

The Oregonian

Should E-Scooter Riders Be Required to Wear Helmets? Politicians to Hold Hearing

*By Andrew Theen
February 11, 2019*

A bill to make helmets optional for electric scooter riders will have a public hearing in Salem this week.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Sheri Schouten, D-Beaverton, goes before the Joint Committee on Transportation at 5 p.m. Wednesday.

Oregon's current law requires all electric or gas scooter users wear helmets, regardless of age. Scooters are regulated more stringently than Segways, which have no helmet requirement. State rules require bicyclists under the age of 16 to wear a helmet.

Schouten's bill, HB271, would regulate scooters like bikes. Scooter riders would only be required to wear a helmet if under the age of 16.

But in effect, the bill would make helmets optional for all scooter riders. State rules require scooter users to be at least 16 years old to ride, but the companies required customers be at least 18 to sign up. But it wasn't an uncommon sight in 2018 to see younger teens on the devices around Portland.

The legislation could effectively knee-cap the biggest complaint scooter detractors made to city hall last year. According to the Bureau of Transportation's report on the 2018 three-month trial period, the city received 1,754 complaints about riders not using helmets. That's the largest single point of scorn, followed next by users riding on sidewalks, with 1,622 complaints.

Transportation Department staff estimated that 90 percent of riders did not wear a helmet.

Lime, Bird and Skip, the three companies that operated in Portland in 2018, held helmet giveaways during the trial period to try and boost usage.

According to the city's report, the companies distributed 2,292 helmets to riders last year.

Dylan Rivera, a city transportation spokesman, said the agency would not take a position on the proposed helmet bill.

"We certainly encourage everyone to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, an e-bike or an e-scooter. So that might be a reason to support the current law," Rivera said in an email.

"On the other hand, we can understand how there could be value in having consistency between the laws for bicycles and e-scooters," Rivera continued. "Our citywide public opinion survey showed that Portlanders want us to use education rather than enforcement when it comes to e-scooters. And we generally agree that it's best to focus our limited enforcement resources on corridors where we have fatal and serious injury crashes," he said.

The city plans to start a second "pilot program" sometime this spring, this time approving scooters for 12 months. A specific start date has not been released.

The Portland Tribune

Get Involved: Terrorism Task Force Vote Set

By Jim Redden

February 12, 2019

Plus, the City Council approves a controversial police settlement denounces white supremacy and alt-right groups.

The issue: The City Council will vote Wednesday, Feb. 13, on whether to withdraw or remain in the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

The context: The task force blends city police resources with those of state and federal law enforcement agencies. Some city leaders have supported being in the task force to deter criminal or terrorist acts and to keep watch over federal law enforcement officials who have been accused of trampling on civil rights.

Others oppose being in the task force because they don't trust the FBI. The most high-profile case was the federal conviction of a Somali-American student who attempted to set off a car bomb at a Christmas tree lighting at Pioneer Courthouse Square, where he was working with FBI informants.

The impact: A resolution to withdraw from the JTTF was submitted by Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty. During her 2018 council campaign, Hardesty said she had three votes to pull the city out of the task force. She apparently meant that commissioners Chloe Eudaly and Amanda Fritz agreed with her, although Eudaly has not taken a public stand. Mayor Ted Wheeler wants Portland to stay in and has introduced his resolution reaffirming the city's participation.

The hearing is likely to be long and emotional. The Council Chambers have been packed in the past when the council voted to join, withdraw and then rejoin the task force.

Why you should care: This is a local issue with international implications. You can make sure your voice gets heard.

Wheeler oversees the Portland Police Bureau and its interactions with federal agencies. Contact him at mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov or 503-823-4120. Commissioner Hardesty is leading the fight against being in the task force: joann@portlandoregon.gov, or 503-823-4151. The council will discuss it at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday in a work session.

Want to testify? The hearing is at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 13, in the Council Chambers, second floor, 1221 S.W. Fourth Ave. It could get crowded; plan to arrive early.

Where do you stand? Go to PortlandTribune.com, scroll to the bottom, and click on Letters to the Editor.

Police settlement approved

The City Council approved a controversial \$100,000-plus settlement with a Portland police sergeant who was fired for making racial comments. Hardesty was the only council member to vote against the settlement, although other members deplored the police contract-mandated arbitration process that led to it.

Gregg Lewis was fired Feb. 2, 2018, after reportedly making comments about killing black people during a 2017 roll call. Details of his remarks differed among officers who filed

complaints. The Portland Police Association challenged the firing, putting it into the arbitration process. The City Attorney's Office recommended the council approve the settlement.

White supremacy denounced

The City Council last Thursday unanimously passed a resolution denouncing white supremacy and alt-right political groups. The resolution also acknowledged Portland's history of discrimination against minorities and called for training city employees to identify and fight racism.

Fritz: Non-Religious Rights Should be Protected

By Jim Redden

February 11, 2019

The City Council will consider an ordinance from the commissioner on Feb. 13 and is expected to vote on it two weeks later.

The City Council will consider amending the city's Civil Rights Code to clarify that the rights of those with with a non-religion — such as atheism, agnosticism, or lack of belief in God or Gods — are also protected.

The ordinance was submitted by Commissioner Amanda Fritz at the request of Cheryl Kolbe, President of Freedom From Religion Portland Chapter.

"This change says that Portland chooses to make certain that non-believers receive the same protection from discrimination as those in any form of religion," Kolbe said in a Tuesday press release from Fritz's office. "This is very affirming for those of us who are atheist, agnostic or any other form of non-belief. It is the right thing to do."

State law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on non-religion, and courts have a mixed record on whether non-religion should receive the same protections as religious beliefs.

The vote on the ordinance is expected to occur on February 27th, 2019

According to the release, prejudice towards atheists, along with other non-religious individuals exists in the United States. Polls consistently show that many Americans do not trust and would not elect an atheist as President, nor believe they should have the opportunity to teach in public school.

"Portland has a large percentage of residents who identify as religiously unaffiliated," Fritz said. "We need to make these changes to our Civil Rights Code to remove discriminatory barriers, so they may participate equally in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the City."

In crafting the ordinance and code changes, Fritz's office worked with the City Attorney's Office, American Civil Liberties Union, Freedom From Religion, the Human Rights Commission, the Office of Equity and Human Rights, and City equity managers, the release said.

"I thank Ms. Kolbe for bringing this issue to my attention and those who weighed in on the Code changes," says Commissioner Fritz. "It is an important conversation, informed by people with many perspectives. Freedom of religion includes freedom not to affiliate with a religious belief. This Resolution clarifies that fact."

Madison, Wisconsin passed similar legislation in 2015, the release said.

Sewer Pipe Sinkhole Stops Traffic in Downtown Portland

*By Zane Sparling
February 11, 2019*

The six-foot-deep chasm was first reported Friday, Feb. 8 on Salmon Street between 5th, 6th avenues.

Downtown Portland is divided.

No — it's not the chasm between left and right, Beaver and Duck, or any of the city's other frequently warring factions.

It's a literal sinkhole, and officials say the cavernous void will continue to shutter one lane of traffic on Southwest Salmon Street between 5th and 6th avenues through Tuesday evening.

Water Bureau crews discovered the gaping abyss Friday, Feb. 8 while responding to a leak in a fire-prevention pipe for Fogo de Chão Brazilian Steakhouse. That led workers to discover a damaged sewer pipe and the sinkhole.

"In the course of cutting through the asphalt, they discovered what was underneath," explained Diane Dulken, spokeswoman for the Bureau of Environmental Services, which is coordinating the reconstruction efforts.

"When we discover a cavity, it's usually because we're doing repair work, and in the course of disturbing the asphalt we may discover a hole where there should be ground," she continued.

In this case, the hole isn't disrupting TriMet bus routes, though the barricades surrounding the six-foot-deep pit leave only one lane left open for vehicle and bicycle traffic.

Dulken says the total dimensions of the hole are about 10 yards square, though only parts of that are visible from the street. Both pipes are now in working order, and the absence has been filled with dirt and rocks. But the job won't be finished until crews repave the road.

"Crews coordinated across bureaus to respond quickly to get repairs done through the weekend, both night and day," Dulken said. "It's pretty straightforward."

The cause of the sinkhole remains under investigation.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Portland's Form of Government Needs a Makeover

*By Alex Zielinski
February 11, 2019*

Portland has spent the last few years attempting to atone for a litany of past decisions that were made to systematically keep minority communities from achieving success. From creating an affordable housing program that helps people return to neighborhoods their families were gentrified out of to signing a document acknowledging the city's racist past, Portland City Council has taken considerable steps toward addressing the city's discriminatory policies.

But that seemingly earnest dedication to improving equity in Portland is toothless without first dismantling the one structure that keeps Portland's biased policymaking in place: The city's archaic form of government.

At least, that's what a group of researchers argue in a recent report for Portland City Club. I'm here for it.

The city adopted its current "commission" form of government in 1913, when African American Oregonians were still banned from owning property or voting and made up an estimated .5 percent of Portland's 200,000 residents. Now, 6.3 percent of the city's 639,000 residents are Black.

Under the city's commission form of government, Portlanders are represented by five commissioners, including the mayor, each of whom comes up with city policies and manages one of the city's bureaus. Unlike our state or federal government, these commissioners do not represent a specific district within the city where they're required to live, know, and speak for at city council meetings. But instead of electing commissioners from specific districts, Portland holds at-large elections—where the victors are those who collected the most citywide votes.

Convincing an entire city to elect any one candidate requires money, time, and powerful friends—which is why the vast majority of those elected to Portland City Council are well-connected white men who live in the city's richest communities. (In city council's 105-year history, only three people of color and nine women have been elected.) That's left many Portlanders feeling ignored by commissioners who can't understand what it feels like to be evicted, or threatened with a racist slur, or denied an opportunity based on your gender identity, or forced to live in a neighborhood without paved roads, sidewalks, or reliable public transportation.

Meanwhile, Portland continues to work really well for the people who look the same as the folks on city council.

Most US cities scrapped the commission form of government in the 1960s, when federal courts ruled that at-large voting led to systemic underrepresentation of racial minorities. Portland apparently missed the memo; we remain the only city with a population above 100,000 that still relies on the commission system.

The City Club's report suggests Portland finally move on to a "council-manager" form of government, where elected officials are solely responsible for policymaking while an appointed, nonpartisan city manager takes over the administrative work that comes with running city bureaus. This would fix the distracting "turf wars" that play out between commissioners who prioritize their bureaus' needs before the city's greater needs.

The report, which calls for district-based elections, also suggests the city expand its council to at least 8 commissioners in an attempt to better represent Portland's ballooning population. The city will have a chance to take up these suggestions in 2021, when Portland will review its charter, the document that defines its form of government.

Mayor Ted Wheeler, who regularly laments the fact he's both Portland's police commissioner and mayor, supports doing away with the city's commission model, as do many advocates for campaign finance reform and civil rights. Those who favor the current system, including commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz, have used the 2018 election of Jo Ann Hardesty—the first Black woman elected to Portland City Council—as proof that the structure is not inherently racist.

But that argument insults the hard work of Portland's underrepresented communities. It's unlikely that Hardesty would be sitting at the council dais if she hadn't already been a state legislator, led the city's NAACP chapter, and was a well-known leader in Portland's activist community. As we've seen in both private and public sectors, women of color are forced to work infinitely harder than white men to achieve comparable success, and it's no different in ostensibly progressive Portland.

Yes, it's fantastic that our city elected a Black woman, and that it now has majority-female council—but that's despite Portland's form of government, not because of it. Upending Portland's current government will be messy, challenging, and unpredictable. But merely maintaining the status quo will keep the city from living up to its full potential, allowing Portland to remain “the city that works” for a privileged few.

Atheists and Non-Believers Could Soon Receive Civil Rights Protections Under Portland Law

*By Blair Stenvick
February 11, 2019*

Protections for atheists and agnostics might soon be written into Portland city code.

This Wednesday, the Portland City Council will hold a hearing about an ordinance that would add “non-religion”—atheism, agnosticism, and general lack of belief—to the list of protected classes in the city's civil rights code.

“Portland has a large percentage of residents who identify as religiously unaffiliated,” said Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who will introduce the ordinance Wednesday, in a press release. “We need to make these changes to our Civil Rights Code to remove discriminatory barriers, so they may participate equally in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the City.”

The city code already protects those who ascribe to different faiths from discrimination—religion is a protected class, like gender, race, and national origin, meaning that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on those grounds. This ordinance would extend those protections to those who do not believe in a god, multiple gods, or religion.

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, Portland was the most non-religious city in America in 2015, with 42 percent of residents identifying as religiously unaffiliated. Just as different religious minorities can face discrimination when applying for a job, looking for a place to live, or attempting to patronize a business, religiously unaffiliated people can experience prejudice as well. A recent Pew Research Center survey found that Americans continue to hold unfavorable views toward atheists, though that trend is improving.

“This change says that Portland chooses to make certain that non-believers receive the same protection from discrimination as those in any form of religion,” said Cheryl Kolbe, president of Portland's chapter of Freedom from Religion, a group for nonbelievers, in a press release. “This is very affirming for those of us who are atheist, agnostic or any other form of non-belief.”

Fritz chose to introduce this ordinance after being approached by Kolbe last year. Her office also worked with the ACLU of Oregon and the city's Human Rights Commission to draft it.

The ordinance is expected to go to a vote on Feb 27. If it passes, Portland will join the city of Madison, Wisconsin, which became the first city in the nation to write protections for non-believers into city law in 2015.

According to local news reports, the move didn't face much pushback in Madison. It remains to be seen if the same will hold true for Portland.

The Skanner

PCRI & Soul District Community to Celebrate Land Acknowledgement and Groundbreaking Ceremony of King Parks Affordable Housing Development

February 11, 2019

On Friday, February 15th at 11am, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives Inc., (PCRI) invites the media and community stakeholders to join in the celebration to begin the construction of King + Parks, a 70 unit affordable housing development being built at the corner of NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and Rosa Parks Way.

The event will feature a Land Acknowledgement ceremony in honor of the indigenous Native Tribes of this land, and the historic African American settlers, both communities which experienced traumatic displacement. The ceremony will also pay tribute to the fearless freedom fighters, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, whose names adorn the intersecting streets of the development.

King + Parks is part of a series of developments which were greenlighted through PCRI's innovative Pathway 1000, a displacement mitigation strategy designed by PCRI as a "Right To Return" initiative for the displaced residents that primarily consisted of the African American community, indigenous populations, and other long-term residents.

At the behest of the Portland Housing Bureau and Commissioner Dan Saltzman who selected the team to develop the site, PCRI and partners, Colas Construction and Merryman Barnes Architects, are moving full-steam ahead with construction in an ongoing effort to address Portland's history of urban renewal and other actions by City government in North and Northeast Portland that have systematically marginalized and displaced many longtime residents of that community. Utilizing Portland Housing Bureau (PHB) N/NE Preference Policy, PCRI's Pathway 1000 plan prioritizes families and individuals with generational ties to N/NE Portland for new affordable housing opportunities in the area and gives opportunities to housing applications from current or former residents of those areas and their descendants.

The first successful implementation of the plan resulted in the construction of the Beatrice Morrow Cannady Apartment Complex located on NE MLK last year. The building's namesake, civil rights worker Beatrice Morrow Cannady (1889-1974), was renowned as a tireless advocate for the Black community, the first African-American woman to practice law in Oregon and a distinguished chair of the Portland NAACP's committee on legal redress

The King Parks complex promises to be another jewel in the community and a victory in the struggle for affordable housing opportunities in Portland.

"King Parks is another step in the right direction that seeks to correct the housing issues caused by income disparities in the city of Portland and State of Oregon. Beyond the brick and mortar development, this project, implemented through the Pathway 1000 strategy, also addresses unemployment, under employment, wage disparities and the inequitable treatment that lead to these noted disparate outcomes which hit-low income and communities of color especially hard."