

The Oregonian

Wheeler Makes Plea for More Police in State of the City Address

*By Gordon Friedman
April 12, 2018*

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler asked residents to support his plans to hire more police officers and make the city more livable in his second state of the city address, given Thursday.

His speech came less than a week after a fatal police shooting at a Portland homeless shelter, a decision some locals have questioned, and as Wheeler is asking city bureaucrats to prepare for deep budget cuts.

Speaking at Portland Community College's southeast campus, Wheeler touted what he sees as admirable progress made on the city's foremost problems – homelessness and availability of affordable housing – during his first full year as mayor.

"We know that homelessness is a challenge for our entire community. I get hundreds of calls, cards, emails related to homelessness," Wheeler said. But government cannot tackle the problem alone, he said, noting he has "called on the community repeatedly" for ideas and help.

Much of the speech focused on the challenges of managing an ever-changing Portland and his resistance to federal policies he sees as misguided.

Using the liberal-leaning rhetoric that has long been a calling card of Portland's elected officials, Wheeler dove head-first into a blistering critique of President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans. He highlighted the wide gap between his views and theirs on gun control, climate change and immigration. In particular, Wheeler said, federal leaders are wrong in their approach to mayors' powers to give safe harbor to people living in the country illegally.

"I cannot believe that in the year 2018 there are still high-level administration officials that believe mayors like me and other like-minded leaders around the country should be arrested for supporting our immigrant communities," Wheeler said. Speaking in a sharp tone and pounding his lectern, he committed to defending Portland's sanctuary city status "even if I have to go to jail."

Wheeler's 47-minute speech was largely without new policy proposals, though he laid out his rationale for asking the City Council to approve a Portland Police Bureau budget that adds scores of new officers. Wheeler has the power to propose a spending plan, but his vote counts no more than other councilors' in deciding city spending.

The Police Bureau is understaffed despite rising crime rates, Wheeler said, and officers are chronically overworked, causing use of costly overtime funds. He lamented that some 911 callers suffer long wait times in an emergency.

"I don't care if you love the police or if you hate the police: There is one truth that drives all of this in my mind," Wheeler said in an off-the-cuff remark. "When you call 911 you expect the police to show up and you expect them to show up in a timely basis."

Wheeler said the city has reached a "tipping point," and police staffing must be addressed. He cited the experience of one carjacking victim, who waited an hour for police to respond to the call. Car thefts have risen nearly 100 percent in five years, Wheeler said. Crime rates are low

when compared over the last three decades, a City Budget Office analysis shows, though assaults, burglaries and car thefts are on the rise.

Wheeler delivered his message during a period of public outcry over the fatal shooting of John Elifritz, who was wielding a knife, last Saturday in a Southeast Portland homeless shelter. Protesters crowded outside City Hall on Wednesday wanting answers about the incident. The 48-year-old appeared to be suffering a mental health crisis and seemed to be standing a considerable distance from officers, according to video footage of the shooting.

During the speech, security officers escorted out a man in the audience who was holding a sign that read "Murderous cops have to go!" Security later permitted the man to come back after confiscating his sign.

Though he did not address the shooting directly in his speech, Wheeler noted that many Portlanders harbor a deep distrust of law enforcement officers and pledged to work to bridge those divides. He lauded the recruitment and hiring last year of a new police chief, Danielle Outlaw, and said police officers are to begin training in May to address prejudicial biases.

Wheeler said Portlanders want more community policing. That approach calls on law enforcement officers not only to respond to emergency calls but also attend neighborhood events, be friendly to children and collaborate with residents. Wheeler said he and Outlaw share a vision that the practice become a greater priority at the Police Bureau.

He issued an open call for residents willing to serve on a new committee to develop "community-engaged policing" policies. "Portland needs you," he said.

The mayor likely faces an uphill battle in his quest to budget for more police officers. The four other city councilors have been mum on Wheeler's proposal. And, in its analysis of the Police Bureau request, the City Budget Office recommended only 14 new officers be hired. Wheeler will unveil his budget proposal later this month.

The mayor's speech also focused on Portland's growing pains and livability problems that run the gamut from homelessness and affordable housing to crumbling city infrastructure.

Wheeler asked Portlanders to vote in November for a constitutional amendment that will allow the city to more effectively issue bonds that fund affordable housing projects. He said the city will continue funding the Joint Office of Homeless Services, which the city operates with Multnomah County officials. And he hailed the City Council for passing ordinances that expand tenant protections, offer new financial incentives for developers and require new housing projects to include units within reach of families earning below the median income. He added that the city is surpassing its own goals for construction of affordable housing units.

Yet Wheeler acknowledged that many problems remain. Making an unscripted remark, the mayor said he does not want Portland to become "a Disneyland for rich people" while lower-income earners must spend hours commuting to the city center for work.

Wheeler took particular pains to address a damning report on the city housing plan for North and Northeast Portland neighborhoods that were formerly home to a heavy concentration of black residents. An oversight panel found that many programs designed to help black Portlanders stay in or move back to those neighborhoods have gone largely unused or are ineffective. Wheeler, who previously called the programs "an abject failure," committed to making good on the city's promises to black residents displaced by construction projects or gentrification.

The mayor built his speech around themes of welcome: to the homeless, immigrants, jobseekers and job-creators, environmentalists and all who want to build a better city. Getting there, he acknowledged, will require a community-wide effort.

"I am optimistic about our future because I am optimistic about our people," Wheeler said, "and I know that together we absolutely will succeed as a community."

Police Shooting at Shelter Draws Deep Concerns from Reform Advocates

By Maxine Bernstein

April 12, 2018

A social justice watchdog group on Thursday questioned the effectiveness of a federal settlement to reduce excessive force by Portland police against people with mental illness in the wake of Saturday night's fatal police shooting of a man with a knife inside a homeless shelter.

Based on a video taken by a witness and released the morning after the shooting, the coalition of area ministers and advocates for police reform said its members were deeply concerned that officers didn't appear to try to de-escalate the encounter.

John A. Elifritz, 48, died from multiple gunshot wounds at the Cityteam Ministries shelter in Southeast Portland. Seven Portland police officers and one Multnomah County sheriff's deputy were involved in the shooting and are on paid administrative leave.

"It was not clear whether the officers had a tactical plan or whether a sergeant or other on-scene supervisor authorized the use of deadly force," the Albina Ministerial Alliance's Coalition for Justice and Police Reform said in a statement.

The group also noted that the shelter is run by a ministry, "which should be a sacred space."

"Although all the facts of this deadly force shooting are not in and the investigation is not complete, this case could possibly be a major step backward for the Portland Police Bureau" in its effort to change the way officers deal with people in mental health crisis, the coalition said.

The group's statement came out shortly after Mayor Ted Wheeler started his State of the City address and called for money in the next budget to substantially increase Portland officer ranks.

It also came a week before city attorneys, U.S. Department of Justice officials and the public will have a chance to address a federal judge in court April 19 on the status of the excessive force settlement.

The city's agreement with the Justice Department followed a federal investigation in 2012 that found Portland officers used excessive force against people with mental illness or perceived to have mental illness.

The coalition was a party to the settlement, which calls for changes in police policies and training, among other things.

The Rev. Mark Knutson, a member of the coalition who officiates at Augustana Lutheran Church, said the witnesses to the shooting were homeless men at a ministry-run shelter and are very vulnerable. "To see a man shot like that in a setting like that will no doubt leave these men with post-traumatic stress," Knutson said. "The city should be asking what we can do to help these men."

Police Chief Danielle Outlaw on Thursday reiterated her request for people to reserve judgment until all the facts about the shooting are gathered and released.

"I understand the community's desire and frustration to know exactly what happened and I ask for patience," she said in a statement.

"A complex investigation such as this requires time for interviews to be conducted and evidence gathered," she said. "Following its completion, it's important that the investigation is provided to the district attorney in a manner that protects its integrity and the review processes we have in place are not impacted."

The video taken by a man inside the shelter showed a group of Portland officers standing with guns drawn at an open door of the shelter as others inside scrambled to get away from Elifritz, who held a knife in his hand.

An Alcoholics Anonymous meeting was about to start at the shelter, and several startled men instead tried to corral Elifritz into a corner with chairs, then tried to get out of the range of the officers' guns.

The officers then entered the shelter and shouted commands to Elifritz, demanding that he drop his knife. Witnesses said police fired less-lethal rounds at Elifritz first, but they didn't work.

Family members also have questioned police tactics.

Elifritz, who was married with a 12-year-old daughter, struggled with methamphetamine abuse, and had a criminal history that included multiple convictions for stealing cars.

Homicide detectives and Portland police internal affairs detectives are conducting simultaneous but separate investigations into the shooting. The criminal inquiry will be presented to a Multnomah County grand jury for review.

Officers don't need a commander's authorization to use deadly force in cases of imminent threat of serious injury or death to others or themselves.

Police had confronted Elifritz earlier that day in outer Southeast Portland. He had called 911 to report that his wife and children were murdered, but police checked and learned that his family was OK.

Officers later saw Elifritz holding a knife to his throat and he ran from police. Officers chose to let him go. They planned to refer him to officers in the bureau's Behavioral Health Unit for a future follow-up.

But soon after, Elifritz was suspected in an attempted carjacking and then a successful carjacking, a road-rage encounter and the crash of a stolen car before he entered the shelter.

There were four cameras on the main floor of the shelter that caught the shooting and provide a more comprehensive picture of what occurred, said Mike Giering, the shelter's executive director. He said he turned the videos over to police. He declined comment on what the footage showed.

The coalition also decried the bureau's delay in identifying the officers involved beyond the typical 24 hours.

The Police Bureau on Monday cited concerns about threats to the officers' safety, but released the names Tuesday after officials said they found no credible information to support the threats.

"The claim of threats against the officers with no substantive evidence makes it seem more as if the PPB did not want to release the names," the coalition said.

Willamette Week

Portland Planning Director Susan Anderson Is Leaving City Government

*By Rachel Monahan
April 12, 2018*

Anderson will stay six months to help with the transition.

Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability director Susan Anderson is planning to leave her post in six months' time.

Anderson has been bureau director of Planning and Sustainability for nine years, but during her three decades with the city, she has also served as director of two other city bureaus—the Energy Office and Office of Sustainability Development.

Her work has helped keep Portland on the map for city planning, as well as for efforts to counteract and prepare for climate change.

Anderson is one of nine top city leaders to announce their departures in the last 14 months. But unlike some of the others, she will be sticking around to help ease the transition. (Her departure also does not involve a severance payment, indicating she was not pushed out by the mayor, who oversees planning.)

Here's her letter announcing her departure:

“Greetings BPS partners, Some of you have heard the news about my departure, but I wanted to follow up with a little more information for everyone. After much thought and deliberation, I have decided to leave the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability in about six months, and plan to consult here in Portland and with other cities around the world. It has been a great privilege to serve the City and help make Portland a national and international leader on planning, sustainability and climate change issues, and especially bring equity to the forefront of those discussions. In the past 9+ years since BPS was created, I have worked to ensure there is a new plan and solid foundation for growth and development in Portland, and a framework for climate action that will carry the city forward for the next couple decades. Most importantly, I’ve been delighted to see that the values of the Portland Plan have been infused into the strategic plans of all City bureaus, so that equity, prosperity, healthy people and a healthy environment, and resilience are the cornerstones of the City’s endeavors. All the work I have done for almost three decades here at the City has been in partnership and collaboration with so many of you, along with talented coworkers and hundreds of people from other City bureaus, businesses, non-profits, universities, other cities, counties, regional and state governments, foundations, and environmental, business, health, equity and other organizations. I have learned that in all things, when we work together, we are much greater than the sum of our individual parts. It has been an honor to be the director of three City bureaus in the past 27 years (Energy Office, Office of Sustainability Development, and Bureau of Planning and Sustainability). I have worked hard with amazing partners to ensure that these three bureaus were viewed as extremely credible organizations – respected and valued locally and around the world. When I made my decision to leave, I wanted to make sure this transition would be as smooth as possible. So during the next few months, feel free to share your thoughts, concerns, and aspirations for the new bureau leadership and opportunities for better collaboration. I will provide that information to the

Mayor's team as they do a national search. I look forward to the next six months of continued collaboration, and I will always value your leadership, creativity and friendship.”

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Judgment Day

By Alex Zielinski

April 11, 2018

Portland police are about to get a federal check-in on their use of force. How will the death of John Elifritz fit in?

Here's what we know: On Saturday, April 7, Portland police stormed a Cityteam Ministries homeless shelter on Southeast Grand and fatally shot 48-year-old John Elifritz. According to witnesses, Elifritz had entered the shelter shirtless around 7:45 pm and began stabbing himself with a knife. It was clear to some witnesses that he was in the midst of some kind of mental crisis, but to police, Elifritz was a suspect—a man they believed had crashed a stolen Honda in the middle of MLK Jr. Blvd.

In the cell phone video capturing the encounter, Elifritz looks stunned as a dozen armed police officers—standing about 20 feet away—yell at him to “Drop the knife!” He doesn't. Witnesses say Elifritz swung the knife at a barking police dog, prompting officers to shoot. By 8:15 pm, Elifritz was dead.

The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) has since released the names of the seven officers and one sheriff's deputy involved in the incident. At least three of those officers have already been called out—either by the feds, community advocates, or the city's Citizens Review Commission—for using unnecessary force against people undergoing a mental health crisis.

While the investigation into Elifritz's death is only a few days old, one thing's resoundingly obvious: PPB continues to falter, with sometimes horrific consequences, when faced with individuals in clear mental distress.

Next week, the city's going to have to explain why to the feds.

Elifritz's death came days before an April 19 check-in between Portland and the US Department of Justice (DOJ) over how the city's cops treat people with mental illness. The feds have requested annual reports since a 2011 DOJ investigation found that PPB consistently engages in a “pattern of... unnecessary or unreasonable force during interactions with people who have or are perceived to have mental illness.”

Portland eventually reached a settlement with the feds, agreeing to overhaul how PPB understands and reacts to mental health crises.

Under Mayor Ted Wheeler and newly minted Police Chief Danielle Outlaw, Portland's already seen a few areas in which the city's failed to live up to its agreement with the DOJ (like holding regular community police oversight committee meetings—or even finding someone to lead them). But when considering the efficacy of PPB's attempts to deter moments of “unreasonable force,” the feds won't need to look further than last weekend's shooting. Or, at least, the moment it went off the rails.

According to PPB, officers had been following Elifritz since 2:30 pm Sunday, after receiving calls depicting a man acting in a “bizarre manner.” When a pair of cops tried to confront him

later that afternoon, Elifritz held a knife to his own neck and ran away. The officers then contacted the bureau's Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) to follow up.

This is where the story could have taken a different course.

The BHU—formed as a direct response to the DOJ settlement—has trained officers to act as first responders for behavioral health crises in which the subject is violent, has a weapon, or is threatening to attempt suicide. Officers volunteer for BHU duty, meaning they're only dispatched to a crisis if they aren't busy with another call.

While Elifritz's encounter clearly fits the description of a "crisis," PPB spokesperson Chris Burley says BHU did not respond to the officer's follow-up call on Saturday.

Instead—hours later—a group of armed officers cornered the visibly shaken man in a corner of a crowded homeless shelter, barking orders at him to drop the same knife he'd reportedly used on his own throat.

A March report commissioned by the city of Portland pointed to flaws in the BHU's system, noting the system "requires some revision."

Let's see what the DOJ has to say.

The Portland Business Journal

Mayor Wheeler Touts Portland's Progress on Homelessness, Defiance to Trump

By Jon Bell

April 12, 2018

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler kicked off his second annual State of the City address this morning with a listing of how Portland is going about its business despite what the Trump administration is trying to do at the federal level.

"Cities like Portland cannot wait on others," he said. "We must take this moment into our own hands. We must seize this opportunity and secure our own future according to our own vision and our own values."

Among the examples of where Portland has been pushing ahead were climate change and immigration.

"Some in the White House think that I, along with other like-minded mayors, should be arrested for our principled support of our immigrant communities," Wheeler said. "I will continue to fight for our right to be an inclusive, welcoming city – yes, even if it means going to jail."

In addition to taking on the Trump administration, Wheeler took up the city's homelessness issues, largely touting the success stories of the past few years. He noted that shelter capacity in the community has doubled in the past two years, hitting 2,300 beds this past winter.

Portland, he added, was one of the only cities in the nation to see a reduction in the unsheltered population over the past two years; Portland's fell by 11 percent.

Wheeler also noted that 5,000 people obtained housing last year and 6,000 people started receiving prevention services last year. He referenced Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle's \$1.5 million donation this week for a new homeless shelter, and also noted that some 600

affordable housing units came online last year, with another 700 expected to open this year — the largest number of affordable units "ever produced by the city of Portland in a single year," according to Wheeler.

"I don't want millionaires to be the only people who can afford to live downtown. I don't want service industry workers to have a two-hour commute," he said. "I want a city where we actively create housing options at every income level and for people of all ages."

Wheeler spent some time talking about the police situation in Portland, noting that calls for service have been up by 25 percent in the last five years, including a nearly 100 percent increase in calls for stolen vehicles alone. To help address those issues, Wheeler called for an increase in police hiring.

"We are reaching the tipping point," he said. "Not only are there more emergencies, but there are more concurrent emergencies which result in situations where the victim of a crime is forced to wait an hour because there are literally no officers available to help them."

Wheeler gave his address at the Southeast campus of Portland Community College. He will also speak about the state of the city at tomorrow's City Club of Portland luncheon downtown.

OPB

State Of The City: Portland Mayor Addresses Policing After Weekend Shooting

April 12, 2018

Erica Cruz Guevarra

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler wants to hire anywhere from 14 to 93 more police officers — but he didn't mention that in his State of the City address.

In fact, Wheeler planned to mention that he would ask city councilors for permission to hire more officers at the bureau ahead of the release of his proposed budget, which he expects to unveil at the end of the month. Wheeler's speech was peppered with small glimpses into what major issues the mayor plans to address in that budget.

Instead, the mayor appeared to go off notes from prepared remarks sent to media ahead of the speech at Portland Community College Southeast, only alluding to the idea of hiring more officers.

"Portland's population continues to grow, response time continues to increase, and it is irresponsible for any elected official to not respond to that reality," Wheeler said. "I don't care if you love the police or you hate the police. There is one truth that drives all of this in my mind: When you pick up the phone because you or somebody you love is in crisis and you call 911, you expect the police to show up and you expect the police to show up on a timely basis."

His speech Thursday comes less than a week after after seven Portland police officers and one Multnomah County Sheriff's deputy shot at and killed 48-year-old John Elifritz at a Southeast Portland homeless shelter.

In the first of two State of the City addresses he'll deliver, Wheeler said understaffing at the bureau has made it difficult and almost impossible for police to respond to incidents on a timely basis.

That's a different message from what protestors demanded at a Wednesday rally outside Portland City Hall. About 100 people gathered to protest the deadly weekend shooting of Elifritz. Elifritz was allegedly showing suicidal tendencies while holding a knife before the shooting. People at the protest called for use of force reform at the bureau.

"When you see somebody in a mental health crisis, please do not call the police," said Ree Campbell with the international nonprofit Boots on the Ground at the rally. "Do not call the police. They will die."

Wheeler didn't mention the shooting in his address, but he did appear to be aware of the anticipation for what he would say about the bureau.

"Here's the controversial part of the speech you've all been waiting for," Wheeler said before transitioning to the subject.

Wheeler did mention a U.S. Department of Justice settlement agreement finalized with the city in 2014 to improve how the police bureau responds to people experiencing mental health crises.

"That is why the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing — PCCEP — will be so important," Wheeler said. "For the first time, there will be formal and direct collaboration between the police bureau and a citizen body on policy development. This goes beyond the settlement agreement and straight to the heart of what Portlanders have been demanding for years. It's long overdue."

Wheeler's speech began with what he called "the things that are right with Portland" before transitioning into the challenges associated with the city's rapid growth — housing, homelessness and the city's racist history.

"Where are we all going to live?" Wheeler asked. "Where are we going to work? How are we going to get around with increasing traffic congestion? And, as we continue to grow as a city, how do we keep Portland affordable for those who have lived here for generations?"

Wheeler provided a small window into his upcoming proposed budget. Wheeler said he'd dedicate the first dollars in his budget to address homelessness and that he'll continue to invest in the Joint Office of Homeless Services, a collaboration between city and Multnomah County agencies.

"We can't continue to call ourselves a progressive city as so many of our neighbors live, and too often die, on our streets. Homelessness represents nothing short of a humanitarian crisis," he said.

Specifics about how much Wheeler would allocate to those projects were not provided.

Wheeler also announced that he'll include money in the budget to hire an analyst for the Portland Police Bureau's Office of Equity and Diversity to analyze data on police stops and hiring decisions.

In March, a city audit of Portland's Gang Enforcement team became the latest report to question whether policing tactics in some Portland neighborhoods lead to over-policing and racial profiling of African-Americans.

Wheeler also said implicit bias training for officers is scheduled to begin in May.