

The Oregonian

Portland Fire Chief Resigns, the Day After New Boss is Sworn In

*By Gordon Friedman
January 3, 2019*

Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers submitted his resignation Thursday, the day after his new boss, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, was sworn into office.

Myers' resignation comes amid his push to reimagine Portland Fire & Rescue from top to bottom, efforts that earned him respect and praise in City Hall. He left for a personal reason, to join his wife who has moved to the Oregon coast, he and Hardesty said.

The idea behind Myers' "Blueprint For Success" was to equip the city's 700 firefighters to respond effectively to health emergencies such as drug overdoses and mental health crises, given that such calls are much more common than summonses to put out fires.

Hardesty said in a statement that she is sad to lose Myers' "leadership and friendship."

"His vision for a vibrant city was exactly what we need and I am disappointed to not work on his plan together," the statement said.

Myers, 51, chose to leave to relocate to the beach town of Gearhart, where his wife lives, it said. He will begin a new job as the emergency manager for the city of Cannon Beach, 10 miles south of their coastal residence.

"I thank the employees of Portland Fire & Rescue for their hard work and support during my time here," Myers said in a statement. "I love the coast and my wife has already moved there and it is my strong desire to join her."

Mayor Ted Wheeler said in a statement that he asked Myers what the city could do to keep him but the chief's decision was firm.

"I completely respect that," Wheeler said in the statement, which also lauded Myers as "an outstanding and visionary leader."

Alan Ferschweiler, the president of Portland's firefighters union, said Myers' resignation "completely caught me off guard" and leaves him disappointed.

Myers is one of the better Portland fire chiefs in memory, Ferschweiler said, describing Myers as a man of integrity with a keen focus on details.

"He doesn't have an ego and he didn't care who get credit for work. He just tried to move the city forward," Ferschweiler said. "And he cared about the firefighters."

Before coming the Portland chief in 2016, Myers had retired from his job as the Las Vegas fire chief and took a job as fire chief in a small city in Missouri. He began his firefighting career in Las Vegas in 1986.

There were few if any signs of Myers' impending resignation.

Myers posed for photos with Hardesty on Wednesday after her swearing in at City Hall. On Thursday the Fire Bureau posted a photo of the chief and commissioner on Twitter, showing Hardesty wearing a fire helmet and Myers standing by her side with a smile and a thumb's up.

The photo was accompanied with the message “Welcome aboard, Commissioner Hardesty.”

Portland NAACP Joins Fight Over City’s Earthquake Warning Placards, Linking Them to Legacy of White Supremacy

*By Elliot Njus
January 3, 2019*

The Portland branch of the NAACP is jumping into a fight over a city policy that will require owners of brick buildings to post public warnings that the buildings could collapse in an earthquake.

The civil rights group said Thursday it would hold a rally Saturday on the steps of City Hall urging the city to drop the ordinance, which affects about 1,600 buildings throughout the city. Its leader said the policy, approved by the City Council in October, would reinforce gentrification in historically black segments of North and Northeast Portland.

The policy “exacerbates a long history of systemic and structural betrayals of trust and policies of displacement, demolition, and dispossession predicated on classism, racism, and white supremacy,” the Portland chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People said in a statement.

The signs were to go up in publicly owned buildings by Tuesday. If the ordinance remains in effect, most other buildings will be required to post the signs by March 1, but churches and nonprofit organizations would have two years to comply.

Leaders of predominantly black churches affected by the ordinance castigated the city in June as the City Council discussed requiring seismic upgrades over a 20-year timeline. Pastors said then that they had been left out of talks while the ordinance was drafted, and the NAACP said the black community was similarly were left out of the discussion over the placarding ordinance.

“It speaks to our houses of worship and everything about the black presence in the North-Northeast area,” said the Rev. E.D. Mondainé, president of the Portland NAACP chapter and a pastor at Celebration Tabernacle Church in North Portland. “As usual, the African American community is the first affected and the last informed.”

Other owners of brick and concrete buildings also have objected to the ordinance, saying it would drive away tenants and customers and make it harder to pay for upgrades in the long run.

The ordinance would require building owners to prominently post signs with the disclosure: “This is an unreinforced masonry building. Unreinforced masonry buildings may be unsafe in the event of a major earthquake.”

The same warning would be distributed to tenants of the buildings, and the owner must file a record of compliance among county property records.

The NAACP and other building owners have said the compliance record will make it difficult for building owners to secure loans, discouraging investment in the structures. Ultimately they would be forced to sell, the group argued, and the buildings would likely be demolished and redeveloped.

City officials say disclosures in property records aren't uncommon and that lenders are already aware of buildings that are vulnerable in a quake.

"It's really just a disclosure," said Alex Cousins, a spokesman for the city Bureau of Development Services. "That's the purpose behind it."

Separately, a group of unreinforced masonry building owners sued the city last month seeking to block the ordinance from taking effect.

MusicPortland, a coalition of music venues, said it would join the NAACP in its rally Saturday. The group posted a list of more than 30 venues it said were threatened by the ordinance.

Portland Traffic Fatalities Drop 'Significantly,' While State Deaths Rise

*By Andrew Theen
By January 3, 2019*

Traffic crashes killed 34 people on Portland streets in 2018, a significant decline from the past two years but a grim statistic in line with the average death toll over the past decade, transportation officials said this week.

Motorcyclists accounted for more than a quarter of Portland's fatalities and more than half of those killed while riding in or on a vehicle in the city. Jimmie Luff, a 48-year-old Tacoma man, became the ninth motorcyclist to die in Portland and the city's last 2018 road fatality when he fell off his motorcycle Saturday on Interstate 205 in Northeast Portland after rear-ending a car. He died a few days later.

The traffic deaths – which include motorists, pedestrians and cyclists who died within 30 days of the crash and were not known suicides – were down from 45 fatalities in 2017 and 44 in the previous year. But the numbers remain stubbornly consistent with the 20-year average, which is 36 traffic deaths.

Traffic fatalities once again outpaced the number of homicides in the city – 33 – and come as the city continues to reengineer city streets and lower speed limits on neighborhood streets and major arterials in an attempt eliminate traffic fatalities through its 2016-adopted Vision Zero campaign.

"It's wonderful to see these numbers go down this significantly," said Dylan Rivera, Portland Bureau of Transportation spokesman, "but 34 is too many."

Outer Division Street is one of the most dangerous streets in the city (Andrew Theen/Staff)

Portland plans major changes to outer Division Street in 2019, one of the most dangerous streets in the city. Those changes include a raised center median, more pedestrian crossings and better lighting. More changes are coming to Marine Drive as well, where the city has changed speed limits and increased law enforcement.

Rivera said the city will release its annual Vision Zero report in the next two months and will expand on the factors leading to the fatalities citywide.

"One year does not indicate a trend," he said. "It's too early to know if this is some sort of a trend that will continue. We want to look at national figures and state figures to have additional context."

Portland's report will also cite four additional fatalities essentially on Portland streets: a suicide, a death occurring more than 30 days after a crash, a medical incident leading to a fatal crash and a death deemed on the Gresham side of 162nd Avenue and Halsey.

Portland's decrease comes as the number of people dying on Oregon roads and freeways overall rose year over year. According to preliminary state figures, 463 people died statewide, up from 439 in 2017.

Shelley Snow, a state transportation spokeswoman, cautioned that the data are not official, and those figures likely wouldn't be available until the fall. The state continues to see cars leaving their travel lanes through distracted driving, drowsiness or drug and alcohol as the main causes.

The number of motorcyclists to die in particular pushed skyward, with 77 motorcyclists dying in 2018 on state roads compared with 54 the previous year.

The number of people seriously injured in state or Portland area crashes is not yet available for 2017. Those figures typically lag roughly a year behind.

Here's a closer look at the Portland deaths in recent years (Source: PBOT):

2018:

Pedestrians: 16
Cyclists: 2
Motorists: 16
Total: 34

2017:

Pedestrians: 19
Cyclists: 2
Motorists: 24
Total: 45

2016:

Pedestrians: 13
Cyclists: 5
Motorists: 26
Total: 44

2015:

Pedestrians: 11
Cyclists: 2
Motorists: 24
Total: 37

2014:

Pedestrians: 15
Cyclists: 1
Motorists: 12
Total: 28

The Portland Tribune

Portland Fire Chief Resigns

*By Jim Redden
January 3, 2019*

Mike Myers announces he is taking a job on the Oregon coast the day after new Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty takes over Portland Fire & Rescue.

Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers resigned Thursday, the day after Mayor Ted Wheeler assigned the bureau to new City Council member Jo Ann Hardesty.

According to a statement from Portland Fire & Rescue, Myers said his resignation was a personal decision because he wanted to move to the Oregon coast, where he has a new job.

"I love the coast and my wife has already moved there and it is my strong desire to join her," Myers said in the statement.

Myers' resignation came a day after Hardesty replaced former Commissioner Dan Saltzman as Fire Commissioner. Saltzman told the Portland Tribune he was especially proud to appoint Myers as chief because the two of them agreed Portland fire stations should be transformed into neighborhood health centers.

Myers joined the Portland fire bureau in July 2016. He said he will be taking a position as the emergency manager for the City of Cannon Beach.

"I have every faith that the leadership of Portland Fire & Rescue will continue to serve the city of Portland at the highest level," said Myers. "My only regret is that I was very excited to work with Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty and her team."

Hardesty said Myers told her in person about his plans to resign.

"I am personally so sad to lose his leadership and friendship," Hardesty said. "His vision for a vibrant city was exactly what we need, and I am disappointed to not work on his plan together."

Myers had previously presented Hardesty with a helmet to wear to PF&R responses.

Mayor Ted Wheeler was also disappointed about Myers' departure.

"Chief Myers was an outstanding and visionary leader for Portland Fire and Rescue. This departure is a loss for our community. When I learned of the news, I asked him what we could do to get him to stay but ultimately he made this decision for his family, and I completely respect that. I wish him nothing but the best in the years ahead. The City is better because of Chief Myers, and I am confident that his positive legacy will continue at the Oregon Coast," Wheeler said in a statement,

An interim chief has not yet been named.

Willamette Week

Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers Is Leaving, Three Days After the Commissioner Who Recruited Him Left Office

*By Rachel Monahan
January 3, 2019*

The well-regarded fire chief to depart.

Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers gave his resignation notice today.

Myers, who was hired in June 2016 by then-City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, is a well-regarded bureau director, known as an innovator. Myers was recruited to the city after a 26-year-long career in Las Vegas.

His announcement comes three days after Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty replaced Saltzman.

Hardesty says Myers offered the reason that he's leaving as a move to Gearhart, Ore.

"Today Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers visited me with the sad news he will be leaving Portland," says Hardesty in a statement. "I am personally so sad to lose his leadership and friendship. His vision for a vibrant city was exactly what we need, and I am disappointed to not work on his plan together. Chief Myers will be joining his wife in Gearhart where they have relocated."

The Portland Mercury

Portland's Fire Chief Unexpectedly Resigns On His Boss' Second Day of Work

*By Alex Zielinski
January 3, 2019*

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's ascension to the Portland City Council puts her in charge of Portland Fire and Rescue, along with three other emergency-related bureaus. After being sworn in at Portland City Hall Wednesday morning, Hardesty pointedly addressed how excited she is to work with Portland Fire Chief Mike Myers.

"Where's my fire chief?" asked Hardesty, scanning the packed city council chambers. After finding Myers standing in the back corner, she clasped her hands together and said, "Thank you so much for being here. I look forward to what we're going to be able to do together."

Less than 24 hours later, Myers resigned.

According to Hardesty's Chief of Staff Karly Edwards, Myers submitted his resignation this morning. He plans on moving to Gearhart, a small town on the Oregon coast. Myers has served as the fire chief since 2016.

"I am personally so sad to lose [Myers'] leadership and friendship," Hardesty said in a statement emailed to the Mercury. "His vision for a vibrant city was exactly what we need and I am disappointed to not work on his plan together. I look forward to working with my colleagues to recruit and retain leaders moving forward and make the City of Portland an employer of choice."

It's unclear if this decision was cemented before Hardesty's swearing-in, or if any other commissioners were aware of it. It's also not clear if Myers' resignation is at all related to Hardesty taking the reins. Portland Fire and Rescue has not yet responded to the Mercury's request for comment.

Portland Public School Students Rally Against Plan to Increase Cops on Campus

*By Blair Stenvick
January 3, 2019*

Wednesday morning was police reform activist Jo Ann Hardesty's first day on Portland City Council. But, as Hardesty was being sworn in inside Portland City Hall, a group of Portland Public Schools (PPS) students gathered outside to draw attention to a cause that Hardesty campaigned on: Police reform.

The students met on the steps of city hall to reject a tentative agreement PPS has made to pay the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) to hire more School Resource Officers (SROs)—sworn officers who have long-term assignments with a public school district—to police PPS campuses. Portland City Council is slated to vote on the agreement sometime in February.

As the Oregonian reported when the PPS Board voted on the agreement last month, PPB already sends nine sworn officers to serve PPS schools three days a week at no charge to the district.

Under the new agreement, PPS will pay the bureau about \$1.2 million a year for the nine dedicated SROs that will serve the district five days a week, as well as two sergeants. The five-year agreement came about because PPB says it cannot afford to continue lending SROs without compensation.

Students from numerous PPS schools are calling on the council to reject it, citing a range of concerns about making armed police officers a permanent fixture at their schools—and spending PPS dollars to make that happen.

“Having armed police officers in schools can lead to a hostile and unsafe environment for some students,” said members of the student group, called PPS Student Voices, at the Wednesday rally. “With at least two fatal shootings by Portland police in the past seven months (Jason Washington and Patrick Kimmons) ... Portland police have proven to pose threats of danger, particularly towards people of color and people with disabilities. Stationing police officers in schools will further contribute to an environment of fear and distrust.”

In a statement read at the Wednesday rally, the students cite a recent ACLU study that found that 26 percent of K-12 students that were referred to law enforcement nationally are kids with special needs, despite special needs students only making up 14 percent of the national school population. The ACLU argued that the routine policing of schools is a harmful practice and that “police should enter schools only to address threats to physical safety.”

PPS Student Voices also identified alternative ways PPS could spend the money—\$6 million total—it plans to pay PPB for the officers.

“The millions of dollars in question could be used towards repairing our schools, as many are still lead and asbestos contaminated,” the group said. “The money could go toward trauma-informed school counselors, and training staff in restorative justice.”

Commissioner Hardesty said she would have joined the rally in support if she hadn't been preoccupied with getting sworn in Wednesday morning.

“I don’t believe police belong in schools. When I was a child, school was a place where you could make mistakes that wouldn’t impact the rest of your life,” Hardesty said at a press conference Wednesday evening. “But today, when you have a police officer intervene because a kid’s not doing what a kid is supposed to be doing, that sends the wrong message.”

PPS Student Voices vows to keep putting pressure on the city council before a February vote. The group's next rally will coincide with a Martin Luther King Jr. Day rally happening at North Portland’s Peninsula Park on January 20.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Portland Clamps Down on Construction Emissions

*By Chuck Slothower
January 3, 2019*

Contractors are working to adjust to new rules requiring cleaner diesel equipment on sizable city of Portland construction projects.

The city’s rules are for its projects with values greater than \$1 million. The requirements are phased to take effect beginning Jan. 1, 2020, through Jan. 1, 2026.

Multnomah County and other local agencies have been involved in ongoing work on the rules and are expected to follow by adopting similar requirements.

Portland’s Clean Air Construction Procurement Standard, approved by the City Council in December, requires significant particulate matter emission reductions from older diesel engines. The rules apply to non-road diesel equipment with 25 horsepower or more, and road-going dump and cement trucks.

Diesel emissions contribute to soot and ground-level ozone, and are classified as a potential human carcinogen. Diesel emissions have been linked to lung conditions, autism and neurodegenerative disease, according to public health authorities.

In Portland, 65 percent of diesel emissions come from non-road equipment – mostly from the construction industry, according to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

North and Northeast Portland had particularly high levels of diesel particulates, according to the biennial Portland Air Toxics Study in 2017. Beaverton, Aloha and Hillsboro also fared poorly.

Yet for small contractors, upgrades to cleaner equipment may be an economic burden, some industry officials said.

“When you consider that about 80 percent of the contractors in Oregon are small businesses, it’s pretty easy to conclude that the impact would be substantial, if not devastating,” said Mike Salsgiver, executive director of the Associated General Contractors’ Oregon-Columbia chapter.

Contractors are in the process of conducting a survey of diesel equipment, Salsgiver said. “Our advice would be to await the outcome of that data,” he said.

The AGC chapter did not comment on the city’s diesel standard, Salsgiver said.

“We have not, frankly, been engaged in that process, and for that matter the city didn’t reach out to us,” he said.

AGC has been more engaged with policy development concerning diesel emissions at the state level than at the local level, Salsgiver said.

Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, the Port of Portland, Metro and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality have also been involved in the effort to reduce construction emissions. Multnomah County is expected to soon become the second jurisdiction to issue diesel rules.

Portland will house the program in the Office of Procurement Services.

“Portland has the highest volume of construction across the region,” said Kyle Diesner, climate action program coordinator for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. “In general, the city does the most construction work, so it made sense for our procurement office to house the program.”

A rule to limit idling will take effect first in Portland. Non-road diesel equipment must be shut off after it has been idling unused for five minutes. By Jan. 1, 2024, no pre-2007 engines will be allowed.

California has enacted a similar standard for 25 horsepower equipment. Portland originally proposed a 100-horsepower standard, but lowered it to meet California’s threshold to ensure the city doesn’t become a secondary market for older, dirtier equipment.

City officials also found a significant number of excavators fall below 100 horsepower, Diesner said.

“Research has shown it’s the earthmoving equipment that has the biggest impact in terms of diesel emissions,” he said.

The rules are likely to spark a round of spending by construction firms on pollution-control technology, new equipment or engine overhauls, or equipment that doesn’t burn diesel, such as electric or propane-powered equipment.

As the standard spreads throughout the Portland-metro region, the cleaner equipment will also be used on more private-sector projects, Diesner said.

“We think as contractors make these investments, they will be using this cleaner equipment on private-sector jobs,” he said.

The city is pursuing funding to help disadvantaged minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses upgrade their equipment to comply with the new rules. Some funding could come from Oregon’s portion of the Volkswagen emissions settlement – if approved by the Legislature – and from federal diesel emissions reduction grants.

OPB

Portland's Well-Regarded Fire Chief Announces Resignation

By Amelia Templeton

January 3, 2019

Portland's well-regarded fire chief, Mike Myers, announced his resignation Thursday.

Myers informed Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty of his decision in the morning. The day before, Myers had attended Hardesty's swearing-in celebration.

In an official statement, Myers said he was leaving to spend more time with his wife, who lives in Gearhart. Myers has taken a job as the emergency manager for the city of Cannon Beach.

"This is about my desire to be with my wife and keeping that priority above all," Myers said.

Two sources who've spoken with the chief said his resignation was not related to the transition in power between Hardesty and former Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who hired Myers in 2016.

Myers met repeatedly with Commissioner-elect Hardesty and her transition team in December, according to his public calendar.

"I think he was excited to work with Jo Ann, and from what my understanding is, Jo Ann was very much excited to work with this fire chief as well," said Alan Ferschweiler, president of the Portland Firefighters Association.

According to Ferschweiler and others, Myers has indicated that other factors contributed to the surprise resignation, including frustration over his lack of a contract with the city.

Portland's bureau directors generally do not have contracts and serve "at will." Eight bureau directors have retired or been forced to step down since Mayor Ted Wheeler took office two years ago.

"I had talked in City Hall about wanting to keep Chief Myers and had requested them to look at some sort of a contract or something to give him some job stability," Ferschweiler said.

"Unfortunately they weren't able to provide that for the fire chief."

Ferschweiler said the lack of a contract was one point of frustration for Myers, but he also ran into challenges working with the city attorney's office.

"The chief is a positive person. I do believe in his heart that he wants to be with his wife; he loves her very much. I do believe that," Ferschweiler said. "I also believe there were some internal frustrations he has had."

In a statement, Hardesty said she did not want to see Myers go.

"I am personally so sad to lose his leadership and friendship. His vision for a vibrant city was exactly what we need, and I am disappointed to not work on his plan together," Hardesty said in the statement. "I look forward to working with my colleagues to recruit and retain leaders moving forward and make the City of Portland an employer of choice."