

The Oregonian

Floating Homeless Shelter? Portland Entrepreneur Asks Why Not?

*By Gordon Friedman
March 12, 2019*

In a longshot effort to help the homeless, Dan Yates, president of Portland Spirit Cruises, recently offered an unorthodox idea to City Hall: Buy a 370-foot ship and convert it into a floating homeless shelter.

“I know you are trying many different approaches to reduce the impact of houselessness in Portland,” Yates wrote to Mayor Ted Wheeler in a Feb. 8 letter. “I think a novel solution may involve something like this vessel.”

Yates’ letter included a clipping of an advertisement for the ship, which is outfitted to sleep 300 people. Its price: \$5 million.

“Perfect for oil rig support, fishing/gaming lodge, private island, floating hotel, 14,000 sq ft unused space ready for casino or more accommodation rooms,” the ad states.

Another blurb refers to the ship – replete with a pool, movie theater, full bar and restaurant, aquarium and helipad – as a five-story “floating palace.” As of Tuesday, it’s still listed for sale.

The advertisement included in Dan Yates’ letter to Mayor Ted Wheeler.

In his letter, Yates said the ship could be bought and retrofitted for about \$15 million to allow temporary shelter for as many as 1,000 people.

“This vessel could have its extensive spaces converted to bunk rooms,” Yates said. “Staterooms could be converted to allow family units to stay together and even have areas for pets and personal storage.”

That Yates proffered the offbeat idea suggests local entrepreneurs want swift, gutsy action to aid people living on Portland streets.

But, as happened with other entrepreneurs’ ideas, like those to use the former Wapato Jail for use as a homeless shelter and another to serve homeless people from government-owned property under the Broadway Bridge, the plans may not pan out financially, logistically or politically.

It also demonstrates an increasing willingness by Portland’s business class to put skin in the game if it means progress. Yates, for example, offered to travel cross-country to inspect the boat. And last year, Columbia Sportswear founder Tim Boyle donated \$1.5 million to help create that homeless “navigation center” underneath the Broadway Bridge.

At the time Boyle announced those plans, Wheeler issued a statement saying: “I want to send the message that if you have ideas, or resources or expertise – and you want to put them to work addressing homelessness – government can be an effective partner.”

In an interview Tuesday, Yates said he never heard back from the mayor’s office about his letter.

Eileen Park, Wheeler’s spokeswoman, said the mayor’s office receives many letters and emails from people writing about homelessness and not everyone gets a response. An aide pointed to partnerships between the city and entrepreneurs to create shelters and conduct research, such as examining whether shipping containers can be converted into housing.

The mayor appreciates Yates' concern for the homeless, Park said, but the floating shelter idea is too expensive and risky (a shelter sleeping 1,000 people is perceived as unmanageable, among other issues).

Yates said Tuesday that he was only trying to "help the process along" with his big idea.

"I just want to take every opportunity we can to provide people the ability to get out of bad weather and give them a place they can maybe start to put their life back on track," he said.

Controversial Portland Infill Plan Narrowly Advances

*By Elliot Njus
March 13, 2019*

A plan to add thousands of infill homes in Portland's established neighborhoods split the city's planning board, only narrowly winning the group's approval.

In the 5-4 vote, dissenting members the volunteer Planning and Sustainability Commission raised concerns about the potential for the infill plan to displace low-income renters and members of minority groups.

And even with the commission's approval, the recommendation will go to the Portland City Council with a letter outlining the displacement concerns.

The Residential Infill Plan would allow duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes in traditionally single-family neighborhoods. It also would limit the size of new construction, an effort to cut down on demolitions that replace modest houses with much larger, more expensive ones.

The plan's been in the works for four years, but The Oregonian/OregonLive reported Monday that city planners believe the latest version could deliver far fewer units than the city has previously touted: 4,000 instead of the 24,000 trumpeted in a city report.

And under the city's forecast, most of those units would be built not in close-in neighborhoods, as planners had suggested, but in east Portland and other areas where land is cheaper and displacement risk is high.

That raises new concerns that the city could be underestimating the risk of displacement if infill development exceeds its expectations.

Planning commissioners discussed for more than an hour the questions raised by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Commissioner Chris Smith, who eventually voted in favor of the plan, said the city's projections represent "a different story than we've been telling ourselves" and the public.

"We all got very excited about the 24,000 number," Smith said. "We lost the understanding of the two models and how the numbers could be very different."

A proposal to restrict the types of housing that could be built in certain areas for a five-year phase-in period narrowly failed.

Commissioner Andre Baugh asked the commission to delay allowing plexes in parts of North, Northeast and Southeast Portland to slow down development while the city comes up with a plan to address the risk of forcing out low-income residents of those areas. (The amendment also included a corridor in Southwest Portland where TriMet plans to build a new MAX line, where the city is also developing a plan to mitigate displacement resulting from the transit project.)

If you make less than \$60,000, the residential infill project “doesn’t help you,” Baugh said. “We’re going into this without a plan to help the people who own those homes or rent those homes.”

Commissioner Eli Spevak said the current zoning doesn’t help those people, either.

To buy a home, “you have to be able to afford to buy a big piece of land and your own single-family home,” he said. “That’s the only choice out there. If you can afford that, you’re in pretty good shape under the current zoning. If not, you’re left out.”

Baugh, who voted against advancing the infill project, forcefully argued that it would force low-income residents — and in particular racial and ethnic minorities — out of the city.

“We’re essentially saying goodbye to a significant part of our population,” Baugh said.

Other members who voted no said they hoped to send a signal to the Portland City Council, which will take up the issue in late summer, that it needs to address the displacement issues before rubber-stamping the plan.

“I would really like to see east Portland be able to meet his change and have some resources at its disposal to be able to take advantage of this,” Commissioner Katie Larsell said.

Bureau of Planning and Sustainability staffers said the plan would likely be the subject of more than one work session before the City Council holds a public hearing and invites public testimony. No date has been set for those discussions.

New Portland Police Recruits Failing Probation at Double the Rate of Past Years

*By Maxine Bernstein
March 13, 2019*

Portland police are struggling to fill officer vacancies as recruits wash out during probation at about double the rate they have in the past.

The bureau currently has 75 unfilled officer positions.

The bureau hired more officers from mid-2016 to mid-2018, but more of them are flunking out of the state’s basic police academy or failing to make it through Portland’s 18-month probation period, Assistant Chief Chris Davis said.

Twenty to 25 percent of those recruits didn’t make it through probation successfully and are no longer working for the bureau, compared to the more typical 10 to 15 percent drop-out rate, according to city figures.

The failed recruits couldn’t perform on the job, had problems multi-tasking or making good decisions under stress during field training, Davis said. Others decided on their own that the job wasn’t working out for them or were terminated due to misconduct, he said.

Davis reviews all the background investigations of recruits and said it’s hard to predict how somebody will perform in uniform.

“It’s not like I’m evaluating a potential running back for a football team and I can see how fast you run the 40-yard dash,” he said.

“Obviously we’re watching this closely,” he said. “If this becomes a longer-term trend, we’re going to have to have our psychological screening contractor and training people figure out what the issue is.”

Officer Daryl Turner, president of the Portland Police Association representing rank-and-file officers, said some of the new recruits "come into the job thinking it’s like it is on television, and it isn’t." Just because they passed the written test, an interview, background check and psychological exam, doesn’t mean they’re going to be cut out for police work, he said.

The bureau faces several challenges in trying to hire officers, common to police departments nationwide. First, officers are retiring at a rate faster than Portland can hire replacements, with another wave of 30 to 50 retirements expected this spring.

A strong job market, negative attitudes nationally and locally toward policing and a backgrounding process that takes longer than many other police agencies also have hurt Portland, police say.

Katie Shifley, an analyst with the city budget office, said hiring and recruitment remains a major challenge for the Police Bureau.

The city provided funding for 55 new Portland police officer positions for this fiscal year, bringing the sworn officer force to 1,001. But the bureau has only been able to hire 22 new officers.

That’s despite developing recruitment videos, social media advertisements, allowing continuous police hiring throughout the year instead of during only scheduled times and trying to speed up background investigations, Shifley found.

“The slow pace of hiring has budgetary and performance implications; the anticipated reduction in overtime to backfill for minimum staffing levels will likely not come to fruition in the next 18-24 months, nor is the bureau likely to improve emergency response times in the near term if recruitment and hiring are not improved,” she wrote in her analysis.

The pace of hiring has fallen from earlier years when Portland hired 58 officers in fiscal year 2016-2017 and 73 in fiscal year 2017-2018. The bureau projected having up to 440 officers available for patrol by mid-2022, but, based on the current hiring pace, now projects as few as 360 patrol officers will be available.

To try to speed up the background investigations, applicants were allowed to fill out personal history statements online. But the turnaround time from application to hiring still averages nearly a year, or 340 days, causing the bureau to frequently lose people to other agencies with shorter turn-around times.

Davis met earlier this week with officials from the police personnel division, the bureau’s psychological testing contractor and the city’s Bureau of Human Resources and community members to figure out what more they can do.

“A lot of it has to do with messaging,” he said. “How we explain to prospective police applicants who we are and how we get our message out in the midst of the negativity about our profession.”

The bureau hopes to better tailor that message, Davis said.

It might, he said, sound something like this: “There’s a lot of desire for change in policing. We get that. Why don’t you come and be a part of that change and lead the organization in a better direction? Come here and help us make it better. Be part of something we can be proud of.”

The bureau remains reliant on overtime to fill patrol shifts at precincts. The cost of personnel overtime was \$3.7 million in fiscal year 2017-18, up from \$2.7 million the prior year. The increase was driven by an increase in the number of overtime hours worked, plus increases in the per hour cost of overtime due to increases in officer salaries under the union contract.

“We got to get those positions filled,” Davis said. “ We can’t go on like this.”

The Portland Tribune

Infill Plan Narrowly Approved by Planning Commission

By KOIN 6 News

March 12, 2019

5-to-4 vote send controversial residential density plan to the City Council for a vote this summer.

In a surprisingly close vote, Portland's appointed Planning and Sustainability Commission approved the current recommendations of the Residential Infill Project on Tuesday.

The vote sends the controversial proposal to rezone most of the city's single-family neighborhoods for up to four housing units on most residential lots to the City Council for consideration this summer.

The 5 to 4 vote was much closer than had been expected because most of the commission members had previously said that increasing residential densities was necessary to accommodate the tens of thousands of additional people expected to be living in Portland over the next 20 year.

Commission members had many questions for Bureau of Planning and Sustainability employees staffing the project about the recommendations during the March 12 meeting. They included concerns raised by opponents who worry that developers will demolish existing homes for larger projects, undermining the character of existing neighborhoods.

"It is counteractive to affordability and development," homeowner and developer Robert Bonna said. "It places such limitations on developers and homeowners. It doesn't make sense."

There are still some big questions as to how many new housing units this policy would create. An independent study by the Johnson Economics consulting firm said up to 24,000 units would be built over the next 20 years. But a staff analysis said the number was only 4,000. That estimate was not publicly known until The Oregonian reported it shortly before the meeting.

Police Body Camera Hearing Delayed

By Jim Redden

March 12, 2019

Thursday City Council meeting is cancelled, postponing hearing on potentially controversial pilot project funding.

A City Council hearing scheduled for Thursday on a police body camera pilot project was cancelled late Tuesday.

Mayor Ted Wheeler's office said there seemed to be a lot of confusion surrounding the request for proposals to be considered by the council, so they wanted to give the other members of the council more time to hear about it and have a chance to understand it better.

A hearing on the measure introduced by Wheeler, who is Police Commissioner, has not yet been rescheduled. Here is a summary of the issue:

What is the City Council considering? A measure to authorize \$1.6 million for a pilot project for body cameras for Portland police had been on the agenda for Thursday, March 14.

Why is this important? Some criminal justice experts believe body-worn cameras are one of the best tools for understanding what police actually do in the field, especially after controversial incidents, such as police shootings. Video of such incidents can provide a more reliable record of what led up to them, how the police reacted, and whether the reactions were justified.

Why just a pilot project? Despite their obvious benefits, body-worn cameras are controversial.

Some law enforcement authorities argue the videos do not always give a complete picture of what happened. There may be other people or vehicles outside the range captured on video. They also can malfunction.

Some civil libertarians say police use of such cameras can be invasive, capturing video of people in crisis in private locations without their permission.

And the actual costs of operating a bureauwide police camera system are not yet known, including the cost of storing and editing requested video for public release.

How long has the council been considering the issue? The use of such cameras came to prominence after a series of controversial officer-involved shootings nearly a decade ago. A 2013 survey of 500 police agencies found that less than 25 percent used them. Then-President Barack Obama voiced support for them and the U.S. Department of Justice made \$23 million in grants available for pilot projects.

The Portland Police Bureau first began looking into them in 2014, seeking public feedback in 2015. The council approved \$834,000 in one-time funds and \$1.6 million in ongoing funds in the 2016-17 budget, but not all of the money was spent. Instead, the Oregon Legislature decided to weigh in on the issue, holding hearings and eventually setting guidelines for their use.

Other law enforcement agencies in the region already have deployed such cameras, including the Oregon State Police, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, the Beaverton and Hillsboro police departments, and the Portland State University Police Department.

When could the pilot project begin? If the council approves the ordinance, the project could begin in early 2020, following more public outreach by the police and additional approval by the council.

What can I do? The ordinance is introduced by Mayor Ted Wheeler, who is the police commissioner. His office number is 503-823-4120 and he can be reached at MayorWheeler@PortlandOregon.gov, @tedwheeler, and Mayor Ted Wheeler, 1221 S.W. Fourth Ave., Room 340, Portland, OR 97204

You can read the ordinance at <http://tinyurl.com/yytqlqbv>.

Planners Fine-Tune Details for SW Corridor MAX Line

*By Bill Gallagher
March 13, 2019*

Light-rail route over complex Crossroads intersection in Southwest Portland could raze 25 businesses, 200 jobs.

The prospective 12-mile Southwest Corridor MAX line that may someday connect downtown Portland, Tigard and Tualatin would travel along an elevated bridge when trains reach the "complicated" intersection called the Crossroads at Southwest Barbur Boulevard and Capitol Highway.

A steering committee composed of local elected officials, TriMet's general manager, and an Oregon Department of Transportation manager voted unanimously Monday, March 11, to abandon all other possible alignment alternatives in favor of a plan that would mean the demolition of 25 businesses employing almost 200 people. It includes a new light-rail bridge that crosses over Barbur south of Capitol.

"With this alignment, if you're heading south on Barbur Boulevard (toward Tigard), the route turns left off of Barbur and goes behind the Barbur Transit Center. Then, just south of the transit center, the route spans over I-5 and over Capitol Highway as a flyover until you land on the west side of Barbur and the east side of I-5," said Jeb Doran, TriMet's project manager for the light-rail plan.

The new light-rail line — which would be the Portland area's first new line since the Orange Line to Milwaukie — is still in the planning stages.

Before any trains start rolling, local governments would have to approve millions of dollars in funding, voters would have to approve a statewide transportation funding measure, and the federal government would have to contribute at least half of the \$2.8 billion to \$3.1 billion the line is likely to cost.

That regional measure vote has not yet been scheduled, but is expected to happen at the November 2020 general election.

Doran said the alignment decision by the steering committee settles the Crossroads debate, which has been the subject of three public meetings attended by 190 people, 125 emails, notification of 60 property owners and a special session of the Portland City Council.

"Crossroads is a fairly complicated problem, and we've looked at a lot of different alignments. Narrowing the possible scenarios down to one is the culmination of that," Doran said. "We're now down to the one alignment that works and meets the metrics and the goals and objectives. This is the one we'll be moving forward on."

Hardest hit if the project happens will be the businesses located at the strip mall on the east side of Barbur just south of the Crossroads.

Capitol Corner, anchored by a Chase Bank branch, was built in 1990. Also in the path of the now-approved alignment is a McDonald's, a Starbucks and the automotive services located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Capitol Highway and Barbur Boulevard just south of the transit center.

The next issue the steering committee will have to resolve is how to connect the light rail line to the campus of Oregon Health & Sciences University. That decision is expected in May.

Willamette Week

Text Messages Show Portland Police Chief and Mayor's Staff in Icy Dialogue Over Arrests of Political Brawlers

By Katie Shepherd

March 12, 2019

"Does this mean you'll be coming out with us?" asked Chief Danielle Outlaw.

On Nov. 5, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler's then-chief of staff sent a group text to recipients who included Police Chief Danielle Outlaw, prodding her to arrest right-wing brawlers. She did not appear to appreciate his suggestion.

A transcript of the exchange was obtained by WW via a public records request.

The texts:

Michael Cox, then the mayor's chief of staff: "I'm sure you saw this op-ed in The Oregonian over the weekend. This quote is getting particular attention.

"Those who claim Portland police and prosecutors don't have the tools to arrest, charge and prosecute perpetrators caught on camera engaging in gang assaults, some with illegal weapons, deserve only howls of outrage and derision."

"Although no one is actually making this argument, it is a powerful straw man, and I continue to be flabbergasted that we allow it to persist. Absent arrests, we should all be prepared to hear much more of this on Thursday."

Chief Danielle Outlaw: "Does this mean you'll be coming out with us on the 17th, Mr. Cox?"

The subtext:

Since November, tensions have increased between Wheeler's office and the Portland Police Bureau over whom police arrest at protests. Back then, the two offices seemed to work hand in hand to advocate for an ordinance that would have made it easier for police to keep warring protest groups separate. (It failed before the City Council on Nov. 14.)

Last month, WW reported on text messages exchanged between Lt. Jeff Niiya and Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson. Now, the mayor's office and Police Bureau are openly criticizing one another.

Within hours of WW's story on the texts, Wheeler called the messages "disturbing" and ordered an internal investigation of Niiya's communications with far-right activists. He later approved an independent investigation to examine whether Portland police show bias when deploying crowd-control tactics. Meanwhile, police union leadership has slammed Wheeler, saying he has "failed to develop an understanding of even basic police work."

Those tensions go back a while, simmering privately even when the bureau and mayor appeared to be on the same page.

Cox, who has since left the mayor's office, was referring to a bloody October street brawl outside the bar Kelly's Olympian—an unusually violent clash even by Portland standards. In the texts, Cox appears deeply frustrated by the lack of arrests. Outlaw fired back at the political intrusion into her officers' decision making.

Outlaw now says her response was an "invitation to [Cox] to join us in the emergency operations center for the next demonstration so he could witness for himself how these events unfold."

The mayor is still frustrated by the lack of arrests at far-right rallies that devolve into brawls, which police and prosecutors have blamed on the questionable concept of "mutual combat".

"I have made my frustration on this eminently clear to all parties," Wheeler says. "If these are truly the rules and our hands are truly tied, then we need to change the rules and we need to untie our hands."

The Portland Mercury

Bureau of Transportation Wants Funding to Fix Poorly Lit East Portland Streets

By Blair Stenvick

March 12, 2019

Many major roads in East Portland have dangerously poor lighting compared to the rest of the city, leaving those who use them more susceptible to injuries and fatalities. The Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) is asking for funding in the next budget cycle to address this disparity.

PBOT has identified a "crash network" of major roads throughout the city where the majority of traffic crashes, injuries and fatalities occur. According to a PBOT presentation during a city council budget work session Tuesday, virtually all the high-crash roads west of E 82nd Avenue have adequate street lighting, while only 23 percent of high-crash streets east of 82nd—where many low-income residents and people of color call home—have adequate lighting, according to PBOT's requested budget. Another way to look at it: Twenty-five miles of high-crash roads east of 82nd Ave. currently lack sufficient lighting.

PBOT estimates that fixing all of East Portland's street lighting issues would cost the city about \$12 million. For this year's budget cycle, the bureau is only asking the city for \$500,000 to fix lighting on SE Stark between 148th and 162nd, one of the city's most dangerous stretches.

"We are looking for money to improve street lighting on the most dangerous stretches of road," said Chris Warner, PBOT's director, at Tuesday's work session. "With better lighting, we can make it safe for pedestrians and bicyclists—those are really two of the most vulnerable groups in our streets."

In its analysis, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recommended that city council consider PBOT's request, but also noted that it could interfere with a Bureau of Planning and Sustainability project to reduce light pollution in Portland.

This project would further the efforts of PBOT's Vision Zero campaign to reduce traffic injuries and fatalities in Portland. But instead of relying on the \$1.5 million in cannabis tax revenue the bureau receives to fund Vision Zero, PBOT is asking for the one-time expense to be covered by the city's general fund.

At Tuesday's meeting, Commissioner Amanda Fritz questioned why PBOT needs to request money from the city's general fund for this project, rather than prioritize it as part of the bureau's regular \$223 million discretionary budget, or as part of the Vision Zero cannabis revenue budget.

“Why not prioritize from your existing money, since people are dying and there’s only street lights on one side of the street?” Fritz asked Warner.

Warner answered that in order to pay for the street light project using its own budget, PBOT would have to cut funding from another project.

Mayor Ted Wheeler will release his proposed city budget in May. City council budget work sessions will continue through the next several weeks.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Portland Art Museum Pavilion Project OK’d

By Chuck Slothower

March 12, 2019

The Historic Landmarks Commission has approved a design for the Rothko Pavilion – an ambitious, \$70 million to \$75 million renovation and expansion of the Portland Art Museum.

The museum’s staff and supporters are raising money for the project, which is meant to enhance the institution’s ability to attract world-class artwork, improve accessibility and show off the museum’s art – even to passing pedestrians.

“Our goal is to be part of the fabric of the city, interwoven, and reflective of the community,” said Brian Ferriso, director of the Portland Art Museum.

Approval of the design by Chicago’s Vinci | Hamp Architects and Portland’s Hennebery Eddy Architects came via a 4-0 vote on Monday. The design centers on a four-story glass box bridging the museum’s Belluschi and Mark buildings.

The Historic Landmarks Commission spent much of Monday’s meeting discussing plans for the museum’s exterior, including a plaza with planters and textured walkways. Commissioners questioned the placement of bollards – structural barriers that will prevent vehicles access – but eventually acceded to them for security reasons.

“If it’s a safety feature, then it’s fine to keep them where they are,” Commissioner Maya Foty said.

Perhaps the Rothko Pavilion’s most remarkable feature will be a glass passageway between the two buildings. Pedestrians will be able to peer into curated spaces in both buildings. The passageway will have a clear height of 11 feet, with widths of 16 feet on the west side and 15 feet on the east side.

Historically, an easement has ensured public access between the two buildings. City staff assured commissioners that a deal previously approved by the City Council will continue to guarantee access.

The design sought to solve a decades-old problem for the museum: how to link the Belluschi building, completed in 1932, with the Mark building (a former Masonic temple), erected in 1927. Museum officials have said visitors are often confused about how to navigate the buildings.

Anthony Belluschi, a son of the original architect, Pietro Belluschi, who died in 1994, weighed in on the project.

“I am quite sure that my father would approve of this new plan,” said Anthony Belluschi, who is also an architect.

The design includes a revolving door on the east side’s ground floor, replacing two smaller revolving doors in earlier versions.

The project involves removing a small amount of brick masonry where the glass box bridges the buildings. The material dates to a 2005 remodel.

“We’re not removing virgin material,” said Philip Hamp, president of Vinci | Hamp Architects.

Public comment focused on potential traffic impacts. The city of Portland’s Central City in Motion plan calls for turning Jefferson Street into a one-lane street. Commissioners said that city initiative is not within the purview of their Rothko Pavilion review, but downtown residents still took the opportunity to question the move.

Disability advocates praised the design.

“They have been very receptive to our feedback,” said Philip Wolfe, a member of the Portland Commission on Disability.

The project, first announced in 2016, was the subject of three design advice hearings before it proceeded to design review. Opponents have 14 days to appeal the Historic Landmarks Commission’s approval, but no serious organized opposition was evident at Monday’s meeting.

“It’s a good process,” Ferriso said after the vote. “We’re very pleased.”

Ferriso declined to specify when construction would begin, saying it depends on fundraising. The Rothko Pavilion fundraising drive began with an \$8 million anonymous donation and a \$5 million donation from the Schnitzer family.

The project team also includes Mortenson Construction, Walker Macy, Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture and Urban Resources Inc.