

The Oregonian

Portland's New Parks Director Gets Big Raise Amid Budget Cuts

*By Gordon Friedman
March 8, 2019*

As Portland's parks bureau prepares to lay off employees and pare back services to close a \$6.3 million budget gap, Commissioner-in-charge Nick Fish has awarded the new parks director a salary \$29,000 higher than the last parks director's.

Adena Long, who started as Portland Parks & Recreation director last month, is earning \$215,000 plus benefits in her new job. She made \$182,261 in her prior position as a commissioner with the New York City parks department, said that agency's spokeswoman, Crystal Howard. Long had been employed at the Big Apple's parks department since 1997, where she worked her way up from park ranger to senior management.

In Portland, Long is earning substantially more than the prior parks director, Mike Abbate. After seven years in the role, he was making \$186,000 when then-Parks Commissioner Amanda Fritz forced his resignation in May 2018.

Long's Portland job classification, created under a major compensation reorganization last year, allows wide latitude for her annual pay: \$147,000-\$235,000.

Sonia Schmanski, Fish's chief of staff, said Long's salary "was set in accordance with the city's pay equity policy and recognizes both her credentials and the size and complexity of her bureau."

It's unclear how Long's salary compares to that of other bureau directors. Serilda Summers-McGee, the city human resources director, didn't provide a list of director salaries requested by The Oregonian/OregonLive Tuesday.

But it's not uncommon for directors of large bureaus like Parks & Rec. to be paid near the top of their salary range. Base pay for the prior fire chief, Mike Myers, was \$180,000. Police Chief Danielle Outlaw's starting pay was \$225,750, with a base of \$215,000 plus a 5 percent bonus for living inside city limits.

Meanwhile, Fish's Parks Bureau is preparing for program and staffing cuts to bring expenditures in line with anticipated revenues. He told The Oregonian/OregonLive last month that doing so would be a "painful exercise."

A slideshow presented to the bureau's budget advisory committee Wednesday proposed laying off 50 employees, closing the Sellwood Community Center and cutting back programming across the city.

Parks officials say the gap is caused by growing personnel costs and flat revenues from fees for park services.

"The problem is structural and will only continue to grow larger every year," said parks spokesman Mark Ross.

"Our goal is to put the bureau on solid financial footing while continuing to deliver the high-quality services our community expects," Ross said. "To fix the problem, we will need to change our business model and streamline the programs and services we offer."

Wildwood Trail Segment Will Be Closed Through the Summer

*By Jamie Hale
March 11, 2019*

A segment of the Wildwood Trail will be closed to hikers this spring and summer, as crews work to construct a safer crossing over a busy road.

Portland's iconic hiking trail runs roughly 30 miles through Forest Park, past Pittock Mansion and into Washington Park, where it begins near the Vietnam Veterans of Oregon Memorial. It's considered one of the longest urban hiking trails in the country.

But three miles from its start, at the edge of Washington Park, the trail makes a potentially dangerous crossing at a curve on West Burnside Road. That will be the site of the new Barbara Walker Crossing, which will offer hikers safe passage via a steel footbridge over the road.

Construction of the bridge will shut down a small segment of the Wildwood Trail between March and September, 2019, and will also cause lane closures on West Burnside Road, including one to two days of full closure in late August or early September.

An estimated 80,000 pedestrians use the crossing every year, according to the Portland Parks Foundation, and about 20,000 drivers pass by each day.

The Portland Parks Foundation is leading the project, working with Portland Parks & Recreation, the Portland Bureau of Transportation and Metro.

The nonprofit foundation raised two-thirds of the bridge's \$3.2 million cost, it announced in a news release, receiving contributions from more than 900 individuals as well as local philanthropic foundations. The city of Portland paid \$850,000 toward the project, while Metro chipped in \$200,000.

The crossing is named in honor of local parks champion Barbara Walker, who had a hand in most of Portland's biggest parks projects, including Waterfront Park and Pioneer Courthouse Square. Her advocacy started in 1968, when she and a group of neighbors helped save a wooded ravine from development, preserving it as Marquam Nature Park. Walker died in 2014.

The Portland Tribune

5G Health Risks to be Considered by City Council

*By Jim Redden
March 10, 2019*

Resolution up for a vote Wednesday calls for more study into previous findings that future technology could increase cancer and other risks in almost everyone in Portland.

The City Council will consider requesting additional federal studies of the potential harmful health impacts of 5G wireless communication technologies on Wednesday.

The resolution introduced by Mayor Ted Wheeler and Commissioner Chloe Eudaly says some studies have suggested 5G technology could increase cancers in those exposed to it — which would be almost everyone in cities because of the large number of closely spaced "small-cell" antennas required.

"There is evidence to suggest that exposure to radio frequency emissions generated by wireless technologies could contribute to adverse health conditions such as cancer. Wireless companies in the U.S. say they'll have to install about 300,000 new antennas, close to the total number of cell towers built over the past three decades. This substantial increase in cell towers deployed in communities means greater contact with them," reads the resolution to be considered March 13.

Wheeler has spoken out against federal restrictions against cities regulating such technologies. He recently protested a Federal Communications Commission order filed in August requiring cities to accept all applications from telecommunications firms to build new wireless and broadband infrastructure.

Speaking at the U.S. Conference of Mayors winter meeting in Washington DC in late January, Wheeler said, "We need every single mayor who cares about this issue — local control of local assets — to sign on with this. The more the better, obviously."

5G will significantly increase wireless communication capacity and is considered necessary for self-driving vehicles and other advanced technologies. But, according to the resolution, it will greatly increase the human exposure to radio frequency (RF), electromagnetic fields from wireless facilities.

Although the FCC has adopted RF guidelines, the resolution says no federally-mandated RF exposure standards exist, despite studies suggesting that harm to people may occur. In addition, federal law prevents cities from adopting their own restrictions.

"(F)ederal law preempts state and local governments, including the City of Portland, from considering health concerns in the regulation and placement of wireless facilities, so long as such facilities otherwise comply with applicable federal law," the resolution notes.

Despite that, according to the resolution, "in September 2017, 180 scientists and doctors from 36 countries sent an appeal to the European Commission recommending a moratorium on the roll-out of 5G until potential hazards for human health and the environment had been fully investigated by scientists independent from industry."

Although Portland is so far working with companies installing 5G technology, the resolution says, "we are requesting the FCC and other relevant federal agencies to revisit and update studies on potential health concerns arising from radio frequency wireless emissions considering 5G technology. Findings from these studies need to be publicly available."

You can read a previous Business Tribune story on the issue [here](#).

You can read the resolution [here](#).

Portland's \$5.5M Project Preps Gateway for Street Fairs

By Zane Sparling

March 8, 2019

Bureau of Transportation says Halsey-Weidler Streetscape Project readies area for bikers, walkers.

Fêtes and festivals will find a new home in the city's Gateway neighborhood after major work wraps on the Halsey-Weidler Streetscape Project later this year, officials say.

The \$5.5 million place-making investment adds a new "festival street" for community events and a public plaza leading to the area's business district, plus protected bike lanes, pedestrian crossing signals, street lighting and other improvements along a 10-block stretch.

Nidal Kahl, president of the Gateway Area Business Association, praised several city bureaus for spurring "economic development that drives Portland's reputation for unique, local eco-friendly enterprise."

"The new streetscape is yet another win for East Portland and Gateway," he said.

Prosper Portland, the city's development agency, and the Portland Bureau of Transportation partnered to fund the streetscape improvements, which are located east of Interstate 205 along Northeast Halsey and Weidler streets between 102 and 112th avenues.

Planners tapped urban renewal money, Bureau of Environmental Services percent for green fees, gas tax and system development charges for the \$5,564,700-project that is expected to be completed in May, with plantings and other touch-ups to occur in the summer. Here are the highlights:

- A two-block chunk of 103rd Avenue between Halsey and Clackamas streets will be transformed into a festival-friendly area with street trees, outdoor seating and space to add or remove traffic-blocking bollards during community events.
- An East Entry Triangle plaza at 112th Avenue will welcome visitors to the Halsey-Weidler business district with leafy street trees, unique lamp posts, new rainwater facilities and solar panels.
- Bus stop stations and pedestrian refuge islands will be constructed at key intersections.
- Protected bike lanes will be added along Halsey and Weidler, and green-striped bike crossings will be painted in as well. On-street parking will still be permitted.
- New curb extensions, compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, as well as scaled street lighting will be installed at every intersection. Pedestrian crossings at 112 and 106th avenues will be signalized with flashing beacons.
- Northeast Halsey Street will be repaved between 102 and 112th avenues.

Officials say the streetscape revitalization is not the only coming change for area residents. Other looming projects expected within a year include the East Glisan Street Update (as well as an I-205 overcrossing improvement on Glisan), safety enhancement on Northeast 102nd Avenue, the East Portland Access to Transit project and a Neighborhood Greenway along Holladay, Oregon, and Pacific streets.

Noted transportation bureau interim director Chris Warner: "The improvements coming to the neighborhood will make it easier for everyone to safely walk, bike, drive and take transit to local businesses, parks and schools."

Willamette Week

Portland Mayor Says He's "Very Disappointed" by the Delay in Earthquake-Risk Warnings on Unreinforced Masonry Buildings

By Rachel Monahan

March 8, 2019

"We have three commissioners, it does not include me, they will go out to the community and they will come back to City Council in a year, year and a half. I'm going to hold them to that."

In an interview Thursday on Oregon Public Broadcasting, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said he was "very disappointed" with City Council's decision to delay a requirement to post earthquake-warning placards on old brick and block buildings, known as unreinforced masonry because they contain no steel supports.

These buildings are at significant risk of collapse in an earthquake, and Portland has a more than one-in-five chance of an 8.0 earthquake over the next 50 years.

Wheeler made his remarks on OPB's Think Out Loud the day after a WW cover story that examined the backlash to earthquake preparation, and the power shift in City Hall that has given building owners a reprieve from recording the seismic status of their properties.

"I don't know why we would withhold information from the public that allows the public to make their own decisions about what their plans would be," he says.

The placard requirement is the subject of a lawsuit by building owners.

"The facts are these: Portland has more unreinforced masonry buildings than any other city on the West Coast," Wheeler said. "Fact number two: Unreinforced masonry buildings are proven to be less safe than other kinds of buildings in the event of an earthquake.

"So we know what the strategy is over the long-term: we know we need to improve the seismic upgrades," he continued. "We know that we need incentive packages for buildings that maybe are historically important or maybe that house music or arts venues or lower-income housing. We are going to have help some of those business owners do the seismic upgrades over a long period of time.

"In the meanwhile, I think it's tremendously important we inform the public about the real risk that exists—people who work in those buildings, people who live those buildings, people who visit those buildings."

Host Dave Miller pressed Wheeler on whether he considered removing new commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty from overseeing Portland Fire & Rescue, after she ordered them not to enforce the placarding ordinance. (She subsequently led the bureau in a delay on the placarding requirement for most buildings.)

Former Commissioner Steve Novick was among the critics of leaving Hardesty in charge. "I'd be curious," he told WW, "about polling the chicken owners of Portland to see how many of them have hired foxes to guard their coops."

Wheeler pushed back on the radio, saying he didn't think removing Hardesty's control of the fire bureau was wise.

"I think that would have been a tremendous mistake," Wheeler said, noting he needs three votes to pass a budget and ordinances at council.

Instead, he is going to hold his colleagues accountable for coming up with a plan for seismic upgrades and an incentive program.

"The clock is now ticking," he said. "We have three commissioners, it does not include me, they will go out to the community and they will come back to City Council in a year, year and a half. I'm going to hold them to that."

The Portland Mercury

Mayor's Police Liaison Leaves for Private Sector Job

By Alex Zielinski

March 8, 2019

Berk Nelson, Mayor Ted Wheeler's senior policy advisor on public safety and livability (read: police) is resigning.

According to the mayor's office, Nelson has accepted a "position in government relations in the private sector." His last day is Friday, March 15.

Nelson is leaving in the midst of an investigation into how the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) engages with activists, an issue that Nelson is directly linked to.

The investigation, sparked by text message transcripts made public by the Mercury and Willamette Week, revealed a close, protective relationship between PPB Lt. Jeff Niiya and Joey Gibson, leader of the Vancouver, WA alt-right group Patriot Prayer. For some, the conversations confirmed a suspicion that alt-right groups received preferential treatment by police officers during their violent protests.

Nelson was Lt. Niiya's direct line to the mayor's office, and has texted Niiya to request information about Patriot Prayer's movement during a protest. In an interview with the Oregonian, Nelson said he was aware that Niiya was in contact with Gibson, but he just "didn't know to what extent the conversations took place."

Nelson has also played a role in trying to prosecute members of Patriot Prayer for past acts of violence during Portland protests. He recently shared his frustrations about the drawn-out process with Willamette Week.

"This has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me because I have gained immeasurable insight into how government serves the community," Nelson said in a Friday press release. "I am grateful to the Mayor for giving me this opportunity. I have made many friends and partnerships along the way that I will carry into my next position."

The Daily Journal of Commerce

New Portland Pedestrian Bridge in the Works

By Josh Kulla

March 8, 2019

TriMet and the Portland Bureau of Transportation expect to break ground in Southeast Portland this spring on a new bridge for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Stacy and Witbeck will serve as general contractor for the Gideon overcrossing, which is designed to span both Union Pacific Railroad tracks and MAX light-rail tracks from Southeast 14th avenue south to the intersection of Southeast 13th Place and Gideon Street. The bridge will replace an old, non-ADA-compliant crossing near Southeast 16th Avenue and Gideon Street that was removed in 2013 as part of MAX Orange Line construction.

Delays in federal funding led to a change in original plans to build the overpass as part of the Orange Line project. But when the latter was completed under budget, TriMet gained approval to use the savings to construct the overpass.

The structure will be built entirely in existing public right-of-way, about 300 feet east of the Clinton Street MAX station.

Construction will take about a year, according to TriMet, and cost approximately \$15 million. When completed, the bridge will be owned, operated and maintained by the city of Portland.

The Skanner

Wheeler Announces Departure of Senior Policy Advisor

March 8, 2019

Mayor Ted Wheeler's office announced in a Friday-afternoon press release that Berk Nelson, Wheeler's senior policy advisor on public safety and livability, is leaving office and that his last day will be March 15. According to the release, Nelson is taking an unspecified position in the private sector.

"This has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me because I have gained immeasurable insight into how government serves the community. I am grateful to the Mayor for giving me this opportunity. I have made many friends and partnerships along the way that I will carry into my next position," Nelson said in the press release.

"I will miss Berk – he brought a wealth of intelligence and ideas to this challenging position. I have been lucky to have such a talented, hardworking advisor over the last two years," Wheeler said in the same release. "I wish Berk the best of luck in his future endeavors, and am confident he will continue to excel."

Nelson, who had worked in the mayor's office since January 2017, had previously worked as an attorney in immigration law and general litigation. The release credits him with relocating R2DToo, examining alternatives for first responders to non-emergency calls and working with the county to address mental health.

OPB

What Happened (And What Didn't) With Portland's Creative Space Plan

*By April Baer
March 10, 2019*

In February 2018, Portland City Council voted unanimously to accept an ambitious plan to preserve the city's creative spaces.

Artists are far from the only people affected by rising residential and commercial real estate prices, but they're also part of the city's cultural identity. Leaders including Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioners Nick Fish and Chloe Eudaly (herself a former bookstore owner) pledged to support an effort to preserve creative spaces. All items on the list were designed to be revenue-neutral, requiring no new city funding.

It's been a year since the plan went into action. So what has happened? We break it down.

What Got Done:

Some core staff across seven city bureaus and several council offices brought a half-dozen points to fruition. Among them:

- The Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center: Sited in a historically-black neighborhood in North Portland, IFCC stood mostly empty for several years. It's run by Portland Parks and Recreation. Parks has turned to a group of community stakeholders to help develop a new plan to lease out IFCC for arts events at below-market rates, with a preference for African-American arts groups. The city hopes to replicate the model with other culturally-specific groups in other parts of town that might be interested in different Parks properties.
- Portland Parks is making lighting and sound upgrades in facilities at some community centers, in hopes of making them suitable for performances and other events.
- The Bureau of Development Services has four new specialists empowered to work with small businesses — among them, arts and cultural groups — to smooth some of the bumps in the permitting process. City permits for building and occupancy can be a rabbit warren of code rules and arcane appeals processes. Officials like Eudaly are optimistic the staffing will give small nonprofits and individuals a place to go if they're trying to get a live/work space to code, add a stage or other amenities.

What's Left To Do

The plan also detailed a number of ideas that didn't come to pass.

- A real estate bank for arts and creative space: Some Portlanders have become keenly interested in the Bay Community Arts Stabilization Trust. A sort of land bank for arts nonprofits, it works intensively with groups that need a building, helping them build capacity and encouraging them to find the donors they need to make a big capital investment work. Wonky stuff, but it's a holy grail for many arts groups tossed from one leased space to another.
- Incentives for landlords to build galleries and studios in new construction.
- One recommendation called for the city to encourage colleges and hospitals to increase their exhibition space. On the higher education front, the exact opposite has happened.

Marylhurst University is closed and its Art Gym is headed for Portland Art Museum. It's a partial save: the exhibitions and publications will continue, but most days you'll have to pay to see them. Lewis and Clark is restricting its Hoffman Gallery to student work. And Oregon College of Art and Craft — with its gallery — is closing in May.

Six of the plan's recommendations are either in limbo or in the planning stage, including:

- A Regional Arts and Culture Council plan to map the city's creative resources. That's a critical step for the city to identify dry spots for the arts and prioritize future plans.
- Prosper Portland is in early-stage planning for offering some below-market-rate leases to creatives at Union Station, in coordination with city staff.
- The city's 2% For Art program is being retooled to allow some different uses.

And there've been a number of promising developments that were not part of the plan.

Outside of RACC, the bureau that seems to be doing the most for art right now is Portland Parks and Recreation. Under the direction of Soo Pak, Parks is opening up below-market leases plus some grants at the Multnomah Arts Center, the Laurelhurst Dance Studio, and Charles Jordan Community Center, plus a series of grants for artists and arts groups willing to do some community engagement. Pak, the bureau's arts, culture, and special events manager, has a slew of deliverables under her belt, and a to-do list a mile long, but she isn't flinching.

The Parks Bureau is also taking on a survey of artists' needs, to see if there might be other ways the bureau can help.

Portland's Bureau of Transportation is working on a long-sought pilot program that will allow musicians to use the loading zones in front of 12 venues to load and unload their gear. The newly-formed advocacy group MusicPortland pushed hard for this one.

Eudaly is in charge of the city's arts portfolio. While Eudaly clearly has her eyes on the macro real estate issues that have driven homelessness and gentrification — everybody knows those are the priorities — Eudaly also told us that she's never lost sight of the arts-specific real estate issues.

"I would like to start by saying this is the conversation I've been wanting the city to have for more than a decade," Eudaly told us.

She talked about the rent control bill that passed in Salem last month.

"You might be hearing getting a more grim picture than we are. I think being in a position of influence and having an ability to do anything makes me a somewhat more hopeful person than perhaps a journalist focused on arts and culture, or an artist trying to ride out this seemingly never-ending housing and affordability crisis."

She points to the new staff at BDS and RACC's mapping project as hopeful signs for the next stages of arts preservation.

While the Creative Space plan was not completed in a year, it may be those 24 points can serve as a roadmap as the city moves forward.