

The Oregonian

Portland Mayor, Decrying Immigration Agency, Sides with Demonstrators

*By Gordon Friedman
June 20, 2018*

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler lambasted the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in a series of tweets Wednesday and announced he will not have city police break up a protest at the federal agency's Southwest Portland field office.

Protesters have for days demonstrated at the field office, heckling agency workers and erecting dozens of tents around the building off Southwest Macadam Boulevard.

The protesters have rebuked the agency for carrying out the Trump administration's zero tolerance immigration policy, which resulted in thousands of children being separated from their parents after illegal border crossings. The protests prompted the agency to temporarily close the field office.

Immigrations and Customs Enforcement is the federal agency that enforces immigration laws. It sent more than 120 adults detained at the southern U.S. border to the federal prison in Sheridan. Their imprisonment and isolation prompted outrage from Oregon politicians and concerns from legal advocates.

In response to growing bipartisan pressure and public backlash, President Trump signed an executive order ending the family separations Wednesday, backing off the hard-line policy he had vehemently supported.

Wheeler applauded Trump for rethinking the child-removal policy in his tweets. But he also cast the policy as "an abomination" and "un-American."

He also criticized a Trump-appointed head of the immigration agency who said mayors of sanctuary cities should be subject to arrest. Oregon is a so-called "sanctuary state" because state law bars most cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials. Portland has also declared itself a sanctuary city.

The tweets were signed "TW," meaning Wheeler dictated them himself.

During a brief interview at City Hall, Wheeler said he does not believe the immigration agency has asked for city help removing protesters now at its building.

Wheeler's siding with the demonstrators is a change from his position on a similar protest last year, where Portland police officers removed protesters from the same Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office. Asked why he had police break up last year's protest but not the one ongoing, Wheeler said, "I'm not engaged in every action or every tactic."

Portland Moves Ahead with Likely Ban on Plastic Straws

*By Gordon Friedman
June 20, 2018*

Portland is all but certain to ban plastic straws after a City Council vote Wednesday.

Council members adopted a resolution instructing the city Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to come up with a plan to "reduce single-use non-recyclable plastics" and to ban plastic straws in particular.

Plastic straws are one of the most common forms of litter, Mayor Ted Wheeler said during a hearing, and are "littering Portland's waterfront, our streets and our parks." Wheeler said straws are of particular concern because they cannot be recycled in Portland.

Susan Anderson, the planning bureau director, testified that by curtailing the use of plastic straws the city is "doing its part to protect the environment." She handed each commissioner a metal straw – which can be reused indefinitely – and said each now could set an example by forgoing use of plastic ones.

Many Portland businesses are already a step ahead of the council. More than 100 local bars and restaurants have over the last two years voluntarily stopped serving drinks with plastic straws, favoring paper straws, metal straws or a straw-on-demand policy. One of the first was Widmer Brothers Brewery; a company representative testified Wednesday that customers approve of the no-straw policy.

Commissioners voted to adopt the resolution 3-0. Commissioner Dan Saltzman and Commissioner Nick Fish were absent. It instructs city sustainability officials to come back with a straw-ban plan in October, when council members will likely add it into city code.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler lambasted the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in a series of tweets Wednesday, decrying its policies as "un-American" and announcing he will not have city police break up a protest at the federal agency's Southwest Portland field office.

Wheeler struck an aspirational tone Wednesday, saying the city has "a lot of work ahead" to make more kinds of packaging and plastics environmentally friendly.

"This is but a start, but I think it's a meaningful and important start," the mayor said, adding, "We need to move aggressively."

Portland Tacks Two New Fees on Airbnb-style Rentals

*By Elliot Njus
June 20, 2018*

The Portland City Council on Wednesday tacked two new fees on short-term vacation rentals.

The council on Wednesday approved a \$4 a night booking fee, which would go toward housing and homeless initiatives, and an additional 2 percent fee, which would go toward tourism marketing.

They come in addition to 11.5 percent lodging taxes already collected by Airbnb and other platforms on behalf of the rental operators.

The 2 percent fee is already paid by operators of large hotels throughout the city. The council also removed an exemption for small hotels with fewer than 50 rooms. Together, the changes are expected to raise an additional \$895,000 to \$1,040,000 annually.

The per-night fee for housing initiatives is expected to raise between \$1.1 million and \$1.28 million a year.

The council initially delayed a decision on the per-night fee after Commissioner Amanda Fritz argued it should be assessed as a percentage of the nightly rate.

But Mayor Ted Wheeler later turned the agenda back to the rental fees and called a vote. It passed 3-2, with Fritz and Commissioner Chloe Eudaly against.

"It just doesn't seem equitable that \$15-a-night room would be charged the same as a \$1,200 a night room," she said.

Taken together, Portland's added fees on short-term rentals would be among the highest in the country, city revenue officials said.

It wasn't immediately clear how short-term rental platforms like Airbnb and HomeAway might respond. Discussions among city commissioners and revenue officials revolved around whether the fees could push one or more of the companies to withdraw from Portland, or to mount a legal challenge.

The Portland Tribune

Portland to Study Ways to Restrict Use of Plastic Straws, Other Throwaway Utensils

*By Steve Law
June 20, 2018*

City Council directs city staff to study the issue and return by fall with a proposal to reduce use of the items, which are a major source of litter and harm wildlife.

The city of Portland is joining the international movement to restrict the use of plastic straws and other throwaway plastic utensils at restaurants and bars.

The Portland City Council adopted a resolution late Wednesday afternoon that directs the city Planning and Sustainability Bureau to "introduce a single-use, non-recyclable plastic reduction strategy, including plastic straws" by Oct. 1.

Plastic items are one of the most common forms of litter along roadsides, streams and the ocean, and in many cases the plastic endangers wildlife that winds up ingesting it.

Plastic doesn't biodegrade naturally in the environment, Planning and Sustainability Bureau director Susan Anderson said at a brief City Council hearing to consider the proposal, introduced by Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"That means they're pretty much here forever," Anderson said.

Though plastic does disintegrate into smaller chunks, that actually makes it worse for wildlife, especially in the ocean, where various species wind up eating it, she said.

More than 660 species have been adversely affected by plastic trash, said Nancy Nordman, a volunteer who has led the local "Ditch the Straw Campaign," a project of the Portland chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. The foundation and others brought the issue to Wheeler for consideration.

So far, some 100 businesses, mostly in Portland, have voluntarily joined the movement or contributed to the campaign, including Portland's Widmer Brothers brewing company and Burgerville, the Vancouver, Wash.-based chain.

Planning and Sustainability Bureau staff will study the experiences of other communities that have enacted plastic straw and similar bans, Anderson said, and will report back on "best practices." The bureau also will consult with the restaurant and bar industry and others who use straws and other non-recyclable plastics. Wednesday's council vote should put commercial establishments on notice that they may want to use up their stock of plastic straws and similar items before any ban takes effect.

City staff will evaluate the need of some institutions, such as hospitals and care centers, to have exemptions where people need to use straws. As Commissioner Chloe Eudaly pointed out, some people have disabilities that make it hard to drink without a straw.

However, as Commissioner Amanda Fritz pointed out, bendable straws can be made out of paper, which does break down in the environment.

A sustainability director for Widmer said that company has found that paper straws are, ironically, more expensive to buy than plastic straws. However, because the company now only serves paper straws when requested, it winds up saving money.

When Wheeler was asked about his proposal to restrict plastic straws Wednesday morning, where he was addressing a Portland Business Alliance breakfast meeting on homelessness, the mayor whipped out a metal straw from his pocket.

Wheeler said he hoped that the bureau's efforts, including reaching out to the public and the hospitality industry, could help win broad support in the community by the time the proposal comes up for council action, perhaps in October.

But Wheeler urged Anderson and her staff to come up with an aggressive strategy.

"I hope it's comprehensive and I hope it's on the edgy side," he said.

Sources Say: Portland Isn't Diverse, But It's Integrated

By Jim Redden

June 21, 2018

Plus, Peterson's fundraising reflects Metro's growing influence and affordable housing supporters are contributing to bond measure.

Portland is among the least-diverse metropolitan areas in the nation. But its neighborhoods are among the most integrated.

Those are among the surprising findings of the most recent report by influential local economist Joe Cortright on his thoughtful urban planning blog, City Observatory. Titled "America's Most Diverse Mixed Income Neighborhoods," the report crunched U.S. Census data on race, ethnicity and household income to identify the nation's most diverse mixed-income neighborhoods.

Not surprisingly, the report found that only a little over 1 percent of neighborhoods in the Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton area were that diverse, among the least of all major metropolitan areas. But it also found that nearly 95 percent of all Portland neighborhoods are as diverse as the entire metropolitan area, among the highest share in the country.

You can find the report at cityobservatory.org.

Peterson reflects Metro's growing influence

In what is perhaps a sign of Metro's growing influence in the region, Lynn Peterson raised more than \$287,000 in cash and in-kind contributions for her successful campaign for council president, even though she faced no serious opposition.

Peterson won the election outright in the May 2018 primary with 84 percent of the vote. Her only opponent, Michael Langley, who filed at the last minute, did not report raising any money for his campaign.

Peterson's backers, who have continued contributing into June, include many businesses potentially affected by the regional government's decisions, such as HDR Engineering (\$1,000), a consulting firm that works on transit projects, and Waste Management (\$1,000), the large recycling and garbage hauling firm that operates the landfill in Arlington where Metro sends most of the region's trash.

As current Metro President Tom Hughes enters his last six months in office, Metro is committed to two new and expensive initiatives — the \$652.8 million affordable housing bond the council has referred to the November 2018 ballot and a yet-to-be-determined regional measure to help fund the proposed Southwest Corridor MAX Line, to be referred to the November 2020 ballot.

Affordable housing bond fundraising starts

Contributions already are being made to the political action committee supporting the \$625.8 million affordable housing bond Metro has referred to the 2018 ballot, even though the time to challenge the ballot title has not yet passed.

Three contributions have been made by politicians who won in the May 2018 primary election and finished their races with campaign surpluses. Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury gave \$10,000 on May 29. Portland city Commissioner Nick Fish contributed \$5,000 on May 21. And Metro President-elect Lynn Peterson donated \$1,000 on June 5.

In addition, outgoing Metro President Tom Hughes gave \$5,000 on May 30. All four are named as controlling members of the committee in the state filing records.

Mayor and River Hugger Swim Team Trek Across the Willamette River

By Hailey Stewart

June 20, 2018

The Human Access Project kicks off Willamette River swim season with Mayor Ted Wheeler

Nearly 40 swimmers jumped into the Willamette River alongside Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler early Monday morning, kicking off the Human Access Project's swim season for its River Hugger team.

Bright green swim caps and neon orange buoys bobbed in and out of the river after River Huggers left the Station 21 Fire House Dock near the Hawthorne Bridge. Attendees swam half a mile across the river and back, starting at 7 a.m. Monday.

Wheeler said many community members have an outdated notion about the river's water quality, and he encourages people to use the river.

"Most people say it's crazy, but we just want people to come down and swim," Wheeler said.

The swim kicked off the River Hugger Swim Team's season, in which they trek across the river and back before or after work every day from June to September.

The Human Access Project is a group of volunteers dedicated to transforming Portland's relationship with the Willamette River, Ringleader Willie Levenson said.

When Levenson moved to Portland several years ago, he noticed a lack of appreciation for the city's main downtown river compared to other river-based cities where he had lived.

"When planning, I drew a lot of inspiration from living in Boise and Virginia," Levenson said. "Those communities had such a strong relationship with their river."

Levenson toyed with the idea of creating a project to aid in that relationship, and after 15 years, the Human Access Project was born.

Levenson began organizing "The Big Float," an event that brought 1,300 participants into the Willamette River on inner tubes and other gear, demonstrating it was safe for swimming and other forms of human recreation in 2011.

Levenson said the name for the event came from Portland's Big Pipe project — a 20-year undertaking that was completed in 2011. It entailed the overhaul of the city's wastewater system to divert sewage from flowing into the Willamette River and the Columbia Slough. After completion of the pipe project, the Willamette River became more swimmable, but Levenson said the public's disdain for the river barely wavered.

The Human Access Project has been trying to change that ever since.

"There's a lot of work that needs to be done with any river, but there's a lot of misinformation spread about the Willamette," Levenson said. "Once you get in the water, you realize you're still alive. Then you realize it feels pretty great. And by the time you get out of the river, everyone wants to come back."

Gretchan Jackson, a member of the River Huggers team, said the summer swims have been a good way to begin her mornings for the past four years.

"If you don't wanna keep doing it, you probably shouldn't start," Jackson said. "You'll get hooked."

Levenson said he hopes the project continues to improve water quality and water access. The project's yearly river events, he said, are "movements disguised as a party."

"When we're trying to get our message heard and there are hundreds of voters out on the water, local government really notices that," Levenson said.

Wheeler recognized the movement in 2016 when he swam his ballot across the river, in a campaign publicity stunt. He's been swimming across the Willamette River ever since.

"This river is our largest public space. It cuts right through the heart of Portland," Wheeler said. "We encourage people to dive in."

Wheeler said the project is pushing forward with clearing the rocks from the Tom McCall Bowl access point, and hoping it will bring more community members to the shore.

"You can't just be a city next to the river. You have to be a city that can access it," Wheeler said.

Still, Levenson said there is plenty of work to be done with Portland's relationship to the river.

"People still worry about the river, but this sort of action helps normalize utilizing it," he said. "The river belongs to the people, so why not swim?"

Portland Adopts Two New Fees on Short-Term Rentals

*By Steve Law
June 20, 2018*

One fee would be used to promote tourism to city; the other would support affordable housing projects.

Two new city fees will be levied on short-term rental operations such as Airbnb and HomeAway, to raise more money for affordable housing and homelessness programs and to promote tourism to Portland.

In a unanimous vote, the City Council gave final approval Wednesday morning to a new fee equaling 2 percent of total revenues for short-term rentals. The proceeds would be directed to Travel Portland, a nonprofit that produces media and other promotional campaigns to lure tourists to the city.

That group pledged to adapt its materials to cater more to travelers interested in staying in short-term rentals, as well as hotels.

In addition, the council directed that the 2 percent fee be expanded to include hotels with less than 50 rooms. So-called boutique hotels had been exempted from the fee before, and the council was receptive to testimony from short-term rental hosts that their operations shouldn't be charged more than smaller hotels.

The other new fee, which will levy a new \$4 nightly charge on each short-term rental, proved more controversial.

Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Chloe Eudaly objected, saying a flat fee would unfairly hit short-term rental hosts who charge more modest nightly rents. They indicated they'd support substituting a fee based on a percentage of revenues, to make it more fair.

"It doesn't seem equitable that a \$15 a night room would be charged the same as a \$1,200 a night room," Fritz said.

But a council majority approved the flat fee, apparently convinced that, while not as fair, it would be more likely to withstand a court challenge.

There are some concerns that a percentage rate could be legally deemed a tax and not a fee, making it easier to overturn.

"This is legally defensible," Mayor Ted Wheeler said of the \$4 a night fee.

Funds from the nightly fee will go into the city's Housing Investment Fund, which is used to support low-income housing projects.

Willamette Week

Mayor Ted Wheeler Calls Federal Immigration Policy “Un-American” And Tells ICE Not to Count On Help From Portland Police

By Katie Shepherd

June 20, 2018

"I do not want the Portland Police to be engaged or sucked into a conflict."

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler today condemned the federal immigration policy of separating families and prosecuting every person who crosses the U.S. border illegally, while vowing not to use the Portland police to chase away protesters who temporarily shut down a federal building Wednesday.

In a thread of tweets, Wheeler called the Trump administration's zero-tolerance and family separation policies "un-American."

"The policy being enacted by the federal government around the separation of very small children from their parents is an abomination," Wheeler tweeted. "I want to be very clear I do not want the @PortlandPolice to be engaged or sucked into a conflict, particularly from a federal agency that I believe is on the wrong track, that has not fully lived American values of inclusion and is also an agency where the former head suggested that people who lead cities that are sanctuary cities like this one should be arrested."

The mayor's condemnation comes as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement temporarily shut down its Portland location after protesters surrounded the building for days, blocking employees from coming and going.

Just after the federal agency announced the closure, President Donald Trump signed an executive order ending the family separation policy but upholding the zero-tolerance directive that instructs federal officials to prosecute every person who crosses the U.S. border illegally.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Reasonable People

By Alex Zielinski

June 20, 2018

A Policy Change Could Bring Fairness Back to the City's Police Review Process

Let's follow the path of a low-level police misconduct case through the city's convoluted investigation process! (Stick with me—it's less mind-numbing than it sounds, promise.)

A woman comes to the city's Independent Police Review (IPR) with a complaint: A Portland police officer called her a "bitch." She has witnesses: two other officers and a bystander. The bystander says he's "pretty sure" he heard the cop call this woman a bitch. The cops, however, tell their supervisor they have "no recollection" of the event.

The cops' supervisor, a sergeant, tells the IPR that she believes her officers, and the case should be dropped. But the woman appeals, taking her complaint to the city's Citizen Review

Committee (CRC), the 11-member panel of civilian volunteers tasked with hearing these appeals and delivering their findings to the chief of police. It's then up to the chief to decide if the accused officer should be disciplined.

And that's when the city's elaborate police accountability machine breaks down.

When hearing a complaint, members of the CRC are told to consider if a "reasonable person" could agree with the decision that's being appealed. In this case, the CRC would ask itself if a reasonable person (like a police sergeant) could believe that two officers might not remember what another cop said.

But instead of objectively weighing both sides of the complaint, CRC members are expected to consider the decision from the perspective of the police bureau.

"We're essentially just adopting the case through the eyes of the sergeant," Citizen Review Committee Chair Kristin Malone tells me. "Why have [this group of] 11 supposedly neutral people if they aren't giving decision-makers their honest take?"

It's a frustration that those on the panel—a mix of lawyers, policy experts, and criminal justice wonks—have had for years. And as the CRC continues to protect officers who may not be as innocent as their "reasonable" superiors believe, the committee is faced with an uncomfortable question: Is a program created to improve police accountability in Portland actually making things worse?

After nearly three years of back-and-forth among committee members, city lawyers, and community cop-watchers, the CRC has suggested a change. Instead of pondering how a "reasonable person" would react when faced with a complaint, CRC members would be allowed to base their recommendations on the objective facts of the case—or, in legalese, the "preponderance of evidence" in the investigation case file.

The CRC asked for public input on the policy change in May and received near-unanimous support (thanks to an expected grimace from the Portland Police Association). According to Malone, the long-overdue policy could get council approval by the end of the year.

"To have a citizen come to you with a complaint against an officer and [to] tell them our decision will not be based on what we believe happened, but on what the officer's boss believes happened?" says Malone. "That's not fair."

It's certainly not reasonable.

City Fees on Airbnbs Could Benefit Affordable Housing Programs

*By Kelly Kenoyer
June 20, 2018*

These costs could incentivize short-term hosts to become long-term landlords

Portland City Council is considering adding two new fees to Portland's growing Airbnb market. One fee, a 2 percent charge per night on short-term rentals (STRs) like Airbnb, would fund Portland tourism campaigns. But it's the other—a \$4 per night charge on STRs—that could have greater impacts on both STR hosts and local renters. In a housing market where many rental homes and apartments have been converted into STRs, the \$4 per night charge will fund more

affordable housing in the city and, possibly, encourage STR hosts to consider renting to Portlanders, rather than tourists.

STRs in Portland are currently taxed by the city, county, and state a total of 13.3 percent of their listing price. The new 2 percent fee, already charged to larger hotels, would increase the hosts' tax to 15.3 percent. Revenues from that fee are estimated to be around \$720,000 to \$840,000 per year.

The estimated revenue from the other, \$4-per-night fee—\$1.1 million per year—would go directly into the city's Housing Investment Fund, which supports Portland's affordable housing projects.

Over a dozen Airbnb hosts spoke in opposition to the ordinance at a June 13 city council meeting, calling it "regressive" as well as a threat to their own ability to afford Portland's housing prices.

"Airbnb is helping thousands of Portlanders like myself to monetize our biggest asset and stay in our homes," said Airbnb host David Bo at the meeting. "Airbnb prevents the housing crisis from becoming much worse."

Deborah Hanthamor, who turned a room in her house into an Airbnb rental, says the fees could force her out of the city.

"The income I earn helps me pay for my property taxes, water and electricity bills, and to take care of general maintenance," said Hanthamor. "I'm a divorced single woman, [I] live alone, and without this additional income I would need to sell my home. But where would I go?"

The proposed fee, however, is meant to address a housing crisis that is exacerbated by a glut of STRs in Portland.

"The concern I have is taking long-term rentals off the market and converting them to short-term rentals," said Commissioner Nick Fish.

He cited a 2017 study showing that a 10 percent increase in Airbnb listings leads to a 0.39 percent increase in rents and a 0.64 percent increase in housing prices in the same ZIP Code.

Data from Insideairbnb.com, an independent website that provides data on Airbnb's footprint in major cities, shows the company has more than 4,700 listings in Portland. Entire houses and apartments (as opposed to a single room in a home) make up about 66 percent of those listings—though accessory dwelling units (ADUs) may be included in that count. ADUs are small structures built by homeowners in backyards and basements; if they were originally built to be short-term rentals, they don't remove anything from the overall housing market. According to Insideairbnb, more than half of Portland's Airbnbs are considered "high availability," meaning they're likely only used for short-term visitors, which erases those homes from Portland's limited permanent housing market.

"Clearly some of those are units that could have been rented as normal housing," says Lisa Bates, director of Urban Studies at Portland State University. The 1,500 private rooms available on Airbnb, on the other hand, are most likely in homes that are occupied by long-term tenants or homeowners.

It's those smaller STR hosts that may end up paying more than their fair share if the \$4 nightly fee goes into effect. Single-room Airbnbs cost an average of \$74 per night compared to \$140 per night for a full apartment or home. A \$4 fee on all STRs without considering the going rate could be seen as regressive. Requiring hosts to be taxed a percentage instead of charged a flat fee would be fairer, Bates says, and would lessen the impact on hosts charging lower rates.

Several members of city council agree. At the June 13 meeting, commissioners Chloe Eudaly, Amanda Fritz, and Dan Saltzman all voiced concern about the regressive nature of the policy and suggested using a percentage instead.

“A flat fee is regressive,” said Saltzman. “Why not just do a percentage for both?” The city council will hold a final vote on STR ordinances on June 20.

Bates is skeptical that fees alone could solve the housing crisis or convince hosts to turn STRs into long-term rentals. In addition to the fees, she suggests the city create an office of landlord/tenant affairs to help train small-time landlords and make renting out rooms more accessible to everyone.

“Figure out what the barriers are to people doing a long-term rental, then address them,” Bates suggests.

The Skanner

Community Forum: How Does Law Enforcement Interact With Vulnerable Populations?

June 19, 2018

The Office of Mayor Wheeler will host its monthly public safety forum on June 27 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at 1900 SW 4th Avenue Room 2500B, on the topic of how police interact with vulnerable populations, including the houseless and those struggling with mental health and addiction. The forum will examine the upstream issues of homelessness, mental health and addiction, and how public safety officials interact with individuals, including referral to services and collaborating with other social service partners to address issues.

There will be two panels featuring service providers and public safety officials across jurisdictions who interact with vulnerable populations. The forum will discuss the importance of a public safety approach that is both accountable and compassionate.

The Mayor's Office is spearheading a program – the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing (PCCEP) – to develop recommendations for how the Portland Police Bureau can better engage the community in its development of policies that directly affect Portlanders, with a specific focus on racial justice, constitutional policing and mental health issues. Part of PCCEP's role is to facilitate conversations with Portlanders about public safety and police accountability. The Mayor's Office will host interim community forums until the PCCEP is established and members are seated. These interim meetings are held the last Wednesday of every month.