams in women's sports.

Mike Golub, president of the Portland Timbers and Portland Thorns, said Peregrine Sports does not intend to sell the Portland Thorns. However, they wanted the flexibility to do so in the future due to "the history of uncertainty around women's sports and women's sports leagues."

Still, Golub said, "the very reason why we're doing this is to ensure the two clubs are here for the long-term."

Golub told The Oregonian/OregonLive in May that the expansion is necessary to ensure the soccer teams stay in Portland. The stadium's current capacity falls in the lower half of Major League Soccer Venues, he said.

"We firmly believe this deal will allow us to build on the positive impact we have had in the community for many years to come," Golub said Wednesday.

The Portland Tribune

Sources Say: Wheeler Takes to Airwaves to Defend Homeless Approach

*By Jim Redden
December 21, 2017*

Plus, Brown thinks car break-ins are no big deal and the white guy drops out of the City Council race

Mayor Ted Wheeler spent two hours defending his approach to the homeless crisis to four conservative critics on KXL radio Sunday morning.

Wheeler was the guest on Kremer, Abrams and Pasero, which runs from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and is hosted by charter school supporter Rob Kremer, former Portland Public Schools board Chairman Mark Abrams and Jim Pasero, a principal at the Third Century Solutions political consulting firm.

Abrams, the only liberal, was absent and replaced by former GOP candidate for Oregon governor Allen Alley and Portland Spirit owner Dan Yates.

Kremer, Pasero, Alley and Yates spent much of their time complaining that suburban women are afraid to come downtown because of the homeless.

Alley went so far as to call the homeless part of "this kind of miasma of yuck that sits over the city." Miasma means a highly unpleasant or unhealthy smell or vapor.

Citing a recent survey by Clean & Safe, a Portland Business Alliance affiliate, Wheeler replied that the downtown economy is booming and 95 percent of business owners feel safe there.

He also said the City Council has increased support for homeless services, and reminded listeners he's only been mayor less than a year.

Car break-ins just a part of life?

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown apparently doesn't think downtown crime is any big deal.

Last Friday morning, state Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, who is running for the Republican nomination for governor, issued a statement saying his car had been broken into near the Portland Art Museum.

"This is becoming, certainly, a big issue for Portland. So I'll be speaking about it. It really is a quality of life issue for the people of Portland," Buehler said.

Brown's campaign responded by telling him to get over it.

"Knut Buehler had an unfortunate experience with vandalism that many Oregonians have been through, but it's clear from his reaction that he doesn't understand the experience of everyday Oregonians," the campaign said in a statement to KATU-TV.

White guy drops out of race

Former OPB newscaster Spencer Raymond has pulled out of the City Council race for Commissioner Dan Saltzman's seat after being heavily criticized on social media for being a white guy running against three women of color. Saltzman is not seeking another term.

"I want to make it clear that I did not enter this election to run against specific individuals or groups. I entered in an earnest attempt to make Portland a better place for everyone," Raymond said in an email statement last week.

Of the three women, NAACP Portland chapter president JoAnn Hardesty has reported raising over \$76,000 in cash and in-kind contributions so far this year. Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith has raised over \$56,000 and Andrea Valderrama, an aide to Mayor Ted Wheeler, has raised over \$14,000.

Northwest neighborhood leader Felicia Williams, who has not yet filed for the office, has raised over \$28,000. She is white but has not yet been criticized for running.

Fish: \$10 Million Utility Settlement Ends 'Water Wars'

*By Jim Redden
December 20, 2017*

City Council approved paying \$10 million to end lengthy lawsuit over challenged water and sewer spending.

Calling it "the last chapter of the water wars," Commissioner Nick Fish praised the \$10 million agreement approved by the City Council on Wednesday that settled a long running lawsuit that charged the council had illegally spent over \$120 million in water and sewer ratepayer funds.

Although Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Stephen Bushong had ruled most of the challenged spending, he determined that approximately \$17 million had been spent on projects not "reasonably related" to the missions of the Portland Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Service — a standard he said the City Charter required early in the legal proceedings.

"By accepting this settlement, we're turning the page and moving forward," said Fish who is in charge of both bureaus.

The largest amount ruled unauthorized by Bushong was over \$5.5 million attributed to a reservoir project in Powell Butte not related to the reservoir itself. It included over \$1.2 million spent on a visitors center. Other notable expenditures included a little more than \$2.5 million in pass-through funds for Portland Parks & Recreation, over \$2 million spent renovating Dodge Park in Clackamas County, and nearly \$1.3 million spent on the public toilets known as Portland Loos.

Under the terms of the settlement, the council to repay the water fund \$5.54 million and the sewer fund \$1.46 million with general fund dollars by Sept. 30, 2019. The Davis Wright Tremaine law firm, which represented the ratepayer that brought the suit, will be paid \$3 million by Dec. 29, 2017.

The city does not admit any wrongdoing in the settlement. Nor is it legally obligated to accept Bushong's "reasonably related" standard. Senior Deputy City Attorney Karen Moynahan told the council the city agrees with that portion of the ruling. However, she said it disagrees with Bushong's additional determination that questions about what is reasonable should be decided by the courts.

Moynahan also said that if the city appeals the ruling, the Court of Appeals could impose the stricter "primary purpose" sought by the ratepayer lawyers and order the city to pay them and reimburse the bureau even more.

"We continue to believe that City Council, not a judge, is best suited to make decisions about our utilities," Fish said.

Mayor Ted Wheeler praised Fish for working on the settlement, calling him a "man of integrity" the public can trust.

"When no one is happy with the settlement, I've come to the conclusion it is the lowest risk, lowest cost solution that gets this mess behind us," said Wheeler.

Commissioners Chloe Eudaly and Amanda Fritz agreed, with Eudaly saying, "Of course no one is thrilled with \$3 million going to the law firm, but it could have been worse and the other \$7 million will be reinvested in the city."

When explaining his vote, Fish told the council that when he was assigned the water and environmental services bureaus four-and-a-half years ago, both were facing controversies. They included a ballot measure created an independent water district, continued challenges to federal regulations that were threatening the city's our historic open reservoirs, and ongoing concerns about the use of ratepayer funds.

Since then, Fish said, significant progress has been made on all front. Among other things, the proposed water district was defeated by 72 percent of the vote, both bureaus have new directors, both the Mt. Tabor and Washington Park reservoirs have been taken off-line, a Portland Utility Board has been created to advise council on utility-related issues, and the council has approved building a filtration plant to remove Cryptosporidium from Bull Run water, as required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Although some may view this settlement as anticlimactic, the lawsuit has had a positive effect in refocusing City leadership on the core mission of the utilities," Fish said.

Most of the spending Bushong ruled was unauthorized took place in the early 2000s before ever council member except Commissioner Dan Saltzman was elected. Saltzman was absent during the hearing and vote.

You can read a previous Portland Tribune story on the issue at portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/381509-269252-portland-settles-ratepayer-suit-for-10-million

Willamette Week

Portland Towing Policy That Costs Car Theft Victims Hundreds of Dollars Poised to Change Following WW Story

*By Katie Shepherd
December 21, 2017*

The bureau will seek public comments on a policy change in the first two weeks of January.

Mayor Ted Wheeler and the Portland Police Bureau have a belated Christmas gift for victims of car theft: Next year, they likely won't have to pay to get their recovered cars out of private tow lots.

That reform comes as a result of a WW story.

On Wednesday, WW reported that under Portland's current policy, victims of car theft often have to pay hundreds of dollars to buy back their stolen cars from private tow companies contracted by the city.

After WW presented questions about the towing policy, Mayor Ted Wheeler pledged to discuss changing the policy in a meeting with Police Chief Danielle Outlaw.

Now the Portland Police Bureau has announced it is seeking public comment on its directives that guide officers who recover stolen vehicles—signaling an imminent change in the city's policy that passes the cost of towing recovered vehicles on to the owners.

The bureau will start taking public comment on its website in the first two weeks of January, says PPB spokesman Sgt. Chris Burley. WW will post a link when the page goes live next month.

Once public comments are received and analyzed, the city can propose changes that could go into effect 30 days after being posted online.

The Skanner

Homeless Deaths in County Reached 80 in Recent Review

*By Melanie Sevchenko
December 20, 2017*

Eighty people experiencing homelessness died on local streets in 2016, according to the Multnomah County Health Department's sixth annual Domicile Unknown report, released last week.

Health officials have found at least 359 homeless people have died since the analysis began in 2011. This year's number is a slight decrease since 2015, when 88 lives were lost.

"We are again seeing people die decades ahead of their time, of preventable deaths, all around us," said Israel Bayer, the outgoing executive director of Street Roots, in a county statement. "This is not normal and it is not acceptable."

Among the report's key findings for 2016:

- Deaths occurred in every geographic quadrant of the county.
- The number of people, as well as their age, race and gender were similar to those who died the year prior.
- More than one third of the deaths occurred in public spaces.
- Opioids were a factor in half of the deaths where alcohol or drug overdose was the primary or contributing cause.

Sponsored each year by Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury, in cooperation with Street Roots, the Domicile Unknown report is intended to help “the public, elected officials and social service providers identify how resources and policies can be directed to save lives,” said the county.

Since 2016, the county and the city joined forces to create a Joint Office of Homeless Services, which oversees homeless services and funding.

Among recent accomplishments, the county chair noted doubling the number of beds, as well as opening shelters for couples, families, and women experiencing domestic violence.

“We opened new seasonal and severe weather shelters,” said Kafoury. “And we increased the number of people who moved back into permanent housing and helped record numbers of people from ever becoming homeless in the first place.”

Even so, homelessness continues to challenge the county and the city of Portland, while critics of policy say elected officials are not doing enough.

Mayor Ted Wheeler recently came under fire by social justice advocates when he designated eight city blocks in downtown Portland as a ‘no-sit’ zone. They say the decision contradicts Wheeler’s campaign promises of working to protect and house the city’s marginalized population.

“Ted Wheeler has chosen to fast-track more no-sit zones to prevent houseless individuals from being where businessmen don’t want to see them,” wrote protest group Portland’s Resistance on its Facebook page. “Banning people from sitting in public spaces is not a solution to the housing crisis. It further dehumanizes our most vulnerable community members.”

The zoning move was largely to appease tourists and commercial spaces in the eight-block stretch, which the mayor has called a “high pedestrian zone.” Among the businesses located there is one of Columbia Sportswear’s headquarters.

Its CEO, Tim Boyle, penned an op-ed for The Oregonian last month in which he outlined instances of crime and harassment experienced by his employees from people on the street outside his building.

In defense of the zoning, Wheeler responded with his own op-ed in The Oregonian, where he wrote that the ‘no-sit zone’ “gives authorities the flexibility they need to address specific public safety or public health threats in congested areas, by keeping our sidewalks accessible and walkable. This common-sense approach will not be used to harass homeless people as some have wrongly suggested.”

OPB

As Portland Harbor Cleanup Progresses, City Wants Clearer Fish Advisories

*By Ericka Cruz Guevarra
December 20, 2017*

Portland City Council voted to create a community outreach program to improve communications about the health and safety hazards associated with eating fish from the Portland Harbor Superfund area.

The vote came just one day after the Environmental Protection Agency signed an agreement finalizing the next big step in Superfund cleanup.

Councilors voted to establish an intergovernmental agreement between the city, Oregon Department of State Lands, Port of Portland and Multnomah County. It gives the county the ability to establish a community outreach program that will cost \$345,000; Multnomah County does the work and the other three entities provide the funds.

“We are worried about people who may eat the fish they catch in the river during the Portland Harbor cleanup,” said Jae Douglas, director of environmental health services at Multnomah County, in a statement. “These funds will help us educate community members about the risks and make sure people are safe.”

Annie Von Burg with the Bureau of Environmental Services told City Council that the feedback from community members revealed public confusion over current fish advisories and the risks associated with eating fish from the Superfund site.

“We also heard that community involvement specifically to those that are most impacted needs to be increased, and that better coordination amongst the government agencies to create those clear messages and consistent messages were needed,” Von Burg said at the meeting.

Von Burg also mentioned that the city’s most vulnerable populations — including Native Americans and low-income residents — would benefit from improved fish advisories.

Portland Council Approves \$10 Million Utility Lawsuit Settlement

*By Ericka Cruz Guevarra
December 20, 2017*

Portland City Council has officially agreed to a \$10 million settlement in a lawsuit alleging mispending of ratepayer dollars by the city’s Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services, a settlement that Commissioner Nick Fish said closes out “the last chapter of the water wars.”

“By accepting this settlement we’re turning the page and moving forward,” Fish said of the case, which spanned six years and three mayors.

The city will transfer \$7 million from its general fund to the utility fund. The remaining \$3 million will pay for the plaintiffs’ legal fees no later than Dec. 29 this year.

The lawsuit alleged illegal spending by the Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services between 1998 and the early 2000s.

It alleged illegal spending on several projects pursued by former Portland Commissioner Randy Leonard, who oversaw the utility bureaus and challenged the city's spending on top environmental priorities, including green infrastructure and pollution cleanup.

None of the current city councilors in attendance for a vote Wednesday were in office when the lawsuit was filed. Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who was not present at Wednesday's council meeting, was elected to council in 1998.

"We can't go back to the early 2000s and correct some of the missteps that were made," said Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"Nobody's happy with the settlement," Wheeler added, saying he agreed with city lawyers that it could have been worse.

"I think there's significant risk with continuing to fight this. But I have come to the conclusion, as apparently as have all of my colleagues, that this is the lowest risk, lowest cost solution that gets this mess behind us and will allow Commissioner Fish or his successor commissioners to do the work that needs to be done in the bureaus."

The city has until Sept. 30, 2019, to transfer the \$7 million to the utilities. That \$7 million represents less than 1 percent of the utilities' combined annual budget.