

The Oregonian

Portland Mayor Says Job is ‘No Fun,’ but Claims Vast Success

*By Gordon Friedman
July 10, 2018*

Nearly half way through his first term as mayor, Ted Wheeler said Monday the job is harder than he imagined given the dizzying array of problems he must deal with.

But he said he has delivered on every campaign promise to combat homelessness and add affordable housing and he believes Portland is “making progress” where it counts.

During a wide-ranging interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive at City Hall, the mayor also vented his frustrations at just how powerless he and the city are to staunch the increasing numbers of homelessness people and the profound lack of affordable housing.

Wheeler touted budgets passed during his tenure that increase spending on homelessness prevention, shelters and programs that transition people from the streets into apartments. He said spending on affordable housing is at record levels and that thousands have been moved from shelters or the streets into housing by city homelessness prevention programs.

Yet the mayor said he has grown resigned that Portland’s homelessness problem is “nearly intractable.” Despite a majority of the public being “lulled” into believing the city can solve it alone, that is not true, he said.

Wheeler lay blame at the feet of the federal government, citing a decades-long decline in housing investments; the ever-worsening American addiction crisis; and inadequate services for the mentally ill.

“We have an obligation at the local level to do everything we can with the resources we have. And we do those things,” Wheeler said. “But we’re never going to solve homelessness – not here in Portland, not here in any major city in America – if we keep assuming that it is purely a local issue.”

He added later: “If people are expecting the mayor of Portland to solve the problem of homelessness they’re going to be sorely disappointed and that’s just the truth.”

Wheeler campaigned on making a considerable dent in the problem.

In his “Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Homelessness” laid out during his campaign, Wheeler pledged to establish work programs for the homeless, limit camp sweeps, expand the number of shelter beds, enact a “Tenant’s Bill of Rights” that bans no-cause evictions, and other reforms.

Many of those promises remain unfulfilled, although Wheeler did help secure approval for significant tenant protections and a new shelter that will be able to accommodate more than 100 homeless people along Southeast Foster Road. The city does not provide scores of jobs for homeless people who want to work; the population living and sleeping on the streets still numbers in the thousands; and the city’s stock of affordable housing remains far too paltry.

Wheeler’s own take on his anti-homelessness efforts is quite rosy. Ticking off a half-dozen of his campaign pledges, he said, “I’ve delivered on every one of those counts and I’ve delivered in a substantial way.”

It is true that the number of publicly funded homeless shelter beds has doubled to about 1,300 since 2015. But plans for the additional beds were set in motion mostly before Wheeler took office.

Camps still dot neighborhoods citywide, and sweeps are regular. Tenant protections have strengthened, with renters who are evicted without cause or subjected to 10 percent rent hikes entitled to significant relocation payments. But no-cause evictions remain.

Asked about a recently published investigation from The Oregonian/OregonLive showing homeless people accounted for more than half the city arrests in 2017, Wheeler said the statistics weren't convincing but agreed the analysis warrants "further evaluation."

The city Independent Police Review has launched an inquiry.

Defending his progress implementing the \$258 million housing bond adopted by Portland voters, Wheeler said nearly half the 1,300 promised units are already "delivered."

Though hundreds of units are planned, only 313 units financed by the bond are available to rent or near-ready, according to the city's housing bond progress website. When asked what he meant by "delivered," the mayor said "delivered or in the pipeline."

Wheeler said he will deliver the promised units regardless, within pre-set timelines and "probably a lot faster." He said that in 2019 the city will open triple the number of affordable housing units as the year prior to when he took office.

To make even more progress, he implored voters to approve both a housing bond on November ballots, put forth by regional government Metro, and an amendment to the Oregon Constitution that would allow Portland and other cities to spend bond proceeds on affordable housing projects developed or owned by entities other than the city.

Asked whether he will allow protesters to continue holding rallies that invariably become public brawls spanning blocks of downtown Portland, Wheeler said he will – and that he faces a "no-win" situation.

Referencing the right-wing Patriot Prayer group that holds rallies near City Hall and has spared verbally and physically with critics, he said, "It's no secret that I'm no fan of the people from Vancouver who come down here and spout their venom."

He recalled a decision made last year when he attempted to stop Patriot Prayer from obtaining a protest permit. The decision came days after the fatal stabbings on a MAX train by a man who had attended protest demonstrations.

"Frankly, I was worried about public safety and so was the Police Bureau. They were concerned about mass casualties as one potential outcome," he said of his efforts to avert the planned rally. "I was uniformly excoriated by the press for that decision."

Wheeler said his view now is that all should be allowed to exercise their First Amendment rights and police will intervene if necessary.

"We're in what I think is in the best place we can be as a police force and as a city, which is protect the public," he said.

Wheeler made it clear he feels the job of mayor is exasperating.

"It's not a fun job. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that it's fun. It's not a fun job. It's a meaningful job," he said.

Wheeler said he is constantly forced to address what he called the “crises du jour,” a Sisyphean existence that he said distracts from his policy agenda.

“I get up in the morning and by the time I’ve gone to bed there’s three or four or five new crises that weren’t there when I started the day,” he said. “That’s what being mayor of Portland is about.”

Asked if he will run for a second term – and be the first mayor to do so Vera Katz – Wheeler said he is undecided.

“At the end of the day we have to evaluate if it’s a good fit,” he said. “Is it a good fit for me? Is it a good fit for the public? Am I right guy for them? It’s too early to tell.”

Transcript: Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler's interview with The Oregonian

*By Gordon Friedman
July 10, 2018*

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler spoke with Gordon R. Friedman, the city government reporter for The Oregonian/OregonLive on Monday. Excerpts of the interview, in the mayor’s office at City Hall, has been edited for length and clarity.

The interview began with Wheeler’s evaluation of his time in office.

TED WHEELER: “It’s going well. It’s where I’d expect us to be 18 months in. It’s a challenging policy environment, but I set very clear objectives for the first part of this administration. I said I wanted to lay the foundation for my governance and that included building relations with the City Council, with bureau directors, making sure we had the right leaders in place, making sure we’re communicating with community groups that have an interest in of policymaking. I feel that we did that.

We’ve obviously had a very busy first year and a half and you’ve seen it around housing, homelessness, policing issues, infrastructure policy, work we’ve done around economic prosperity, workforce development, contracting, procurement, public safety, emergency management – it’s been a prolific 18 months in my perspective. It’s been a marathon at a sprinter’s pace.

GORDON FRIEDMAN: I think one of the issues most on residents’ minds is homelessness. You’ve made pledges as a candidate and as mayor to effectively address the causes of homelessness here and help people get into housing. I think it’s fair to say the average person driving around town, walking around town, might wonder what’s going on. Because the problem seems to be getting worse in a lot of places. Can you tell me what you plan, specifically –

TED WHEELER: When I ran I was very clear about what I would do. I would increase our investments around prevention, increase our partnerships with the county and other community partners. I was very clear that we’d invest much more in shelter space to get people off the streets, out of doorways, out from overpasses and get them connected with services – whatever services they need, whether it’s mental health whether its addiction or economic resources. I’ve delivered on every one of those counts and I’ve delivered in a substantial way.

We've more than doubled shelter capacity from the year prior to my taking office. We have increased our contributions to the Joint Office of Homeless Services by over 100 percent. Last year we provided prevention services to 6,000 households. We transitioned 5,000 people from shelter or from the streets into housing.

In terms of the actual housing we have significantly increased our investments on housing. If you go back to my State of the City speech – by the end of 2019 we will triple the number of affordable housing units we deliver to the market over the year prior to my election.

Here's what's going on: this is not just a local issue. We have an obligation at the local level to do everything we can with the resources we have. And we do those things. But we're never going to solve homelessness – not here in Portland, not here in any major city in America – if we keep assuming that it is purely a local issue.

There's a larger dynamic that's going on here and I'm going to talk about this a lot in the next two years. The federal government has withdrawn its support through HUD for affordable housing at the community level by 85 percent since the 1980s. Which means local governments, which don't have anywhere near the tax base or the economic capacity, have been asked to take up the slack. Local governments will never be able to take up that slack.

Secondly, addiction. We have a national addiction problem and we have a global addition crisis. We can respond to it at the local level, but we don't have the resources to stop the national addition issue in Portland on our own.

Third, community based mental health delivery. There's a lot of good people and good organizations here. But the need is absolutely swamping the capacity that we have at the local level.

As you know there are structural economic issues that are causing a lot of people to tip into homelessness for economic reasons. And not just young people, a lot of older adults too.

This is something I really want to stress: we will do as much as we can locally with housing, prevention, services, economic help. But until we have an acknowledgement that this is a national crisis it will not be solved at the local level. We'll be talking about this in a decade, in 20 years.

FRIEDMAN: I know you can't fiat away poverty.

WHEELER: No. But we don't even have an acknowledgement yet that this is a national issue. The majority of people have been lulled into believing this can be solved at the local level. If that were true we wouldn't have the problems we have all the way up and down the west coast, in the Midwest, on the East Coast, and frankly, in virtually every large city in the world right now. And you're right, the problem is getting worse.

We're doing what we can. If people are expecting the mayor of Portland to solve the problem of homelessness they're going to be sorely disappointed and that's just the truth. I'll do what I can. I've been more aggressive than any prior mayor on this subject.

FRIEDMAN: I know it's a difficult problem.

WHEELER: It's nearly intractable.

FRIEDMAN: But there are certain things you can do. You're the housing commissioner, you're the police commissioner, you're in charge of development. Do you think we're using the housing bond dollars well enough, fast enough?

WHEELER: I do. And there's an audit that will take place sometime in the next couple of months. That's the auditor's business, but she's auditing.

What I can tell you is this: the bond promised 1,300 units of affordable housing in a five- to seven-year timeframe. We're 18 months into that timeframe and we've delivered nearly half of what was promised in the bond.

FRIEDMAN: Not in terms of actual rentals, people living in units though.

WHEELER: In terms of units either built, under construction or –

MICHAEL COX, CHIEF OF STAFF: You're right, there's a time lag identifying a set of units and defining those as going to be used with bond dollars.

WHEELER: My pledge to the public is I will deliver at least the 1,300 units promised and I will deliver them within the five- to seven-year timeframe, but probably a lot faster. And, if the constitutional amendment passes in November, and I'm one of the strongest proponents of that, we can probably get even more out of it.

COX: When you say delivered sir, do you mean we have identified and earmarked them, do you mean we have broken ground, do you mean ribbon cutting? There's a definitional issue here.

WHEELER: Delivered or in the pipeline.

WHEELER: I've been here 18 months and here's what I've delivered. Our housing pipeline through the Housing Bureau is way ahead of where it's ever been in terms of the number of units delivered, the number currently in the pipeline. The housing bond, which I inherited, is not only on track I believe it's well ahead of schedule.

FRIEDMAN: Your critics will say it's not enough.

WHEELER: My critics will always say it's not enough.

FRIEDMAN: Are they right to a certain extent?

WHEELER: What is it they think we should be doing that we're not?

FRIEDMAN: If you look at the 2035 Comprehensive Plan there's parts of the city that are exempt from density requirements – those are the more affluent neighborhoods. When you look at what Portland does in terms of building public housing, compared to East Coast cities where if there's not enough public housing people freeze on the streets, they'd say we should be doing more like what East Coast cities do. Building more housing projects.

WHEELER: We don't have the same financial resources. If you're talking Boston or New York City, we're a much smaller city and our financial resources are much, much smaller. With the resources we have I believe we're maximizing our leverage. Could we do more? Yeah. People should pass the bond when it comes on the ballot in November. Let's do more.

FRIEDMAN: The Metro housing bond?

WHEELER: Yeah. And people should pass the constitutional amendment, so we can partner alongside private sector institutions.

FRIEDMAN: You know The Oregonian did an analysis of arrests by the Police Bureau and found that more than half the arrests were of homeless people. The vast majority arrested were

for non-violent offenses. I'm curious about your reaction to this, but also if there are any steps you're going to take in response to this.

WHEELER: The Police Bureau is going to respond.

FRIEDMAN: You're in charge of the Police Bureau.

WHEELER: I am the police commissioner. I know Chief [Danielle] Outlaw and her staff are highly eager and motivated to respond. And what I heard this morning is they met with at least one of the reporters. They provided what they thought was good data, good information and they do not believe that data or information was taken into account. So, they will be providing the response.

FRIEDMAN: Are you going to order the Police Bureau to do a review of their practices?

WHEELER: They should always review their practices.

FRIEDMAN: But in response to this story –

WHEELER: One of the things I did in my last budget is we hired a person in the Police Bureau who will work with us to address issues related to homelessness. And one of the questions that will be asked is how many of those arrests resulted from calls versus proactive policing. That's of interest to me because probably 80 percent of the calls we get in this office, maybe 90 percent, are people complaining about criminal activity. Often times the people committing that criminal activity are homeless, but not always. So, the question is are they arresting people for criminal activity in response to a citizen complaint or are they proactively going out there and hassling homeless people? I didn't get an answer reading that report.

FRIEDMAN: Homeless people are approximately 3 percent of Portland's population but make up more than half the people arrested, so what does that tell you?

WHEELER: I could play with statistics with you all day long. Off the record –

FRIEDMAN: No, no, no. I don't want to go off the record on this because I think it's important.

WHEELER: We don't have enough information based on a newspaper article to come to a conclusion. Does it warrant further evaluation? Of course, it does. Certainly, it does.

FRIEDMAN: So, is there going to be a specific evaluation ordered because of this?

WHEELER: I believe Independent Police Review is already involved. Am I wrong?

COX: I think the American Civil Liberties Union has made some request. I don't know that that's gone forward. Are you saying is it a bureau management thing or an inquest?

FRIEDMAN: No, I'm asking –

WHEELER: We all read the article. We're interested. Does it warrant further evaluation, yes? Yeah of course it does.

FRIEDMAN: Was there a response to the ACLU's letter? They requested an investigation.

WHEELER: They can request it. They can go to IPR. They know that. They can start that. I haven't responded. I just got back from vacation.

COX: It's an ongoing set of discussions about how those conversations are going to be structured.

FRIEDMAN: It's become clear that these Patriot Prayer rallies are scheduled fistfights.

WHEELER: Well-advertised.

FRIEDMAN: Well-advertised. They've broken out into riots. Are you going to continue allowing permits for these events?

WHEELER: We have two objectives. Number one, protect the public safety. Two, give space for people to exercise their First Amendment rights. If it gets to the point where the public safety is endangered, then the police intervene, and they've done that on numerous occasions.

You know I tried to have Patriot Prayer not come to Portland a week after three people were attacked on a train. And the alleged perpetrator was associated with this group. I was not trying to say you can't protest. I was trying to say this isn't the right time. I was saying that with rights come responsibilities and this is not a good time to come to Portland, Oregon and have this rally.

Frankly, I was worried about public safety and so was the Police Bureau. They were concerned about mass casualties as one potential outcome. I was uniformly excoriated by the press for that decision.

So now we're in what I think is in the best place we can be as a police force and as a city, which is protect the public. In advance we often set parameters. We tell people you can't block transit, can't take the bridges, can't block freeways because it's common sense you don't do those things. But we also provide the space for people to express their First Amendment rights.

It's no secret that I'm no fan of the people from Vancouver who come down here and spout their venom. Their intentions have been – Joey Gibson made it very clear that his objective was to get the cops and Antifa into it with each other. The Police Bureau, having gone through this exercise a number of times, is smarter than that. They understand people are going to try to drag them in. Their objective is to focus relentlessly on giving people space to exercise their rights and protect the public.

FRIEDMAN: I know you're between a rock –

WHEELER: It's not between a rock and a hard place. It's a no-win. It's managing the situation best we can with the resources we have. I think on a whole the Police Bureau has done a fantastic job.

FRIEDMAN: Are you going to run for re-election?

WHEELER: Do you think I should?

FRIEDMAN: They don't pay me for my opinions.

WHEELER: I haven't made that decision. I will say this: My objective for my administration is to bring people together to solve some of these really difficult issues. Portland has never been more prosperous, and it has never been afflicted with as many issues.

I get up in the morning and by the time I've gone to bed there's three or four or five new crises that weren't there when I started the day. That's what being mayor of Portland is about. Trying to drive your agenda while also addressing the crises du jour – and it's crises du jour, not crisis du jour. I've got a great team. They're highly motivated. We've got great partners in the community. I feel well supported by the public.

It's not a fun job. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that it's fun. It's not a fun job. It's a meaningful job. And if I leave this job giving people a sense that we can work together as a community to solve these problems – and we're already seeing good partnerships developing.

Ultimately what I want to people to have is a sense of civic pride, a collective sense that this city is a good place to live, work, raise a family.

It's much harder than I expected it to be, just in terms of the number of issues and how significant they are. It gets back to my theme. If people are waiting for Ted Wheeler to solve these problems alone they're ultimately going to be disappointed. I think the best thing I can do is provide a means of bringing people together. Giving them spirit. Giving them hope. We are making progress, but we're only 18 months in.

FRIEDMAN: So, you're keeping the door open?

WHEELER: Absolutely. I haven't made any decisions. I'm not going to make a decision on this until Labor Day of next year. We're early in. At the end of the day the public, they'll either – I'll have a stronger sense. This is a two-way street. This isn't just about what I want. I have my skillset, my expectations about what my team and I can accomplish. We're looking only at this term right now.

At the end of the day we have to evaluate if it's a good fit. Is it a good fit for me? Is it a good fit for the public? Am I right guy for them? It's too early to tell.

Now, I have a question for you, off the record.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDES OFF THE RECORD.

Police Oversight Agency to Investigate Portland Arrests of Homeless People

*By Rebecca Woolington
July 10, 2018*

The city's police oversight agency has launched a wide-ranging investigation into how Portland police officers interact with homeless people, a move prompted by The Oregonian/OregonLive's reporting.

The news comes two weeks after the newsroom revealed that one in two arrests made by the Portland Police Bureau in 2017 was of a homeless person, while less than 3 percent of Portlanders are homeless.

"There's a particular concern about the police bureau in profiling people," said Constantin Severe, director of the Independent Police Review.

Following the newsroom's investigation, the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon called on Mayor Ted Wheeler and Police Chief Danielle Outlaw to investigate whether officers are profiling people who are homeless.

Severe said Outlaw directed the police bureau to ask the Independent Police Review, which is part of the city auditor's office, to conduct an inquiry based on concerns that were raised from the newsroom's reporting and the ACLU. A police spokesman said the chief requested the review after receiving the ACLU's complaint.

The mayor made his first public comments about the newsroom's analysis Monday during an interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive.

The mayor wouldn't provide reaction to the findings but said additional review of police practices is warranted. He said he wants to know how many of the arrests were related to calls from the public as opposed to contacts initiated by police.

"That's of interest to me because probably 80 percent of the calls we get in this office, maybe 90 percent, are people complaining about criminal activity," Wheeler said. "Often times the people committing that criminal activity are homeless, but not always."

"So, the question is, 'Are they arresting people for criminal activity in response to a citizen complaint, or are they proactively going out there and hassling homeless people?'"

The ACLU of Oregon praised the police chief for requesting an investigation.

"We are glad that Chief Outlaw has called for an IPR investigation, and we hope this is the start of the City taking the steps necessary to end the criminalization of homelessness in Portland," Kimberly McCullough, policy director for the ACLU of Oregon, said in a statement. "We also commend The Oregonian for bringing this important information to light."

Police say a lack of housing, mental health and addiction treatment drive the arrests up. They say they've seen a spike in calls to 911 and their non-emergency line about homeless people. Police also increased searches for wanted people at homeless encampments last year.

The Oregonian/OregonLive analysis found that police most often arrested homeless people on property, drug or low-level crimes. The vast majority of the arrests, 86 percent, were for non-violent crimes, the analysis found.

"Does it warrant further evaluation? Of course, it does," Wheeler said. "Certainly, it does."

The Independent Police Review investigates allegations of misconduct against individual police officers but also conducts systemic reviews, said Severe, the agency's director. The group examines whether officers are policing in a constitutional manner and within the bureau's policies.

The investigation into the arrests of homeless people will be one of three to four broader reviews that the agency plans to conduct this budget year, Severe said.

Severe said the police bureau's Professional Standards Division asked for an investigation last week on behalf of the chief. A team of two to three employees will be assigned to it. The team will look at documents, reports and data and talk to experts, police and people who have experienced homelessness.

"Initially, we're going to do a lot of listening," Severe said.

In the past, Severe said, the agency has received complaints from homeless people about feeling targeted by police. The agency, he said, has also received complaints from other community members alleging the police don't take enough action against homeless people who break the law.

He said it's too early to know the precise scope of the investigation and that investigators first need to get acquainted with the issues around homelessness in Portland, before drilling into specific areas. Broadly, they will be probing how police interact with the homeless population.

Severe said he expects the review to take several months but hopes it will be completed by winter.

"We do want it to be timely," he said.

Willamette Week

As of March 2018, Permits for Block Parties Are Free Throughout the City

*By Beth Slovic
July 10, 2018*

The Best Reason to Stop Avoiding Your Neighbors

East Portland gives the city more than it receives, and now it's given the rest of Portland one more thing: free block parties. Last year, knowing that very few groups in the area hosted neighborhood block parties, officials with the Portland Bureau of Transportation sought to change that.

They abolished the nominal \$10 block party permit fee and told would-be organizers they no longer had to collect signatures from residents on affected streets—a pretty big barrier where multifamily apartment complexes dominate.

As of March 2018, permits for block parties are free throughout the city. And in parts of Portland, PBOT will also loan neighbors the required safety barricades for free, too. They cost about \$75 to \$100 to rent from private companies. "

Block parties are an easy tool for neighbors to engage with each other," writes Dylan Rivera, a PBOT spokesman, in an email. "We love that people want to use our streets as public gathering spaces, building vibrant, resilient neighborhoods."

OPB

Portland Police Chief Asks For Investigation Into Arrests Of Homeless People

*By Amelia Templeton
July 10, 2018*

Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw has asked for a review of whether officers have been disproportionately arresting people who are homeless.

The request came in response to an analysis by the Oregonian/OregonLive, which found that just over half the people arrested in Portland last year were homeless.

By any count, homeless people compose a tiny percent of the city's overall population of roughly 600,000 people.

Most were arrested for non-violent misdemeanors like trespassing and drug possession, the newspaper found.

Now, Police Chief Danielle Outlaw has asked a division of the city auditor's office to review the police bureau's interactions with people who are homeless.

The Independent Police Review investigation will look into the disparity in arrest rates.

“How much is that the Police Bureau or individual officers acting within their own discretion, and how much is it based from community members requesting the police to be somewhere?” asked Constantin Severe, director of Independent Police Review.

Severe said he hopes to complete the investigation by the end of the year.