

The Oregonian

Portland Picks Sports Fields Concept for Massive Post Office Redevelopment

*By Elliot Njus
May 6, 2019*

Portland's central post office could be replaced with sports fields and basketball courts flanked by high-rises under a concept recommended by the city's urban renewal agency after weighing several contenders.

The concept for the public space in the long-planned redevelopment project was one of three floated last year by the agency, Prosper Portland, and its partners. Alternatives included a nature-focused "urban forest" and a series of scattered plazas.

The concept being advanced also integrates the city's "Green Loop" plan for a six-mile bike- and pedestrian-focused parkway through downtown, the Lloyd District and the Central Eastside.

The agency's staff made the recommendation after a series of open houses with input from other city bureaus, Mayor Ted Wheeler and the likely developer for the site, Continuum Partners of Denver. Portland-based ZGF Architects led the design team.

The Prosper Portland board of commissioners will vote on the recommendation Wednesday.

The redevelopment of the 14-acre central post office site, located near the west end of the Broadway Bridge, is one of the largest development opportunities in the city center. The project extends to other city-owned sites nearby, bringing the project area to a total of 32 acres.

Continuum was chosen as the city's partner in the planning effort last year. It won't be paid for the planning work, but it will get the first chance to buy the post office site from the city and pursue the development once the plan is complete. The sale of the land will pay back the \$88 million the city spent to buy the site from the U.S. Postal Service.

The post office has moved its sorting and distribution facility to a site near Portland International Airport but still operates a retail post office in the old building, which is expected to be demolished when the redevelopment moves forward.

Chief Outlaw Selects Jami Resch to Serve as Deputy Chief for Portland Police

*By Maxine Bernstein
May 3, 2019*

Jami Resch, a 20-year Portland police veteran, will fill the bureau's second-in-command job as deputy chief on May 23, Chief Danielle Outlaw announced Friday.

The announcement came a day after Robert Day retired as Outlaw's first deputy chief.

Resch, 45, of Portland, has had a quick rise in the bureau.

A year ago, Outlaw selected Resch, then a captain, to serve as assistant chief of investigations. She previously served as an acting commander of North Precinct, a lieutenant in the criminal intelligence division and a sergeant of the gun task force.

Resch also has served as manager of the bureau's Honor Guard and as a critical incident commander. She also has been a member of the bureau's Muslim police advisory council and Slavic advisory council.

"Assistant Chief Jami Resch brings a strong balance of perspective and experience to the role of deputy chief," Outlaw said.

Resch said she's honored and will work diligently to "promote excellence in our service and community relationships."

With Resch's promotion, Andrew Shearer will serve as the new assistant chief of investigations. Shearer was promoted in April 2018 to commander and has supervised the tactical operations division.

Shearer said he's humbled to work as part of the chief's leadership team. He said he'll work toward reducing crime "through community collaboration, meaningful relationships and nationally recognized best practices."

"We are excited for these changes as we continue to move forward in the realm of contemporary policing," Outlaw said.

Day, a 29-year bureau veteran, finished out one year of serving as Outlaw's deputy chief before retiring on Thursday.

When Outlaw took over the bureau on Oct. 2, 2017, she had planned to start as Portland's chief with her own hand-picked deputy from outside the bureau, but the city wasn't able to make arrangements for the new position before she began. With no salary or job parameters set, Outlaw's choice wasn't about to make the leap.

She then selected Day to fill the position. In late October 2017, the City Council approved the deputy chief's position, along with a new administrative assistant. Day's salary was \$174,720, according to city records. Resch's deputy chief's salary is still being negotiated, according to Lt. Tina Jones, bureau spokeswoman.

Day told The Oregonian/OregonLive that he supported the need for a deputy chief in Portland to run day-to-day operations while allowing the chief to deal with larger policy and strategic decisions, interact with City Hall and do outreach to the community.

Portland Officer Says He Couldn't 'Live With Myself' If He Let Harm Come to Hostage in Fatal 2018 Shooting

*By Maxine Bernstein
May 3, 2019*

Portland police Officer Kelly VanBlokland, the bureau's lead firearms instructor and a member of the tactical squad, kept watch on the two back windows of Room 16 of the Del Rancho Motel.

VanBlokland, armed with an AR-15 rifle equipped with a power scope, climbed up on a flat-bed truck in the business lot south of the Southeast Portland motel to get a better vantage point.

By then, he knew a man named Samuel Rice had tried to stab someone at the 7-Eleven across the street, then dragged a woman at knifepoint into the motel room. She was Rice's girlfriend.

The sharpshooter gave an account of what led up to his single rifle shot that killed Rice in a 481-page transcript of grand jury testimony released late Friday in the Oct. 10 shooting. The grand jury in November found no criminal wrongdoing by the officer.

The transcript indicates a fluid scene with a turbulent suspect threatening to harm himself and his girlfriend. Police evacuated the hotel and tried to negotiate with Rice, 30, over the phone but he had barricaded the door and screamed at officers to go away, testimony indicated.

From about 20 yards away, VanBlokland noticed movement through a clear glass pane window in the room, partially obscured by a drape. It looked as if someone was pacing back and forth inside, he said.

Over the police radio, other officers broadcast that they heard heavy furniture being moved inside Room 16. VanBlokland said he believed Rice was blocking the front door.

“I start to see movement – what I see is Mr. Rice,” the officer testified.

VanBlokland said Rice pushed a mattress against the room’s rear wall in an attempt to obscure the window with the clear glass – his only view into the room. The other rear window was frosted over. Rice’s right hand was in a fist, holding an object that VanBlokland later realized was a knife.

Rice had “this stone cold face look, and he’s just glaring at me,” the officer recalled.

VanBlokland tried to radio to other officers what he saw but the channel was “saturated” and he said he couldn’t get through.

Other tactical officers were positioned in hotel rooms on either side of Room 16. They prepared what’s called a gun port charge to blow a hole and breach a wall if they needed to charge inside.

Rice had dialed 911 but then hung up.

Crisis Negotiation Team Officer Benson Weinberger called him back. He described Rice's behavior as "manic."

His conversation with Rice was "disjointed" and "all over the place." Rice identified himself as "Aaron," and at one point, Rice threatened to cut his own ears off and send them to him, Weinberger testified.

"We really didn't have a communication going back and forth," Weinberger said. "It was more him yelling at me."

At one point, those on the call heard Rice say "you have two seconds" and then Rice hung up, making officers and crisis team members believe he was about to harm his girlfriend. Another officer thought he heard Rice say, "He's going to cut her throat," according to the testimony.

VanBlokland heard over the radio that Rice threatened, "If you don't leave, I'm going to kill her."

Sgt. Pete McDonnell, a supervisor at the scene, said if officers heard yelling coming from inside the room, they'd have to make entry, the testimony indicated.

VanBlokland went over what he knew: Rice had tried to stab someone across the street. He now had a woman locked in a room at knifepoint. Rice was fortifying the room and had made unrealistic demands to police and threats to harm his hostage.

“In my mind, we need to intervene and do something about this,” he said he thought, not wait until screams are heard. “He is going to kill her.”

VanBlokland continued to try to get on the radio, but when he'd press the communications button on it, he'd hear just a honk.

He needed to alert other officers and command staff, “If I see him again, I'm willing to use lethal force to end this event,” he testified.

Peering through the optic of his rifle, all of a sudden, Rice appeared again in the back window, VanBlokland said.

“And he's just sitting there staring at me,” the officer said. “He's staring at me, and I'm staring at him.”

VanBlokland said he didn't think any officer would be positioned by the motel room's front door, the backstop if he fired. Communication with Rice had broken off.

If he didn't act, VanBlokland said he thought, “He's going to disappear and I'm going to lose this chance to save her.”

He fired one round through the window. Rice disappeared.

VanBlokland this time was able to broadcast to officers on the police radio that he had fired a round and that the suspect was down on the south side of room.

Explosives in a side wall boomed. Officers rammed the front door to get in, threw in a flash-bang grenade and shattered the front window.

Rice was found lying on the back bathroom floor, his hostage was safe, officers broadcast.

Rice's girlfriend at the time, 30-year-old Talon Ochoa, testified that she and Rice had been a couple for a year and were staying at the motel after getting evicted from their apartment.

Ochoa said they'd been at the motel for a week with their two cats when they got up around 8 a.m. and went to a 7-Eleven across the street to buy oatmeal and drinks for breakfast.

As they were standing in line to pay for their food, Ochoa said she asked another man ahead of them if she could go first. When he said no, Ochoa said, Rice got upset, pulled out a kitchen knife and fought with the stranger. She said Rice was trying to stab the man.

The store clerk later broke up the fight, saying police were arriving. Ochoa said she and Rice then left and she wasn't sure if Rice stabbed the other man. The couple returned to the Del Rancho but forgot their key. She said Rice forced the door open.

Ochoa denied being pushed into the room by Rice, as some witnesses said, or that they had any argument while in the room. She said Rice moved one of the two beds and a nightstand to block the front door after they got inside. At some point, she knew Rice had called 911, but she didn't know what he said on the phone.

Ochoa said Rice appeared frustrated as police officers were outside. She noted that he peeked out the motel window twice and that officers wanted him to come out of the room but he refused because he had a warrant for his arrest.

“He wouldn't let me go outside,” Ochoa testified.

Ochoa later noted that she was afraid Rice was going to hurt her if she left the room and said she thought he was trying to trap her inside.

He told her that he'd cut her throat and cut off her ears, she said. The threats left her too afraid to try to leave, she said.

Rice was shot while opening a bathroom window to get some air, she said. She was sitting on the second bed when he was hit.

Police then shattered a front window and officers rushed in, pushing past the mattress and nightstand.

Rice died from a single wound to the head, shot in the lower edge of his right eyelid, according to Dr. Rebecca Millius, a deputy state medical examiner. She said toxicology tests showed Rice had cannabinoids in his bloodstream but no other drugs.

VanBlokland said the fatal shot marked the first time he has used deadly force in his 25-year police career.

"I knew that if he went back from that window and went and cut her throat like he said he was going to, I wouldn't be able to sleep," he testified.

"I wouldn't be able to live with myself for not being able to do my job," he said.

Opinion: How Portland Should Raise Revenue for Parks, Mental Health and Housing

*By Mary C. King (Guest Columnist)
May 5, 2019*

King is professor emerita of economics at Portland State University

Judging by our city leaders' current proposal of severe cuts to our beloved Bureau of Parks and Recreation and the chronic human misery on our streets, you wouldn't know that Portland is more prosperous than ever. Last fall, the Oregonian/OregonLive reported that median household incomes in the Portland area hit an historic peak, and business profits are high. We can and should do more to fund our city services locally. We can't wait for our federal and state governments to step up.

Portland city commissioners' single best strategy to fund healthy recreation programs, support mental health initiatives and invest in housing may be to follow the approach of the new tax created in 2018 by the Portland Clean Energy Initiative. Right now, the Clean Energy surcharge to the city business license tax is levied only on big, brick and mortar retailers, with revenues of \$500,000 or more in the city and global sales of at least \$1 billion a year.

Extending the 1 percent tax to giant firms in all industries, while maintaining the exemption for groceries, medicines and health care, could raise approximately \$200 million annually, extrapolating from a 2017 city revenue division report.

Meanwhile, for want of \$6.3 million, the city is talking about closing the Sellwood and Hillside Community Centers and Columbia Pool, significantly limiting hours and offerings elsewhere and eliminating 70 positions. Our recreation programs provide critical, affordable exercise options; inexpensive neighborhood preschools; beautiful, outdoor gathering spots and teen employment.

Rather than cutting, we should be expanding programs, centers and parks, as our population grows in size and density.

Our city and county Joint Office of Homeless Services runs well designed, comprehensive programs, but is seriously underfunded for the size of the problem. The office's proposed 2019 budget calls for just \$33 million from the city, but far more is clearly required to accomplish its goals. Portland's homelessness prevention efforts could be much more effective if they could scale up, take over more of the first responder role that police currently fill and include investments in public housing.

The genius of the business tax surcharge is that it is structured to protect small and medium-sized businesses while making it hard for huge corporations to avoid or pass on to customers. If big businesses want to sell in Portland, they have to pay the tax since it is on sales; it's as simple as that. They can't dodge it as they currently do federal and state profits taxes by booking profits in offshore tax havens or taking advantage of the corporate income tax breaks resulting from well-funded lobbying efforts over the years. And they can't simply pass the tax on because they are competing with smaller, local firms not subject to the tax surcharge.

We have considerable room to expand the top tier of our business taxes. Despite the endless complaints of business lobbyists, state and local taxes on companies doing business in Oregon are the second lowest in the country. Meanwhile, as Bloomberg reports, "profit margins for all of corporate America are near their all-time highs," especially for the largest corporations.

City leaders can no longer rely on our property tax system, crippled by 1990s "reforms" now cemented into our state constitution. Oregon's illogical property tax structure limits the growth of assessed values, while gradually shifting the property tax burden from commercial to residential property owners and creating tremendous inequity among households.

Portland's quality of life depends on expanding our parks and community centers for a growing population, while meeting local mental health and housing needs. It's time to be more proactive to raise the revenue to do that, particularly given how prosperous Portland has become.

The Portland Tribune

Your City Hall: Share Your Views on Mayor's Budget This Thursday

By Jim Redden

May 07, 2019

Only public hearing on proposed budget begins at 6:30 p.m. at the World Forestry Center, Miller Hall, 4033 S.W. Canyon Road, Portland.

WHAT'S HAPPENING? The Portland City Council hearing on Mayor Ted Wheeler's proposed budget is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, May 9, beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the World Forestry Center, Miller Hall, 4033 S.W. Canyon Road, Portland. It is the only time public testimony will be taken on the overall budget before the council begins a series of work sessions and votes on the final version Wednesday, June 12.

WHAT HAS WHEELER PROPOSED? The council has the most control over the record \$577.3 million general fund dollars the city expects to collect in the fiscal year that begins July 1.

The mayor proposes spending most of that money on existing programs, and on a few new initiatives. He is continuing to prioritize homeless services by renewing the nearly \$32 million provided to the city-county Joint Office of Homeless Services, continuing related existing city programs, and creating some new city services, such as mobile showers and bathrooms for use by homeless people.

WHAT IS CONTROVERSIAL? During recent public budget forums, a recommendation to cut \$6.3 million from Portland Parks & Recreation to close a projected budget shortfall drew the most heat. That would lay off 9% of the staff, shut down several community centers, and curtail numerous programs.

Wheeler is proposing an additional \$2.5 million to put off some of those decisions for 12 to 18 months, and to allow Parks Commissioner Nick Fish to appoint a task force to study potential long-term revenue sources, such as a voter-approved parks tax district.

Wheeler's decision is still controversial, however, because some cuts would still happen this year, and others could occur next year. Parks supporters are planning to attend the hearing to insist that the programs be permanently saved. They include groups in North Portland backing the continued operation of the Columbia Pool, which had been targeted for closure. The Hillsdale and Sellwood community centers still would close this year if nonprofit operators cannot be found.

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty also has said she will move to eliminate the Portland Police Bureau's Gun Violence Reduction Team, formerly known as the Gang Enforcement Team.

WHAT IS NEW? Perhaps the most important initiative is the study of a Rapid Street Response program that would create alternatives to dispatching police to reports of people experiencing mental health crises. The idea is to provide the most appropriate help and free up police for more serious calls.

The chief administrative officer would be directed to convene a work group that would propose a plan to the council no later than Nov. 15. Wheeler is requesting \$500,000 to start the effort, and would ask for more money later for the full program.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE? Details of Wheeler's proposed budget and other information related to the budget process are posted on the City Budget Office's website at portlandoregon.gov/cbo.

You also can read a previous Portland Tribune story on Wheeler's proposed budget at tinyurl.com/y2rcm9av.

WHAT IF I CAN'T MAKE THE HEARING? The mayor and council members are accepting comments by phone, mail and email. Contact information can be found on the city's website at portlandoregon.gov.

Motel Hostage-Taker Fatally Shot in Bathroom by Police

*By Zane Sparling
May 07, 2019*

Grand Jury testimony reveals details in shooting death of Samuel Rice at Del Rancho Motel in Portland

An armed man who barricaded himself and held his girlfriend hostage inside a Southeast Portland motel was killed by a single shot to the head fired by a police officer positioned about 20 yards away, according to new testimony.

Police responded to the Del Rancho Motel on Southeast 82nd Avenue near Flavel Street shortly after 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 11.

The shooting death of Samuel Edward Rice, 30, was determined to be a lawful act in defense of a third party by a grand jury convened by the Multnomah County District Attorney's office a month later.

In nearly 500 pages of jury proceedings, responding officers describe a "manic" hostage-taker, armed with a steak knife, who they thought might be high on methamphetamines due to his erratic behavior and threats to "cut off his own ears."

A toxicology report, however, found only evidence of cannabinoids in his blood.

The rapidly escalating standoff started in a nearby 7-Eleven after Rice's girlfriend got into a dispute with a customer about who was next in line. Rice intervened, pulling out his knife during the scuffle with customer Ronald Pearson Jr. in the chips aisle.

Pearson said he heard Rice say: "I'll gut you like a fish."

Rice and his girlfriend, Talon Tiara Ochoa, ran back to their motel room. Rice forced the door open because they had lost the key. Across the street, the 7-Eleven clerk dialed 911. So did Rice.

"I'm suing you for attempted murder of my fiancée," Rice told the emergency operator. "I'm going to fight back and it's going to kill me."

The transcripts of Rice's calls to 911 and with crisis negotiators are filled with nonsensical ramblings. At one point, Rice interjects "I've got the best and hottest boy voice in the world" then claims to have stabbed his genitals.

With police on the scene, Rice began to fortify his position using two mattresses and a nightstand. But before Rice hung up the phone for the final time, someone in uniform heard Rice demand that police back off or he would "cut her throat." That information was relayed over the police radio system.

The grand jury listened to several audio recordings, but only a written transcript was provided of the call containing the final threat.

"There was some difficulty that resulted in insufficient audio quality during the playback of one of the 911 calls," explained D.A. spokesman Brent Weisberg. "Only one or two officers actually heard Mr. Rice make that comment in person."

Officer Kelly VanBlokland heard the broadcast from intel officers about Rice's threat. The 25-year veteran and lead armorer for the Portland Police Bureau was positioned on the bed of a flat-bed truck in a parking lot south of the motel, armed with an AR-15.

VanBlokland described seeing a "stone-cold face" glaring at him through the bathroom window. He decided he was willing to use lethal force, but his radio was jammed with the chatter of other responders, preventing him from warning the other officers.

"He's staring at me and I'm staring at him. And I know that if I allow him to walk away from that window, he's going to go cut her throat," VanBlokland testified. "I knew that in that moment if I didn't take that opportunity, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night."

The bullet from VanBlokland's gun entered Rice's right eye socket and traveled through his skull, according to a deputy state medical examiner.

The situation unfolded differently for Ochoa, 30. After they both ran back into Room 16 of the Del Rancho, Ochoa decided to take a hot shower. She said Rice was opening the bathroom window to let out the steam when he was killed.

Ochoa met Rice at SL Start, a developmental disabilities service provider, where the couple had the same caseworker. They were living at the motel after being kicked out of an apartment near Eastport Plaza.

While testifying before the grand jury, Ochoa said she was trapped in the room, that she was afraid Rice was going to hurt her and that she heard him threaten to cut her throat.

"I was too afraid," she said. "I was shaking."