

The Oregonian

Only 3 of 61 Applicants Pass Background Checks for New Portland Public Safety Specialist Jobs

*By Maxine Bernstein
April 3, 2019*

While the Portland Police Bureau struggles to recruit officers to fill dozens of vacancies, its effort to hire new civilian public safety specialists to respond to low-level calls also has hit a big snag.

Of more than 100 applicants, the bureau did background checks on 61 prospective candidates -- and only three passed, Assistant Chief Chris Davis reported to the City Council this week.

Of the three, one person took a job elsewhere, leaving only two viable candidates.

Why are applicants failing Portland police background checks?

The two biggest factors: past drug use and dishonesty uncovered in the investigations, Davis told the council.

Anyone who wants to be a Portland cop must not have used marijuana within the prior year. For non-sworn applicants, they must not have used marijuana within the prior four months.

“I think I just discovered where our problem is everybody,” Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said, drawing chuckles during a police budget work session.

Davis said it’s not just marijuana use, but other drug use that’s eliminating both the specialist and police applicants during their background checks, and it’s not Portland’s problem alone but common among police departments nationwide.

Because marijuana use is still a federal crime, the bureau can’t legally transfer a gun to a “drug user.” With guidance from the City Attorney’s office, the bureau interpreted “drug user” as meaning someone who had used drugs in the year before. Because the specialists won’t carry guns and are not sworn officers, the limit was lowered for those applicants, he said.

The bureau won’t start the six-week training of public safety specialists until it has at least six people on board, Davis said. The city gave the bureau the green-light in December to hire 12 new civilian employees, who would be armed with pepper spray, to help relieve patrol officers by responding to nonemergency calls that don’t require police authority.

Police recruiting in general is at a critical stage, Mayor Ted Wheeler and Police Chief Danielle Outlaw said. In February and March, the bureau lost 44 people due to retirements, leaving 120 sworn officer vacancies and another 39 non-sworn support staff vacancies.

The Oregonian/OregonLive previously reported that new hires are washing out of the bureau at double the rate as in the past. And the bureau is losing candidates to other police agencies hiring in Oregon and nationally.

“Working here in Portland is unique,” Outlaw told City Council members Tuesday. “We deal with demonstrations, protests, crowd management. We catch a lot of headlines.”

Many applicants, frankly, would rather go for more money elsewhere “and less scrutiny,” the chief said.

“The climate here in the city is a lot different,” which agencies across the country are recognizing, Outlaw said.

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty pressed the chief to be creative and consider reducing the number of command staff or restricting officers’ secondary private jobs.

Outlaw said there might be a way “to flatten” the police hierarchy but the bureau needs to maintain a certain “span of control” and “accountability,” as sought by the U.S. Department of Justice in its settlement agreement with the city after finding a pattern of excessive police force against people with mental illness. Outlaw said she believes some more positions could be made into civilian positions.

During a wide-ranging budget work session Tuesday, commissioners also were critical of the failed Police Bureau records management system that has left Portland police paying millions of dollars to cover the share of regional police agencies that once were partners in the system but pulled out.

The bureau is asking the council to approve \$1.4 million for fiscal 2019-2020 and another \$1.52 million for fiscal 2020-21 to cover the gaps, plus about \$5 million set aside to create a new, more affordable system for Portland police. That would happen once the contract with Canada-based vendor Versaterm Inc. expires in July 2021.

Hardesty said she was concerned the bureau was asking the council “to fund its mistake.”

“That’s not acceptable,” she said. “I think the Police Bureau should be responsible for fixing that mess.”

The chief and mayor clarified for Hardesty that a past City Council approved the project. Remarkably, Wheeler added, the contract has no “opt out” clause for the city of Portland, which is forced to pay off the contract.

“We will never sign a contract like that again,” Wheeler said.

[Among other interesting information from the public safety work session:](#)

-- The bureau receives about 103 officer applications a month, Davis said. That’s up from earlier years but still isn’t going to get the bureau where it needs to be to fill its vacancies.

-- In 2018, the Bureau of Emergency Communications received 37,753 calls relating to an “unwanted person” in Multnomah County. Portland accounted for the majority of those calls, with 32,961.

-- The Fire Bureau’s average response time is 7 minutes, 19 seconds, beyond the goal of 5 minutes , 20 seconds.

The Portland Tribune

Eudaly Piles on Criticism of ODOT's Interstate 5 Project

By Zane Sparling

April 3, 2019

Portland Commissioner Chloe Eudaly says Oregon Department of Transportation must complete EIS study.

Commissioner Chloe Eudaly is ready to harmonize with the vocal critics of a state transportation plan that adds new lanes to Interstate 5 as it crosses into the Rose Quarter.

The first-term member overseeing the transit bureau at Portland City Hall is the latest politician to call on the Oregon Department of Transportation to prepare a second, more rigorous study of the project's overall effects, known formally as an Environmental Impact Study.

"Although it would be nice to fix the bottleneck on I-5," Eudaly said in a statement, "as it stands the added auxiliary lanes on I-5 will not deliver meaningful safety, environmental or equity benefits."

ODOT's vision for the narrow stretch of I-5 would create two new auxiliary lanes, one in each direction, which would allow drivers to chug along to interstates 84 or 405 without having to merge. Workers would also widen shoulders so drivers have enough space to pull over after a fender-bender.

Opponents say the \$450-million project will encourage residents to keep on commuting by car, though funding is also included to build ambitious lids over I-5, bridging a divide in the Albina neighborhood and creating new greenspace and leafy routes for hikers and bikers.

Eudaly's objection isn't exactly an unconquerable roadblock for the project's planners, since the state government and the Federal Highway Administration control the interstate, not the city of Portland.

Even if the project stalls, the commissioner acknowledged that the money will still be spent on interstates — just not here. "These funds... will be reallocated somewhere else in the region, most likely on a significant freeway expansion project such as additional lanes on I-205 around West Linn," she predicted.

Eudaly said in the statement released Tuesday, April 2 that she wants the board overseeing ODOT to ensure the proposed I-5 tolls are in place by the time work wraps up on the interstate.

The influential leader of the Albina Vision, Rukaiyah Adams, is demanding as well that ODOT launch a more in-depth review of the project than the just-completed Environmental Assessment

"We are asked to trust that the highway covers and the environmental remediation will be modified," Adams wrote to administrators. "But there is no basis for trust, certainly not from the historic community that called lower Albina home."

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty told the Tribune in an exclusive interview that she opposes the I-5 Improvement Project. Mayor Ted Wheeler, however, says Portlanders are lucky that state leaders chose to fund this project out of the many competitors for the \$5.3 billion in transportation funding passed as a package deal in 2017.

In a statement, ODOT administrators promised to take a close look at all feedback they receive before the deadline to comment closed April 1.

"We appreciate receiving the comments in all letters that were submitted," ODOT said. "We will be reviewing all comments."

Portland Landlords Must Register With the City by April 15

By Jim Redden

April 04, 2019

The registration requirement was passed last year, before the City Council started considering new tenant screening and other rental requirements.

Landlords with rentals in Portland must register their names and the addresses of their units with the city Revenue Division by April 15.

The deadline is approaching as the City Council considers tenant screening and other requirements landlords must meet intended to increase the availability of housing to more people, including those with criminal records. The council passed the registration requirement last year, however, in order to create a current inventory of all rental housing units in the city.

Revenue Division Director Thomas Lannom estimates there are around 20,000 landlords with approximately 120,000 rental units in the city.

"The final number could be higher or lower," Lannom says.

He notes that landlords already must obtain city business licenses and file business license tax returns every year.

Lannom says landlords and any other business owner can request an extension until Oct. 15, which means the final number of landlords and their unit will not be released until the beginning of next year.

There is no registration fee for the first year, although not registering could result in a penalty.

You can learn more about the registration requirement [here](#).

The council was briefed on the new tenant protections proposed by Commission Chloe Eudaly on Wednesday, April 3. It will take public testimony on Thursday.

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

Federal Judge Says City Violated URM Restraining Order

By Jim Redden

April 04, 2019

Portland officials are ordered to send a new letter to unreinforced masonry building owners correcting previous letter that should not have been sent.

A federal judge has ruled that the City of Portland violated a temporary injunction he issued preventing the enforcement of its unreinforced masonry building earthquake warning requirements.

In an April 3 telephone status conference with attorneys representing the city and URM owners, Oregon U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge John Acosta found that letters by the city to some owners violated the injunction he issued on Feb. 15. It prohibits the city from enforcing any of

the requirements until July 1. A hearing on whether to continue the injunction is scheduled for May 14.

The Bureau of Development Services sent letters to some URM owners in late March saying they must include earthquake warnings in lease applications by July 1, 2019, and post warning signs by Nov. 1, 2020.

But Acosta had ordered the city to not communicate with URM owners without his approval.

"[T]he City may not take action in reliance on the ordinance, including but not limited to informing owners of URM buildings that they must comply with ordinance, that they are not in compliance with the ordinance, or that they shall be or are fined for noncompliance with the ordinance," Acosta's order said.

The city did not submit its letter to Acosta before mailing it. Attorneys representing URM owners notified Acosta of the letters in an April 2 letter to him asking him to send followup information to the owners about the temporary injunction and upcoming hearing for a permanent one.

"We are concerned that many recipients will feel obliged to begin preparing to comply with the amended Ordinance — by, for example, drafting and printing new rental applications — before this Court is able to rule on our Motion for Preliminary Injunction," reads the letter signed by Chris Swift with Davis Wright Tremaine LLP.

On Wednesday Acosta ordered both parties to prepare a new correction letter to be mailed to URM owners. He also ordered both parties to prepare a script based on the letter to be given to city employees receiving phone calls regarding the status requirements.

The City Council postponed the sign posting date after URM owners complained they would lower the value of their buildings, which could fail in an earthquake. The council is expected to reconsider the requirement before the posting deadline.

You can read Swift's letter and supporting documents [here](#).

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

Willamette Week

City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly Is Latest Official to Question Oregon Department of Transportation Over Highway Project

*By Rachel Monahan
April 3, 2019*

In a letter, she doubts that ODOT will implement tolling before the project is completed, as required by City Council.

Portland Transportation Commissioner Chloe Eudaly does not believe the state's transportation agency will live up to the city's requirements for the Interstate 5 Rose Quarter project, she writes in a April 3 letter.

The two-page letter to the chair of the policy-setting Oregon Transportation Commission is the latest from a public official to question the Oregon Department of Transportation over its plans for the I-5 expansion.

Eudaly's letter to commission chair Tammy Baney calls for implementing a highway tolling plan to relieve congestion before the project is completed. (That's a requirement City Council passed last year, she writes.)

There's a long way to go before what's called congestion pricing can be implemented in Portland, specifically approval from the federal government, but the state has also already approved a plan for congestion pricing.

In the letter, Eudaly says she doesn't believe the state agency is going to implement congestion pricing in the timeframe the city requires.

"We all know that we cannot build our way out of our congestion problems and that variably pricing our packed roadways is critical to managing that congestion," Eudaly writes.

"As this condition makes clear, the Oregon Department of Transportation must coordinate the eventual implementation of congestion pricing with the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project – I do not believe this is in ODOT's current plan," she adds.

On Friday, staff for the regional government metro submitted a formal critique of ODOT's plan that called elements of the plan "objectively not true" and "potentially misleading."

Her letter does not address why it is Eudaly believes ODOT won't implement congestion pricing in time for the project. But the state's formal document on the project, the environmental assessment, does not appear to address congestion pricing or assume it will be implemented before the project is completed.

Instead, in a bizarre twist, revealed by Oregon Public Broadcasting last week, ODOT assumes that a Columbia River Crossing, which was killed off six years ago, will be in place by the time the Rose Quarter expansion is built. There's new life in the bridge project, with the governor calling for a development of a plan, as *The Oregonian* reported yesterday, but approval for that project is not guaranteed.

Eudaly also wrote an April 2 Facebook post elucidating her position on the project, where she voiced support for an environmental impact statement. That's a more thorough review by ODOT, which would potentially result in delays to the project.

The Portland Mercury

Portlanders Fight for Community Centers, Police Alternatives in Budget Townhall

*By Alex Zielinski
April 3, 2019*

More than one hundred impassioned Portlanders squeezed into IRCO's small auditorium last night in hopes of having their concerns about the city's proposed budget heard by city commissioners. The city certainly wasn't prepared for such a large crowd for its only budget townhall-style meeting of the year—staff ended up locking some 50 people out of the building due to capacity issues.

“The fact they’re keeping people out who want to speak, it shows the city is not interested in feedback,” said Lauren Tyers, who attended the meeting with her two young children. “They’re just going through the motions.”

For many, this meeting felt like the only chance they had to raise issues with proposed budget cuts before Portland City Council votes on a final budget on May 22.

While community centers and parks are regularly on the city budget chopping block, this year's cuts to Portland Parks and Recreation are particularly painful. With a \$6.3 million budget gap, caused by diminishing revenue sources, PPR has proposed to shutter Sellwood and Hillside community centers and North Portland's Columbia Pool, and greatly limit the hours and programming of the city's other community centers. PPR has also proposed to cut 70 full-time and part-time positions within the department.

The majority of public comment centered on these sweeping changes. Some wore swim caps to protest the slated pool closure, while others wore green to oppose the general reduction in park maintenance and programming. Other attendees came to ask commissioners to reroute police dollars toward more community-centric programs, and cut police programs that disproportionately target people of color.

Despite the variety of concerns that inspired Portlanders to show up Tuesday evening, attendees all shared the same complaint: They're tired of Portland's combative budget process.

"Every year, these meetings pit people in our community against each other," said Emily Golden-Fields, co-chair of Portland's Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) chapter and one of the people selected by a lottery to give public comment Tuesday night. "Here we are again, dancing to the same tune. I ask you in attendance, are you tired of having to beg?"

The audience cheered in response. Golden-Fields followed another speaker, Julie Currin, who asked commissioners to keep the Sellwood Community Center open, as it's one of the few affordable, accessible preschool and after-school care providers in the city. In her remarks, Currin noted that when she emailed a commissioner this request, she was told, "If you want to save your program, tell us what programs you want to cut."

"Which is a very frustrating response," Currin said. "I don't think we want a city where one neighborhood stands on the heads of others to put my kids on a life raft."

Other critiqued the city's stated commitment to equity, saying that the proposed job cuts, community center closures, and other program eliminations would add to the city's growing inequity issues.

"Please consider this decision through an equity lens," said a North Portland resident, who didn't give her name. She noted that in the 1980s, the pool offered a sanctuary for kids at risk of being caught up in gang violence and offered free lunches to low-income families, like her own. "Columbia Pool isn't just a building to me and my neighborhood," she said. "It's an opportunity for us to improve the lives of ourselves and our children."

Several city staff employed at community centers and PPR programs slated for cuts asked commissioners to reconsider, touting the economic and community benefits of their work.

The meeting also featured speakers with local activist group Care Not Cops, who shared a report highlighting the impact Portland policing has had on local non-profits and homeless advocacy groups. Care Not Cops calls for a freeze on police hiring and cuts to the PPB's proposed \$239,443,249 budget.

According to Teresa Raiford, founder of Don't Shoot PDX, that money should instead go to support communities that have systemically and historically been negatively impacted by police work

"If we continue to use the priority of public safety against our families instead of using that priority to build up communities, we'll continue to get exactly who we elect," Raiford said, gesturing toward the commissioners. "These people using us as pawns in a game of capitalism, patriarchy, and systemic discrimination."

Homeless advocates, including Street Roots Director Kaia Sand, highlighted the need for more city resources for programs that support the homeless, like the proposed mental health and nurse triage program baked into the Bureau of Emergency Communication (BOEC) budget.

The program reflects recommendations made in Street Roots' newly-proposed Portland Street Response report.

The city will host a number of smaller meetings about the 2019-20 budget between now and May 1, when Mayor Ted Wheeler will release his proposed budget. Community members will also have a chance to comment on Wheeler's budget before a final council vote. Find out more about those opportunities [here](#).

Commissioner Eudaly Takes Critical Stance Against I-5 Expansion Plan

By Blair Stenvick

April 3, 2019

Portland Commissioner Chloe Eudaly has added her voice to the chorus of influential Portland organizations critical of the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) plan to widen Interstate 5 in the Rose Quarter. She is also joining those organizations in calling for a more rigorous study into the project's potential environmental impact.

The public comment period for ODOT's Rose Quarter Improvement Project—which would add two lanes to a 1.7 mile stretch of I-5—ended Monday. In the last week of the comment period, several important institutions, including Portland Public Schools (PPS), the Albina Vision Trust, and Metro all submitted comments raising concerns about the project. On Tuesday, Eudaly, who is the city's transportation commissioner, issued a statement of her own mirroring many of those organizations' talking points.

"I've been listening and learning about Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) proposed I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project along with the public, and I share many of the concerns expressed by community members," begins the statement, which Eudaly posted on Facebook.

Those concerns include the following: that highway widening doesn't actually reduce traffic or lower carbon emissions in the long run; that expanding the highway would do further damage to NE Portland's Black community, and worsen the air quality at a middle school with a high racial minority population; and that congestion pricing—strategically tolling roads during high traffic times—could be a better solution for the area.

ODOT has maintained that this project would be a good thing for Portland's traffic and air quality problems, though independent studies and ODOT's own research refutes this. The

department has pointed to its own environmental assessment as proof to their claims, but many local transportation advocates question the veracity of that research.

That's why Eudaly—along with Metro, PPS, and others—is calling for ODOT to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which requires more research and public input than an environmental assessment does. ODOT told the Mercury last week it had not yet made a decision about whether it will conduct an EIS.

“I am hopeful that, as the Federal Highway Administration reviews the comments and input that came in during the EA process (including numerous comments from the City of Portland), they will determine that an Environmental Impact Statement is needed and the public will have another opportunity to address remaining concerns with the project,” Eudaly said in her statement.

Eudaly's statement is particularly noteworthy because her previous comments about the project have cautiously walked the line between supporting and opposing it. As she noted in the statement, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) does not have control over how ODOT spends state transportation money, and I-5 is a state-controlled road.

“I've been told that if this project does not move forward, these funds, all \$500M for the highway and surface streets, will be reallocated somewhere else in the region,” Eudaly said, “most likely on a significant freeway expansion project such as additional lanes on I-205 around West Linn.”

Eudaly also said she plans on sending a letter to the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), ODOT's governing body, asking that congestion pricing on I-5 be in place before the widening project is completed. That would bring the project more into alignment with Portland's Central City Plan.

“[W]hile congestion pricing brings up other concerns and challenges from the impact on lower-income drivers to traffic diversion onto neighborhood streets which must be addressed, it is the only proven strategy for getting people out of their single occupancy vehicles,” she said.