

The Oregonian

Portland Parks Director Resigns

By Gordon Friedman

May 7, 2018

Mike Abbaté, the director of Portland Parks & Recreation, announced his resignation Monday, telling city officials in an email that he is leaving his position "to pursue other opportunities," according to a copy of the email obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Abbaté, 60, wrote that being Parks & Recreation director is "the greatest honor of my professional career" and that holding the job "was truly a dream come true." His last day is May 15.

Abbaté wrote that his time at Parks had been marked by "remarkable progress, often in the face of difficult budget reductions and heavy social burdens." He praised "our amazing parks system" while listing a dozen accomplishments realized during his tenure. Among them: passage in 2014 of a \$68 million parks bond, Portland's parks system being named the nation's best and building or upgrading many parks.

Abbaté's resignation comes as his bureau is facing the prospect of a steep budget cut. Though Mayor Ted Wheeler has proposed a parks budget of nearly \$200 million, that is nearly \$10 million less than the previous year's budget. The cut budget includes plans to close two community centers and eliminate several jobs, among other budget reductions.

Abbaté has been director of Parks & Recreation since 2011, when he was appointed by Commissioner Nick Fish, then the commissioner-in-charge of parks. Abbaté had previously been a high-level manager at the bureau, a planning manager at the city of Gresham and a consultant. Parks & Recreation spokesman Mark Ross said Monday that Abbaté does not plan to grant interviews about his resignation.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, the current parks commissioner, told officials in an email obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive that the city will conduct a national search for Abbaté's replacement. Fritz said Kia Selley, who worked as a Parks & Recreation division head until she resigned in 2016, has been named the bureau's interim director.

Fritz spoke highly of Abbaté in her email, saying he "achieved significant accomplishments" while leading Parks & Recreation and "forged exemplary relationships" with the labor union that represents parks employees. Noting her "tremendous gratitude" to Abbaté, Fritz said, "I wish him the best."

Council Candidate Slams Mayor for Opposition to Portland Retail Tax Measure

By Gordon Friedman

May 8, 2018

Portland City Council hopeful Jo Ann Hardesty launched a searing criticism of Mayor Ted Wheeler on Sunday over his opposition to an initiative petition that would tax large retailers operating in Portland to benefit people of color and eco-friendly jobs.

The proposed tax, which Hardesty has helped to write and promote, would levy a 1 percent surcharge on businesses with at least \$1 billion in total sales and \$500,000 in Portland. Supporters say it would raise tens of millions a year to fund eco-friendly building projects and job training for low-income residents and people of color.

Late last month, Wheeler made public his plans to keep the tax off Portland ballots. The mayor praised the Oregon Just Transition Alliance -- a coalition of social justice and environmental groups behind the tax -- as “trying to do the right thing.” But Wheeler said he is “not a fan” of taxing businesses’ before-profit earnings.

Hardesty, in the email blasted out to supporters Sunday from her campaign account, wrote that Wheeler is “trying to kill three years of work by communities of color” by working against the tax with the Portland Business Alliance. The Alliance, which is the city’s preeminent business lobbying group, has said it would back Wheeler’s own plan to increase business taxes by \$15 million, but only if the bigger potential retail tax is withdrawn.

In her email, Hardesty slammed the mayor’s dealings with the business group, saying, “Mayor Wheeler has decided that he and the Portland Business Alliance know what’s best for the city rather than the residents themselves.” She said private negotiations between the mayor’s office and the Business Alliance “threaten the public’s faith in our government’s transparency and democratic process.”

Asked Monday what Wheeler should have done differently, Hardesty said he ought to have consulted Just Transition members. Hardesty said she believes Wheeler’s stance against the Just Transition’s petition is about winning approval from the business community for his own tax increase, which would help fund more police officer positions.

Wheeler spokesman Michael Cox refuted Hardesty’s characterizations Monday, defending the mayor as seeking only to broker a compromise. Cox said the mayor’s office was in contact with the Just Transition group before Wheeler went public with his opposition to their initiative petition.

“He didn’t talk about killing anything,” Cox said of the mayor. “He talked about finding a solution that is a win for all parties without an expensive and damaging ballot fight.”

It’s unclear where the other council race frontrunners -- Commissioner Loretta Smith and mayoral aide Andrea Valerrama -- stand on the tax. Smith’s campaign said she is “still reviewing” the petition, but supports carbon reduction efforts, clean energy usage and workforce programs targeted at the low-income and people of color. A campaign representative for Valderrama did not return a request for comment.

During the press conference at which Wheeler made clear his opposition to the retailer tax, he proposed a deal where the Energy Trust of Oregon, a non-profit that promotes energy conservation, would direct some of its \$150 million annual budget toward the Just Transition group’s goals. He expressed his desire for an “amicable, agreed-to solution.”

Hardesty said Monday that she wouldn’t back Wheeler’s deal because Energy Trust doesn’t specifically serve low-income people.

Energy Trust spokeswoman Hannah Cruz said the organization is aware of the Just Transition’s initiative and Wheeler’s comments. She said the Energy Trust does not comment on policy proposals. She said expanding energy efficiency and renewable energy programs to low-income people and people of color “is integral to our mission.”

With a series of favorable court decisions last week, backers of the eco-related tax can now begin to collect the 34,156 valid signatures needed to put their initiative on the November 2018 ballot. Signatures are due in early July.

The Portland Tribune

City Hall Update: City Offers Tips for Testifying on Infill

*By Jim Redden
May 8, 2018*

Plus, gang violence is continuing to increase in Portland and Better Naito has started its fourth year.

A large number of people are expected to testify about the Residential Infill Project during the upcoming Planning and Sustainability Commission hearings on it. The project's recommendations would limit new home sizes and allow small multifamily projects in 60 percent of single-family neighborhoods, among other things.

To help facilitate the testimony, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability staff working on the projects have posted details of the hearings and recommendations for testifying on its website. They include tips on signing up and how to make group presentations.

The hearings will start at 5 p.m., May 15 and 22 in Room 2500A of the 1900 Building, 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave. To learn more, go to: tinyurl.com/y7f4ussj

Gang violence still increasing

Gang violence is still running well ahead of last year's level, despite a recent slump that saw only three shootings during the last two weeks of April. One person was hospitalized following a fight that preceded a shooting in one of the incidents.

According to the most recent statistics released by the Portland Police Bureau, the Gang Enforcement Team investigated 42 incidents by the end of April, compared to just 29 during the same period in 2017. Total incidents in April dropped to 10 from 17 in March, however.

The number of incidents has historically increased during the rest of the year, especially after the weather warms up and school lets out for summer.

Better Naito starts fourth year

The fourth annual installation of the Better Naito bike and pedestrian lane was celebrated with a ceremony at the Salmon Street Springs fountain in Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park on Tuesday.

The project creates a separate, car-free lane on Southwest Naito Parkway along the park during the festival season. It will remain in place until Sept. 30 to better protect the increasing number of people expected to use the park until then.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Portland Bureau of Transportation and the Portland Rose Festival Association. It also marked the beginning of a new season of Adaptive Biketown, the PBOT program which provides bikes for people with disabilities.

Portland Parks Director Leaving

*By Jim Redden
May 7, 2018*

National search to be conducted to replace Mike Abbate, who announced his departure in a Monday email to Portland Parks & Recreation employees.

The director of Portland Parks & Recreation announced he is leaving Monday.

In an email to PP&R employees, director Mike Abbate said he has decided to "step down" after seven years in the position. The email gave no reason for the decision.

"I have had the honor of being a Parkie. In that time, I have been able to work alongside some of the most amazing people I have ever met — you. Together, we have seen remarkable progress, often in the face of difficult budget reductions and heavy social burdens," Abbate wrote.

He has been replaced by Kia Selley as interim director through the fall, starting May 16. She served as the Assets and Development Division Manager in PP&R for almost five years up to December 2016.

The bureau has been overseen by Commissioner Amanda Fritz for many years. Mayor Ted Wheeler recently took control of all bureaus as part of the process for the City Council approving the budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1. Wheeler's office says "Fritz remains the lead on this issue."

Fritz's office says a national competitive search process will be done to hire a new permanent director. She praised Abbate's service under previous parks commissioner Nick Fish and former Mayor Charlie Hales.

"I have tremendous gratitude for the work Director Abbate has led in partnership with Commissioner Fish and me, Mayors Hales and Wheeler, Parks staff, and community Parks supporters over the past seven years, and I wish him the best," Fritz said in a statement.

Here is what Abbate told PP&R staff:

Dear Parkies, Friends and Colleagues -

I have some news to share with you — I have decided to step down as Director of Portland Parks & Recreation. For the past seven years, I have had the honor of being a Parkie. In that time, I have been able to work alongside some of the most amazing people I have ever met - you. Together, we have seen remarkable progress, often in the face of difficult budget reductions and heavy social burdens. Yet, despite challenges, it is clear: Portlanders appreciate your work and support our amazing parks system, one of the best in the nation! Together over the last seven years, we have accomplished many things that leave our system in better shape:

- Voters passed the 2014 Parks Replacement Bond
- Portland was awarded the Gold Medal as the best managed park system in the U.S.
- Council created over 200 new living wage jobs for our employees
- Council approved our new System Development Charge methodology, which has allowed us to fund many new park projects
- Portland Parks and partners created Explore Washington Park, the Transportation Management Association
- We developed our Five-Year Racial Equity Plan and two Strategic Plans
- The Bureau has become more diverse and reflective of the community we serve

- We formed new partnerships to help support our work with organizations like the Halprin Landscape Conservancy, Nike, Under Armour, Verde and many others
- We developed and have begun implementing our new Ecologically Sustainable Landscapes Initiative and are making great progress on Renew Forest Park
- Along with partners at BDS, we implemented Title 11 (the Tree Code) and added many new heritage trees to our system
- We built new or renovated parks such as South Waterfront Greenway, The Fields, Dawson Park, Khunamokwst Park, Colwood Golf Course, Marquam Nature Park Trails, Oaks Bottom Trail, Gateway Green, Under Armour fields at Lents and Duniway Parks, Luuwit View Park, Whitaker Ponds Natural Area, Ventura Park play area, Spring Garden Park, Thomas Cully Park, Gateway Discovery Park, and the beautiful new Forest Park Bridges.