

The Portland Tribune

Your City Hall: Council to Vote on Startup Loan for Clean Energy Projects

*By Jim Redden
April 16, 2019*

Wednesday vote expected to be another major step toward implementing the Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund program approved by voters.

What is happening? On Wednesday, three days before Earth Day, the City Council is poised to take the next major step toward implementing the Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund program overwhelmingly approved by voters at the November 2018 general election.

Mayor Ted Wheeler has asked the council to authorize a temporary interfund loan not to exceed \$2.6 million from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's Solid Waste and Management Fund to the program to provide interim financing for its startup costs, including hiring staff.

What is the fund and program? Portlanders overwhelmingly voted to create them at the November 2018 general election. The ballot measure, passed by 65% of voters, imposes a 1% surcharge on large retailers doing business in the city.

It is expected to raise between \$54 million and \$71 million per year for clean energy projects, green jobs training, and programs that reduce greenhouse gases and promote economic, social and environmental benefits. The spending will help the city meet its climate action and equity goals.

The money will be deposited into the fund and then distributed as grants to nonprofit organizations, which submit applications to meet the goals outlined in the initiative measure. They include energy conservation and green job training programs targeted at low-income communities and communities of color.

Who will approve the spending? The measure requires the council to appoint a nine-person oversight committee of experts and community members, modeled after the successful Portland Children's Levy, which will recommend which projects get funded by the council.

The committee also will evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the funded programs in meeting their stated objectives and the overall goals of the measure. In addition, the fund will be subjected to an annual financial audit and a performance audit every two years.

What has the council already done? The council unanimously approved an ordinance to write the authorizing code and create the first positions on Feb. 21. "We are discussing 300 to 500 jobs new jobs yearly," Nate McCoy, executive director of the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon, said at the hearing. He estimated the program will create 300 to 500 living-wage jobs per year doing such things as installing solar panels on the rooftops of affordable housing projects.

Can I apply to be on the committee? The city is not expected to accept applications for the committee until later this spring. But those interested in learning more and following the program's progress can sign up for email notifications at www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/705673.

What else can I do? You can give the council your opinions of the fund and program at the contact information found at www.portlandoregon.gov. You also can testify at the hearing

scheduled for April 17 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 1221 S.W. Fourth Ave., Portland. The full text can be found at the agenda link on the city's website.

Transportation Leaders Drive New Perspective on Mobility

By Jim Redden

April 16, 2019

Ideas for convincing drivers to get out of their cars are discussed at Business for a Better Portland forum.

Getting people out of their cars is the greatest traffic challenge facing the Portland region, transportation officials agreed during a panel discussion last week.

TriMet General Manager Doug Kelsey said doing that will require big thinking, including changing the mission of the regional transit agency he oversees.

"TriMet is changing from a transit agency to a transportation option agency," said Kelsey, noting TriMet's new partnership with bike, scooter and ride-sharing businesses to offer customers door-to-door travel services.

For Metro, it may mean arguing against its own public polling on a regional transportation funding measure planned for the November 2020 general election ballot.

Multnomah County Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, who is co-chairing the task force developing the measure, admitted that multiple polls show most voters want new transportation funds spent on road projects. The polls include one conducted for Metro that was released in January.

But Vega Pederson said she and other leaders need to convince voters otherwise.

"The polls say, build more roads, make them bigger. It's incumbent on us as leaders to push the values that says that's not the best investment," Vega Pederson said.

The discussion took place during a Portland Design Week forum hosted by Business for a Better Portland on Tuesday, April 9.

The other panelists were Street Trust Executive Director Jillian Detweiler, Metro Councilor Juan Carlos Gonzalez, and Portland Bureau of Transportation Interim Director Chris Warner.

Like Kelsey and Vega Pederson, they all agreed that the public's current dependence on single-occupancy vehicles for most trips has resulted in congested, dangerous and environmentally harmful streets and freeways.

Asked by moderator Adam Davis, executive director of Oregon Humanities, to design a better system, Detweiler called for shrinking all current five-lane roads in the region to fewer lanes for motor vehicles and more for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Gonzalez said communities of color have been pushed out of their historic homes by redevelopment projects, and must be helped with the longer commutes they are now forced to endure.

Warner said the City Council is committed to investing more transportation funds in safety and other projects in historically underserved East Portland.

Kelsey warned that reducing the percentage of single-occupancy vehicle trips is an enormous challenge, however. He noted that only 4.2 percent of trips in the region currently are being made by transit, biking and walking — far fewer than in many other major cities around the world. And Kelsey said changes must be made in the entire Portland-Vancouver region.

"We need to have a regional conversation, not a municipal conversation, and that includes Clark County. The original hub-and-spoke system of people commuting in and out of Portland isn't working anymore. We need to figure out how to get people from suburb to suburb," Kelsey said.

Because the discussion was meant to be aspirational, no one proposed a list of projects intended to address the region's transportation needs. Such a list currently is being developed by the task force that Vega Pederson chairs. It reportedly could add up to tens of billions of dollars.

The regional funding measure was first proposed to help finance the Southwest Corridor MAX line that is in the final design stages. It is currently estimated to cost \$2.4 billion. Although the federal government is expected to pay half the cost, that still leaves \$1.2 billion that must be raised from state, regional and local sources.

No decisions on the other projects to be funded by the measure have been made yet. They must be spread throughout Metro's boundaries to give voters outside the corridor between Portland and Tualatin a reason to vote for it, however.

In a video shown at the end of the discussion, Metro Council President Lynn Peterson said the other projects will be concentrated in corridors where most economic activity takes place.

Business for a Better Portland was founded a little more than two years ago, originally as the Portland Independent Chamber of Commerce. Executive Director Ashley Henry said it was started by business owners who felt their values were not reflected in other business organizations.

Council to Consider Four Subsidized Housing Projects Wednesday

*By Jim Redden
April 14, 2019*

The four projects are eligible for property tax breaks to help support 32 units affordable to households earning 80 percent or less of the area median family income.

Property tax breaks to support the construction of 32 affordable apartments under Portland's inclusionary housing policy are scheduled to be considered by the City Council on Wednesday.

The apartments are in four different buildings scheduled for construction. The tax breaks are intended to ensure that lower-income households spend no more more than 30 percent of their monthly income on housing. Eligible households must earn no more than 60 or 80 percent of the area median family income (MFI), depending on the projects.

In 2018, the Portland metro area MFI for a household of three is \$58,640. The tax breaks on the affordable units are good for 10 years, and their affordability must be guaranteed for 99 years.

The inclusionary housing (IH) policy was controversial when the council first approved it because it is required for all projects with more than 20 units, and some developers said it would discourage future construction by making financing difficult because the other tenants must essentially pay more than otherwise to help support the affordable units over time.

The city says the IH program is a success, however. The project went into effect in February 2017. During its first two years, the city has permitted, or is in process to permit, a minimum of 422 IH units from 65 development projects — the equivalent to more than \$34 million-dollar public subsidy from privately financed developments.

The four projects to be considered Wednesday are:

- Arbor Lodge Apartments, located at 6545 N. Denver Ave., where 10 of the 66 units will be affordable to households earning no more than 80 percent of MFI.
- Killingsworth North D Block, located at 5510 N. Denver Ave., where three of the 36 units will be affordable to households earning no more than 60 percent of MFI.
- Koz on Killingsworth, located at 151 N. Killingsworth St., where 13 of the 88 units will be affordable to households earning no more than 80 percent of MFI.
- Nomad, located at 5620 N. Interstate Ave., where six of the 130 units will be affordable to households earning no more than 60 percent of MFI.

You can learn more about why the city considers the IH program successful [here](#).

The Portland Mercury

The Portland Arts Tax Is Due Today—Here's How Your \$35 Will Be Spent

*By Blair Stenvick
April 15, 2019*

Today is Tax Day, the date by which you should have held your nose, swallowed your pride, and filed your tax return with the federal government—knowing full well that far too much of your taxes will fund the military, and far too little of them will fund education, housing, transportation, et cetera.

But on a more local level, there is one transaction you can make today that you might actually feel good about: paying the Portland Arts Tax.

Passed by Portland voters in 2012, the sometimes-maligned Portland Arts Tax asks each city resident to pony up a flat \$35 on or before April 15 every year. That money is then distributed to local arts nonprofits and school districts by the Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC). Since its inception, it has raised \$63 million.

In the Mercury's recent spring arts issue, news editor Alex Zielinski found that, until recently, RACC's method for doling out those funds tended to favor the already large and powerful Portland art institutions. Per Alex's reporting:

“RACC currently calculates the amount of grant funding an organization receives based on that applicant's budget size. It's no surprise, then, that over the past decade, a whopping 57 percent of RACC's total grant dollars have been distributed among the city's five largest arts nonprofits: Portland Art Museum, the Oregon Symphony, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Portland Opera, and Portland Center Stage.”

But starting in 2020, that funding process is going to be turned on its head. In addition to looking at an organization's budget, RACC will also take into account its demonstrated commitment to

serving underrepresented communities. Smaller, more diverse arts organizations could see a big bump in RACC funding—and local art behemoths, like the Portland Art Museum, could see an estimated 59 percent drop in RACC dollars.

Here's what that means for you: The \$35 you pay on your arts tax today could be spent to help an arts organization that serves, hires, and promotes the work of people of color, or the LGBTQ community, or people with disabilities—basically, anyone besides the old white guys that fancy art galleries still tend to favor.

If you live within Portland city limits, you can pay your arts tax [here](#).