

The Portland Tribune

Sources Say: County Mum on Hostile Workplace Complaint

*By Jim Redden
January 18, 2018*

Plus, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly wants to hire a communications assistant to help handle her social media after being sued over Facebook postings.

Multnomah County library employee Amanda Byrd has filed a complaint charging that a majority of the County Commission has violated county policies on professional workplace behavior. In response to a question from Sources, the county is declining to say how — or even whether — the complaint will be investigated and resolved.

Byrd filed the complaint after Chair Deborah Kafoury called Commissioner Loretta Smith a "b---ch" at a Dec. 21 commission meeting. Kafoury subsequently apologized for the remark and every commissioner except Smith promptly accepted her apology. But Byrd still wants Kafoury and the three other commissioners investigated for creating a hostile work environment.

The complaint was filed on Jan. 7 with Multnomah County Chief Operating Officer Marissa Madrigal. Ironically, Kafoury used the slur after Smith repeatedly questioned her decision to designate Madrigal as her successor in the event of incapacitation. Smith was arguing the county's chief operating officer should not be so closely associated with a single commission member when Kafoury gaveled the hearing to an end and insulted her.

After Sources asked about the investigation process, county communications director Julie Sullivan-Springhetti emailed back, "I can confirm the county has received the complaint and has no further information."

Eudaly seeks communications help

Commissioner Chloe Eudaly is offering up to \$73,050 per year and generous benefits for someone to manage her social media and other communications.

Eudaly was the subject of controversy during the fall when a freelance reporter dished on all the things she had been saying about local journalists and constituents on her private Facebook account. Eudaly maintains that these are private communications, but many people consider them public records because she was discussing her role as a public official.

We soon may hear what a judge thinks. Rumor has it, papers in a federal lawsuit asking for the records were served on Eudaly last week.

The Portland Mercury

Traffic Deaths are Increasing in Portland. Will Lowering Speeds on Residential Streets Help?

*By Dirk VanderHart
January 17, 2018*

Forty-five people died on Portland streets in 2017, according to the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT).

It's the highest number of traffic deaths Portland's seen since 2003, when the city recorded 47, and well higher than Portland's homicide tally from last year. It's also just one higher than 2016's death toll.

At the same time, the number of people who died in traffic crashes while walking in 2017—19—was higher than any year dating back to 1996, which is as far back as I could readily find. Nearly 70 percent of last year's traffic fatalities occurred in the "high-crash network"—the list of busy streets that the city says is routinely responsible for half of fatal crashes.

I bring all this up partly because it shows this fast-growing city is drifting farther from Vision Zero, officials' stated goal to eliminate serious injuries and deaths from crashes. But it's also pertinent to point out in light of a decision by the Portland City Council today.

Starting in April, all of the city's residential streets will have a speed limit of 20 mph, down from 25.

In a 5-0 vote, the council took advantage of a right Portland won in last year's legislative session to set its own speeds on non-arterial roads around town. PBOT will now spend \$300,000 putting up 2,000 new speed limit signs (and removing the old ones). By April, the bureau says, 70 percent of the city's street grid will have the new limit.

"We are poised to make a really significant step today in the City of Portland," PBOT Director Leah Treat said at this morning's meeting. "Five miles per hour may not seem like much, but it actually is a big deal. We all know that speed kills."

Treat's correct, and today's decision is certainly a potent symbolic move for a city council with at least three members who've lost loved ones to car crashes. What's less clear is that the speed limit change will do anything to change the ugly numbers above.

After putting up signs and rolling out an education campaign, the city has no plans to increase speed enforcement on the roads where the new limit is in effect, officials said today. They're partly hoping that people who speed will index that speeding to the new limit.

"There are some people that are gonna always speed—that's just what they do," Captain Mike Crebs, head of the police bureau's traffic division, told council. "If we reduce it by 5 miles per hour, it's like they'll be driving 25 or 27 mph."

More basically, it's hard to tell how many serious crashes actually take place on these residential streets. When we asked PBOT if it had that data yesterday, the bureau sent back something else: a tally of all serious crashes, from 2006 to 2015, that took place within 25 feet of one of these streets. According to PBOT's figures, there were 2,362 crashes that resulted in death or serious injury in that time frame. The bureau says 803 of them of them occurred within 25 feet of residential streets.

"Bottom line, approximately a third of fatal and serious injury crashes are on or very near to residential streets," PBOT spokesperson John Brady said.

That's not at all the same as saying they occurred on those streets. After all, the number PBOT sent along ropes in crashes that occurred on busy streets, but also happened to be near the intersection of a residential street. Brady also sent along a map plotting out all these serious crashes, and while I haven't gone through it minutely, it suggests that the vast, vast majority of the crashes occur on busier streets. (I'm trying to get a shareable version.)

That's one reason safe-street advocates have been relatively muted in their enthusiasm for the change. Groups like the Street Trust and BikeLoudPDX are absolutely supportive of the new 20

mph limit, but insistent that more substantive steps need to take place on streets that are actually causing Portland's traffic carnage.

"The street design is what ultimately determines drivers' speed," says Emily Guise, a chair at BikeLoudPDX. "BikeLoudPDX wants to see the city lower the speed limit as soon as possible on arterials as well, and most importantly follow it up with changes to the street design that further decrease speeding."

Hall Monitor: Incoming Calls

By Dirk VanderHart

January 17, 2018

A Local Attorney Believes the City's NIMBYs Can Help Fix Homelessness—and Now He Has Their Numbers

Jeff Merrick might have your phone number. He might even use it.

Since June, Merrick—a Lake Oswego attorney and Pearl District resident—has been engaged in a tug-of-war with city officials over a special segment of Portland homelessness data.

Using a city website known as One Point of Contact, thousands of Portlanders have complained about homeless camps in their neighborhoods in recent years. Many even offered up their contact information, just in case city officials wanted to follow up. And last year, after deciding that ordinary people didn't have enough say in dealing with Portland's homelessness crisis, Merrick decided to ask for that information.

The good news: Merrick prevailed. This is unquestionably public information, after all. In a January 8 order first reported by the Oregonian, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office told the city to cough up the records.

The bad news? Merrick now hopes to use the trove of data in a way that could be extremely unhelpful, to say the least. He wants to unite the NIMBYs.

"The voices that are out there on these issues... are not really a well-rounded group," Merrick told me on Monday. "You get one neighborhood that is totally up in arms... then there's an enforcement action for a while, the problem moves to Lents, and the people in Laurelhurst go back to their lives. There's not a consistent neighbor group."

He'd like to change that. The 59-year-old has visions of a grassroots group similar to Portland Tenants United, the rabble-rousing renter advocacy organization. His object: Make sure neighborhood interests are consistently involved in the region's homelessness policy.

Merrick mentioned a few neighborhoods during our discussion. For instance, Laurelhurst, where residents last year (unsuccessfully) demanded Mayor Ted Wheeler slap stepped-up penalties on homeless people staying in Laurelhurst Park. Or Mount Scott-Arleta, which was recently papered in flyers that used Soviet iconography to oppose a new homeless shelter.

I told Merrick it sounded like he was dreaming up some sort of NIMBY supergroup. He said I was wrong.

"I think of it as just the opposite," he said, explaining the coalition he envisions would be able to promote regional solutions to the homeless problem.

One such solution? “How about we do what they did in the 1920s and 1930s?” he said, referencing the Multnomah County Poor Farm, where the county once sent its destitute and disabled to work the fields. “Let’s give people some self-sufficiency instead of warehousing them.”

So. That’s on the table.

This whole thing might or might not happen. The seven-month struggle with the city has sapped some of Merrick’s enthusiasm for these ideas, he said, and a two-year self-imposed sabbatical from practicing law is almost up. Still, recent publicity behind his cause has helped. Since the Oregonian ran a story, Merrick’s gotten calls of interest about his plan, and has even set up several appointments.

“I’ll probably come up with an event in March or April to get people together,” he said.

Jeff Merrick might have your phone number. Whether you pick up is on you.

Oregon’s Constitution Has Shackled Portland’s \$258 Million Housing Bond

*By Dirk VanderHart
January 17, 2018*

Now, State Lawmakers Say They Have the Key

Last Friday, local officials and well-wishers packed into a wedding tent in the Lloyd District to crow about Portland’s largest affordable housing development in decades.

Once built, the Block 45 development, at the corner of Northeast Hassalo and Grand, will offer 240 units affordable to people making 60 percent or less of the area’s median family income. The 12-story development will set aside 20 deeply affordable apartments for domestic violence survivors, offer two-bedroom units that can house families, and—perhaps most importantly—maintain below-market rents for up to a century.

That’s all good news, but Mayor Ted Wheeler came to last week’s groundbreaking ceremony keen on making another point about the \$73.7 million project: that it’s a steal for Portland taxpayers.

“The \$5.6 million that the city has contributed has a leverage of 1,317 percent,” Wheeler told his audience. “Is there anybody here who has gotten a better rate of return on investment than that? No.”

If the comment sounds defensive, it sort of was. Wheeler, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB), has been battered with questions about whether the city is overspending on affordable units. In response, he’s repeatedly pointed out that Portland’s contribution on housing projects is often multiplied by funding from elsewhere. (For instance, he recently compared one downtown development to “paying for a Toyota and getting a Tesla.”)

For a hefty and high-profile segment of Portland’s housing cash, though, that leverage isn’t currently possible. Now, state lawmakers are considering asking you to change that.

Among the bills being prepped ahead of the short legislative session that begins next month is a proposal that would allow local governments more leeway to spend bond money on affordable housing. If passed by lawmakers—and then approved by voters this fall—the constitutional

change could have a big impact on the landmark \$258.4 million housing bond Portlanders passed in 2016.

“We’re in a situation right now where the City of Portland can issue general obligation bonds to finance affordable housing, but its hands are tied behind its back,” Portland bond attorney Harvey Rogers told lawmakers last year.

At issue is Article XI, Section 9 of the Oregon Constitution, which prohibits cities from intermingling general obligation bond money with private enterprises. The provision, written in the 1800s, was meant to prevent government corruption. But for affordable housing, which frequently relies on a bevy of funding sources to get a project to pencil out, it’s a roadblock.

According to Rogers, the constitutional limitation hurts Portland’s chances for securing federal housing loans, prevents the city from tapping useful tax credits, and preempts help from private-sector partners.

That’s a central reason why supporters of the 2016 housing bond were only able to make a tepid promise to voters. For nearly \$260 million, the city guaranteed just 1,300 affordable units would be built or preserved, all of which would need to be owned by the City of Portland. In a city short more than 20,000 affordable homes, it’s a drop in the bucket—and well below what officials say they could accomplish without limitations.

“Based on our typical leverage ratio, a constitutional amendment would allow us to leverage two to four times the amount of our investments with bond dollars,” PHB Interim Director Shannon Callahan says. In other words, without the constitutional hang-up, housing officials would expect your \$260 million to help create between 2,600 and 5,200 affordable units.

That’s no longer possible. The city has already committed to spending a sizeable chunk of the bond money to purchase the 263-unit Ellington Apartments in Northeast Portland, and has other projects in the works. Callahan says Portlanders expect the city to continue prioritizing the money, regardless of what’s on the horizon.

If voters ultimately approve a change, though, Callahan says, “there will still be a significant amount of resources that we have not bonded yet to make the tool go farther.”

The bill being mulled in Salem would keep in place restrictions on most bond spending, creating a small exception for affordable housing. The proposal has bipartisan support, but a lot has to happen before a ballot measure goes before voters.

The fate of the bill could be dictated by the outcome of the January 23 special election. If voters shoot down Measure 101, which would leave new health care taxes in place, legislators may be too preoccupied trying to close a funding gap during the February session to deal with much else.

If the legislation does go through—and if an amendment is ultimately approved by voters—it could have reverberations well beyond Portland. Advocates say the tweak could convince cities and counties around the state to pursue housing bonds. And it would certainly have bearing on a bond Metro is expected to pursue later this year.

“We don’t want government to get in the way of the private sector, which we know needs to be a part of solving the affordable housing crisis,” said state Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer (D-Portland), chair of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing, in a hearing last week. “I’m excited about the product that we’re bringing forward.”

OPB

Portland Approves 20 Mph Speed Limit In Residential Zones

*By Ericka Cruz Guevarra
January 17, 2018*

Drivers who cruise through the residential areas of Portland will soon have to drive slower.

Portland city commissioners overwhelmingly approved an ordinance to reduce speeds in residential zones from 25 mph to 20 mph.

Residential streets make up 70 percent of Portland's transportation network, and signage is expected to be installed citywide by April 1 this year.

Introduced by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Bureau of Transportation, the plan is part of the city's Vision Zero goal to reduce traffic-related deaths on Portland roads to zero by 2025.

"Excessive speed is one of the major factors contributing to traffic deaths," Saltzman said. "From our research, we knew that if we could get Portlanders to slow down, we could save lives."

Capt. Mike Crebs with the Portland Police Bureau's traffic division said he supported the ordinance, adding that the ordinance will prevent deaths. Crebs told city commissioners that it takes 59 feet to stop when driving 25 mph, and that it takes 42 feet to stop when going 20 mph — the entire length of a car.

Crebs said Portland Police enforcement of residential zone speeds will remain the same.

"I feel confident that this will prevent somebody from either getting killed or seriously injured," he said.