

The Oregonian

Portland Police Chief Calls Sluggish Public Records 'Huge Issue' That Must Be Fixed

*By Bethany Barnes
December 14, 2018*

Portland's police chief says her department's inability to provide victims a copy of their police report in less than six weeks is a "huge issue" that the agency must change.

"We don't want to re-victimize anyone again by making them wait for a long time and charging them for it," Chief Danielle Outlaw told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday.

The interview followed up on the news outlet's recent investigation that found people face high fees and long waits to get their own police reports from Outlaw's department largely because the function has been relegated to a skeleton crew.

"We have to make sure our staffing meets demands," Outlaw said Thursday. She said she doesn't know how many additional employees that will require, but it's possible the workforce in records may need to double.

Outlaw's remarks signal the strongest stance Police Bureau top brass have taken to date on the issue. Her comments come days after Mayor Ted Wheeler and a majority of commissioners, in direct response to The Oregonian's reporting, said Portlanders deserve better service and Wheeler announced victims would soon no longer be charged \$30 or more for a copy of their reports.

The Oregonian/OregonLive investigation found people struggled to get information about events that upended their lives because of delays that went on for weeks, months and in some cases more than a year. Fees and delays also stymie people trying to solve some of the city's most pressing issues, including pedestrian deaths. The average wait for a police report in 2017 was 133 days, and that slow service comes with an upfront cost of at least \$30. Meanwhile, Portland's metropolitan neighbor to the north, Seattle, produces simple police reports in under a week for \$1.

Wheeler's announcement last week appeared to happen on the fly in response to the realization that a reporter planned to ask him about the October investigation.

"When I heard you were going to ask me about that, I was a little surprised we didn't already have a plan in place to execute on that," Wheeler said at a scheduled interview that occurred minutes after his announcement.

Wheeler's staff denied that the change was spur-of-the-moment and insisted the announcement had been in the works for a while. Outlaw backed up that assertion Thursday and threw her support behind the change.

"It didn't come as a surprise," she said. "I was very aware – and it's the right thing to do."

That's a major departure in thinking for police bureau leadership. In October, Assistant Chief Chris Davis, who oversees the records division, told The Oregonian/OregonLive that victims who can afford to pay should do so because the bureau needs the money to operate. Also, while Davis said the backlog is a problem, he was hesitant to say the records division deserved more resources.

Sgt. Chris Burley told The Oregonian/OregonLive the goal is now to complete 95 percent of public records requests within 15 days by the end of 2019.

Wheeler's announcement that crime victims won't be required to pay for their own police reports starting Jan. 1 came at a time when his office was under fire for its effectiveness and commitment to transparency, particularly as it relates to police matters. Willamette Week had just published a story about his office's failed attempt to get reporters to sign non-disclosure agreements, so the city could direct their coverage in exchange for access to police operations.

It's unclear how long efforts to fix the records backlog have been in the works. The Police Bureau and mayor's office haven't offered specifics. But officials didn't include the matter in their November request for mid-year budget increases.

Wheeler's office has also ignored an offer for free outside help from public records experts. A University of Florida-based think tank that specializes in public records twice reached out to the mayor's office to offer technical assistance, but was ignored.

Frank LoMonte, director of The Brechner Center for Freedom of Information, said he had hoped center experts could come to Portland to provide free diagnostics to help the bureau look for efficiencies and hunt for ways to help Portland become a model agency for police records.

The mayor's office did not so much as acknowledge the offer, even though the cash-strapped Police Bureau is trying to find ways to make the records division function better. Outlaw in her interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive said in her experience police departments often struggle with records backlogs and she'd be interested to know more about anywhere that's found good solutions.

The Oregonian/OregonLive asked mayor's office spokeswoman Eileen Park why the city didn't respond to an offer of free help on an issue that officials keep saying boils down to a lack of resources. Park offered this statement, "We appreciate Frank LoMonte for reaching out to us to offer his help. We have been planning internally and speaking with local journalists about improving public records disclosure citywide and understand that the police records division has its own unique challenges. When the time is right we'll engage with experts and leaders in this field and seek their input."

Who Stole a Benson Bubbler? Portland Wants its Water Fountain Back

*By Gordon Friedman
December 14, 2018*

Call it the first known case of the Thirsty Thief.

One of Portland's 126 iconic Benson Bubbler water fountains has been nabbed, according to the Water Bureau.

The bronze bubbler at Southeast 65th Avenue and Foster Boulevard went missing the night of Dec. 6, according to the Water Bureau, and officials are looking for tips to help them find the absent fount.

The bubbler in question has had a tough year, officials said. Besides being stolen, it was destroyed by a car accident in April and replaced soon after.

The Water Bureau requests anyone with knowledge of the bubbler's whereabouts to call 503-823-3028.

The Portland Tribune

E-scooter Supporters Roll Into City Hall Rally (With Cookies and Veggie Pizza)

*By Joseph Gallivan
December 13, 2018*

Bird reminds city that it would like to bring its electric scooters back to Portland, but few riders bother to show up.

Electric scooter rideshare company Bird rallied outside City Hall at noon Wednesday, Dec. 12, to remind elected officials that it is still here.

Scooters from Bird, Lime and Skip were removed by the companies on Nov. 21, at the end of the Portland Bureau of Transportation's four-month pilot period, in which Portlanders had unrestricted access to the electric-powered scooters throughout most of the city.

Portland officials are studying data from the pilot project. They plan to issue a full report on the e-scooter experiment and decide whether the electric rides can return to city streets and sidewalks.

Bird served branded water and cookies as well as vegetarian pizza to a crowd of a couple of dozen people gathered at the rally. They also brought helmets, since riding without a helmet — which is illegal — is often cited in complaints about scofflaw riders.

Local groups speaking in support of Bird and shared mobility in general were Forth Mobility and the Street Trust.

Jillian Detweiler, executive director of nonprofit the Street Trust ("a movement for people who choose to travel and experience the Portland region by biking, walking, or riding transit") said that the city bureau of transportation expected its final report in mid-January. The bureau would then open the topic for public comment.

Detweiler hoped the comment period would move quickly but be equitable. "I look forward to seeing e-scooters return to the streets of Portland as soon as possible," she said.

Sergio Lopez of Forth, told the crowd that he hoped the city would continue the e-scooter project to provide "shared mobility option."

"We need to ensure companies such as Bird can continue to provide Portlanders with these shared mobility options," he said. "Forth advocates for affordable, equitable and accessible shared mobile transportation options, particularly those that reach disadvantaged areas. As the pilot data is assessed, e-scooter ridership should be continued as a mobility option."

Olympia's senior manager of government partnerships at Bird, Joanie Deutsch, also called for the early return of the scooters — of all brands. Her speech was drowned out by chants of "No justice, no peace" from people nearby protesting something different.

"Portland needs continued, uninterrupted access to low-cost transportation options that help the city remedy its addiction to cars," Deutsch said. "We urge city officials to immediately return e-

scooters to the people of Portland, and once again make good on its promise of being a regional — if not national — leader in sustainable practices."

Arriving later, Jeanette Shaw of Forth said e-mobility was good for the environment and people who can't afford a car. "We believe, while the city is analyzing the data, why not have that pilot continue?"

Scooters are a small but visible part of the e-mobility ecosystem. Shaw lobbies for the electric vehicle industry in Salem and Olympia. She works on things like the electric vehicle rebate in Oregon and the Washington sales tax credit rebate that expired, and the electric vehicle tax credit at the federal level.

What if the PBOT report said the scooters were a bad idea for Portland? "I'd be surprised if it did, because anecdotally, we know from our members that they were incredibly popular." She said riders should abide by the rules, "but with safety mechanism in place it's a terrific mobility option."

The only option for stopping people from riding on the sidewalks would be ticketing. "But that will be for the e-bike community and the bike community to work with the city of Portland to come up with a solution that hopefully works for everybody," Shaw said.

The city's e-scooter pilot project lasted from July 25 to Nov. 20. It was the first study of the scooters done in autumn. PBOT spokesperson Dylan Rivera told the Business Tribune the agency would share some of their findings in January. "We expect that will kick off a period of public involvement and help with a potential pilot in 2019."

They are studying whether the scooters reduced the use of car and cut emissions and congestion, and how they were used in East Portland. PBOT insisted the companies drop several hundred scooters there every morning in the name of equity.

The immediate decision is whether to not allow the scooters back, or to have another pilot. Only after that could a decision be made about having them here longer term. "At this point we're not considering permanent rules, but eventually the second pilot could become permanent."

The companies would still have to reapply for their license to operate annually.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

In the crowd, Glenn Traeger, a retiree who studied environmental engineering and lives in Northwest Portland, was there to tell a representative of Bird that riders should stay off the sidewalk.

"I'm anti. I think it's been a failure," he said of the four-month test period. "A lot of trips are taken on the sidewalk, jeopardizing the safety of pedestrians. That's just not right."

He said Bird and the city of Portland should develop some kind of self-policing. He suggests that unless there is a program directed to assuring pedestrians that they can walk the sidewalks safe from being hit by e-scooter riders, Bird should not get a license to operate here.

What would that program look like? "Education would work for new riders," he said.

He thought the splash screen on the scooters should tell riders to wear a helmet and stick to the bike lanes, but a Bird employee informed him it already does. "The other issue is that when riders are downtown they won't follow the one-way streets, they use the sidewalks for the shortest distance." Traeger suggested that the public should be able to take photos of law breakers and send them in to Bird for reprimand and maybe a short ban. He suggested they add a license plate or number to the scooters for quick identification.

He also found it hard to walk his dog with scooters passing them on the sidewalk. "All I want them to do is follow the rules. Based on the survey, I'm in the zip code that has the most traffic. It got to the point that on nice days, when I left my apartment, I had to look both ways before I could enter the sidewalk, not knowing if someone was going to be scootering on the sidewalk."

He said he had moved about 20 scooters blocking sidewalks, but it was no big deal, since he already picks up trash.

"There's this conflict between pedestrians and scooters, and you have to make a choice and go with pedestrians."

He also thinks using the Internet of Things and GPS, keeping them out of the parks would be easy. "Take their license away for a month — just for a month — to reinforce it."

THE LAST MILE

Mobility companies are fighting over the last mile market and e-scooters have shown great promise for their ease of use. In July, 2018, rideshare company Uber invested in Bay Area-based electric scooter rental company Lime as part of a \$335 million round, including promoting Lime in its mobile app. Uber also bought the electric bike company JUMP for \$200 million to acquire the company in the spring.

Lyft has its own branded scooters in Arlington, Austin, Denver, Los Angeles, Santa Monica and Washington, D.C.

Willamette Week

Portland Businesses Among Those Targeted in National Bomb Threat Hoax

*By Katie Shepherd
December 14, 2018*

"At this time, there is nothing to indicate that the bomb threats are credible or that there is an immediate danger to the community," police say.

Portland police say they received reports of bomb threats that were sent to local business owners, adding the city to a long list of places impacted by a hoax deployed across the U.S.

"The nature of the threats included a demand for payment or an explosive device would be detonated as employees left work," a Portland police spokesman said Thursday afternoon in a press release.

McMinnville Police had offered more details Thursday morning, reporting multiple threats to blow up businesses and schools in that town. The threats demanded payment to an anonymous and likely untraceable Bitcoin address. The messages said "recruited persons" were watching the targeted buildings for police activity and warned the recipients not to call law enforcement for help.

Vancouver, Wash. also reported receiving similar threats.

"At this time, there is nothing to indicate that the bomb threats are credible or that there is an immediate danger to the community," the Portland Police Bureau said.

The anonymity of Bitcoin has draw criticism from law enforcement officials who say it could be used to commit crimes that are difficult to trace back to an individual. The technology allows people to transfer funds without leaving an electronic trail.

For the Ninth Time This Year, a Bear or Something Pooped in Portland's Water Supply

*By Elise Herron
December 13, 2018*

A spokesperson says rain can “increase the chances of Crypto moving from scat into water.”

As the new year approaches, it's time to reflect the numbers that defined 2018.

For instance, how many times did Portland Water Bureau find Cryptosporidium in the city's water source, likely from wildlife poop, in 2018? As of Monday, the number is nine.

A release from the agency today notes that two crypto oocysts were detected in a small sample of Bull Run reservoir water on Dec. 10. That's less than a month after the bureau's last crypto detection, on Nov. 19.

Felicia Heaton, a spokesperson with the water bureau, says it's tricky to say exactly what the source of the crypto contaminations were, but that "wildlife is the most likely source."

"Rain can increase the chances of crypto moving from scat into water but a detection can also occur in a dry season if an animal carrying the parasite deposits waste in or near the water," Heaton says.

Portland Water Bureau is currently working to install a filtration system by Sept. 2027 to comply with Oregon Health Authority guidelines. Heaton says the location of the new filtration plant was approved by Portland City Council yesterday.

Bull Run reservoir is unique in that it is completely sealed off from people and farming—save for one live-in ranger who monitors the watershed's security. That means bear poop is most commonly the cause of water contamination.

Cryptosporidium is a potentially disease-causing microorganism that can cause vomiting, diarrhea, fever and stomach pain if ingested. The water bureau says customers do not need to take any precautions in drinking tap water at this time.

Portland-Area Officials Seek to Fill a \$3.25 Million Gap in the Metro Housing Bond

*By Rachel Monahan
December 13, 2018*

That's the amount needed to serve the lowest income Multnomah County residents.

A \$653 million Metro housing bond cruised to victory in November, and faced flimsy opposition.

The bond's few foes lost badly in the election, and their key spokesman, Andy Duyck, former chairman of the Washington County Commission, made a habit of repeating racially charged remarks.

But Duyck did have one substantive critique of the bond: It wasn't going to solve homelessness.

In fact, the units of housing that are supposed to go to the lowest-income residents (1,600 of the 3,900 units) weren't actually fully funded in the bond.

"They could get the money to build all these units, but then have no way to fund folks to move into them or maintain them," said Joe Keizur, a former developer and former Hillsboro City Council President, in response to a question from WW in June. "I hate to say it but it reminds me of the Wapato Jail fiasco. They should have worked with the feds and the counties to find the money to support these units first."

That argument didn't prevail. But now city, county and Metro officials are looking for ways to fill the gap that was baked into the Metro bond—much as it was in the Portland housing bond, two years prior.

In Clackamas and Washington counties, similar funding gaps will be met with help from federal housing vouchers. But Portland has used all its vouchers to fill the gaps in the the Portland housing bond.

Metro officials say they knew they would need more money to use the bond to help the most vulnerable people in Portland.

There's a funding gap of \$3.25 million to cover 475 units for serving the lowest income bracket in Multnomah County: a family of four making less than \$24,420 a year or an individual making less than \$17,100.

That funding gap is one reason there's pressure on the city, the county and Metro to reach a deal on the Visitor Facilities Intergovernmental Agreement, which sets up how the three governments will spend hotel and rental car taxes collected across the county.

"We were certainly cognizant of the need to bring additional resources to bear to meet the commitments of the bond," says Metro government affairs and policy development director Andy Shaw.

The new agreement—which Portland City Council discussed Wednesday—would provide \$5.25 million annually for the Joint Office on Homeless Services, which may go to filling the gap.

There were questions last week about whether Multnomah County would agree to the deal that the county and metro had agreed to.

But those rifts appear healed: At the City Council hearing yesterday, Mayor Ted Ted Wheeler announced a tentative agreement with the county.

OPB

SimCity In Stumptown: Portland To Get Model Powered By Cellphone Data For Planning

*By Amelia Templeton
December 12, 2018*

For the first time, Portland's transportation planners could get access to the powerful insights companies glean from tracking the location, moment by moment, of millions of cellphone users.

On Wednesday, after little debate, the Portland City Council voted unanimously to approve an agreement between the Portland Bureau of Transportation, TriMet and the regional government Metro to pay for a pilot test of a powerful new program called Replica.

Replica is software tool developed by Sidewalk Labs, the city-building subsidiary of Alphabet, Google's parent company. Piloting it for a year will cost the three government agencies a total of \$457,300. After that, agencies can choose to buy a one-year subscription for 12 cents per resident.

The tool is powered by the vast trove of precise location data collected by smartphones and smartphone apps that allow programmers to track the movements of their users. Sidewalk Labs will remix that data with information from the U.S. Census to create what it calls a "synthetic" version of the Portland metro area, populated by 2.3 million virtual people.

It's SimCity, except the imaginary Sims are based on Portland's real demographics and thousands of daily trips to work, school, shopping and the doctor captured by residents' phones.

"It's a full representation: all households, all people, all modes of transportation, the entire street network that people use, the sidewalk network — but all the people are synthetic," said Nick Bowden, who leads the team developing Replica at Sidewalk Labs.

"It will be equivalent to how people move, but no single person could re-identify themselves in that web of movements."

Portland's transportation planners say the tool could dramatically improve their ability to understand and monitor how people use streets, sidewalks and transit.

"It is data that will augment, enhance, possibly replace PBOT's existing data collection efforts," said City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, casting her vote to fund the project. Eudaly oversees the transportation bureau.

PBOT officials say the data Sidewalk Labs works with is "fully anonymized" and that the government agencies involved in the pilot will only be able to see travel patterns and will never collect or maintain individualized data.

But they also acknowledge that they don't fully understand where Sidewalk Labs sources the mobile location data it uses in its model.

"Part of this entire effort is gaining a better understanding of how are they doing this, lining that up against our own citywide privacy standards, and making a comparison between the two," said Michael Kerr, manager of the Office of Strategy and Innovation with PBOT.

A Powerful New Model

Sidewalk Labs is best known for its effort to build, from scratch, a new neighborhood called Quayside on 12 acres of riverfront in Toronto.

The Replica software is a separate initiative. Portland is one of eight U.S. cities, including Chicago and Kansas City, selected to test the tool.

The company says many cities can't answer basic questions about how people use streets, sidewalks and public transit because their data isn't sufficient.

"Since around the early '50s, regional planning agencies and cities have used the same kind of travel modeling technique that most of them still use today," Bowden said. "They do a paper survey, typically; that's a small sample of the population. They ask them to kind of diary out their movements for a particular week."

Metro, for example, periodically conducts a travel behavior survey as part of its regional planning responsibilities. The most recent survey took place in 2011 and involved 6,450 households. The agency then extrapolated from that sample to model how people move around the region.

In addition, Portland collects some real-time data on how people travel the city using traffic cameras and loop detectors in the pavement that can count cars, bike sensors mounted on two of the city's bridges, and volunteer "hand-counts" of pedestrians.

Much of that data isn't gathered in a consistent, regular way.

Because its data is old or incomplete, simple questions are surprisingly difficult for PBOT to answer: How do Portlanders' driving and walking habits change in different seasons? At different times of the day?

By contrast, the data that powers the Replica model will be updated every three months. Kerr says getting fresh data multiple times a year could help planners with "seeing the before and after" of the investments the city makes in its streets.

"If we install a new crosswalk, are we seeing more people walking as a result of that investment than would have walked before?" he said.

Portland's population and housing costs have both skyrocketed in the past five years, pushing many people to the city's outskirts.

Kerr says if Replica's model works, it could help the city figure out how those displaced by the housing boom are commuting, and in turn make wiser decisions about where to invest in new public transit.

"What are their major forms of transportation?" he said. "And are there tremendous gaps in the level of service that they have available to them?"

Privacy Questions

Portland leaders agreed to take part in the Replica pilot quietly, after little public debate.

Eudaly placed the agreement on the Council's consent agenda last week, meaning commissioners would have voted on it without discussion first. A member of the public requested the item be pulled, and so PBOT staff gave a brief presentation about the project.

The Council voted to fund the pilot project just days after a New York Times investigation revealed the extent of the data harvesting effort from personal smartphones and questioned whether users understand how closely they are tracked and how their data is resold, often to advertisers.

“Location information can reveal some of the most intimate details of a person’s life,” U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, Oregon’s senior senator and a noted privacy advocate, told the Times. “It’s not right to have consumers kept in the dark about how their data is sold and shared and then leave them unable to do anything about it.”

Sidewalk Labs says Replica has been designed with privacy protections in mind, because the tool has been intentionally crafted to help public agencies that have been unable to use the datasets in the past, in part because of privacy problems.

“We believe pretty strongly that this data can be used in a privacy-sensitive way, first and foremost, and that the use of the data can have really great public good,” Bowden said.

Neither PBOT nor Metro officials have a complete understanding of where Sidewalk Labs obtains the mobile location data that it uses.

Documents filed with the City Council state the data comes from “Android Phones and Google apps,” but PBOT officials said the data might come from other sources too.

A Metro spokesman gave a vague answer as to where Sidewalk Labs sources its mobile location data but said Metro councilors expect more details before the deal is finalized.

“We expect to see full documentation of data collection sources before we sign a contract,” said Metro’s Nick Christensen.

Bowden said Sidewalk Labs works with different data providers, including telecommunications companies and companies that aggregate mobile location data from different apps.

“We only will receive data that has been entirely scraped of personal identifiable information,” he said.

A spokesman for Sidewalk Labs says Google is not a data source for Replica.

Bowden said Sidewalk Labs audits the companies that supply it with mobile location data and exclusively works with companies that give phone users a clear choice to opt out of the data collection.

“A big part of that checklist or audit that we go through is whether or not their sources of the data provides users with appropriate user consent,” he said.

Bowden says the company takes one other step to protect privacy: Any time one of the synthetic people populating the model has too unique of a travel pattern, that virtual person is removed from Replica.

Portland Bureau of Transportation officials say they believe Google follows a stringent standard when it comes to privacy protections.

The agency says that unlike the private companies that are mining cellphone location data in an effort to better tailor ads, PBOT isn’t trying to learn about individual households.

“We’re looking at this as a tool to make our roads safer, to make it more efficient,” said John Brady, PBOT’s spokesman. “For us, it’s all about trends and patterns.”