

The Oregonian

Fire destroys homeless camp in SE Portland, spreads to nearby house

*By Jayati Ramakrishnan
July 29, 2019*

A homeless camp in Southeast Portland caught fire Monday, destroying the camp and sending embers to the roof of a house across the street.

Portland Fire & Rescue in a press release said crews responded to the fire, in the 5300 block of Southeast 96th Avenue, around 4:05 p.m. The fire burned an area of about 20 by 50 feet and destroyed items including tarps, tents and shopping carts. A tree overhead caught fire as well.

No one was injured. Portland Fire & Rescue Lt. Laurent Picard said the department had not yet identified a cause nor determined whether anyone who lived in the camp was there when the fire started.

After crews had extinguished the fire at the camp, they noticed that the roof of a house across the street had caught fire after embers drifted across the street.

Crews extinguished the second fire before it spread to the rest of the house and used a chainsaw to cut the roof material off. The residents were not home when the fire started, and the rest of the house was not affected.

Portland Fire & Rescue reminded Portland residents that embers from barbecues or backyard fire pits can spark fires and urged people to keep them at least 15 feet from any structure.

Political ties may yield taxpayer boost for private housing developers in Portland

*By Gordon Friedman
July 30, 2019*

Former government officials turned businessmen may be among the first to profit from Portland's new clean energy tax with help from their longtime political allies, according to interviews and public records.

The team of entrepreneurs, which includes former City Commissioner Erik Sten and former State Treasurer Randall Edwards, intends to raise \$150 million to launch investment funds that purchase, rehab and finance construction of affordable housing in Portland, Sten said in an interview.

And an influential figure in Portland City Hall wants to sweeten their plans by paving the way for them to tap the new Portland Clean Energy Fund.

Marshall Runkel, chief of staff to Commissioner Chloe Eudaly and an architect of the energy tax, says he will help the businessmen access that pot of taxpayer money to pay for energy efficiency upgrades at the aging apartment complexes they want to buy.

Runkel, who in interviews strongly denied exerting any undue influence in favor of Sten, previously worked for the ex-commissioner, and his connections to Sten's business partners run deep.

Atop the team of businessmen is Rey Ramsey, a former Stoel Rives attorney who was director of Oregon's state housing agency from 1989 to 1993. He later worked in business and nonprofits, including as board chairman of Habitat for Humanity International, before founding investment firm Centri Capital in 2017.

Centri, which Ramsey operates from New York and Washington, D.C., has already raised more than \$50 million to invest in low-income housing in Baltimore, Memphis and Philadelphia, according to a prospectus reviewed by The Oregonian. The document states those investments were planned for the first quarter of this year.

Because of Sten's influence, Ramsey has also turned the company's sights to Portland.

Sten contacted Ramsey last year with a plan to invest in Portland and seek a Clean Energy Fund outlay. "I was like, 'Oh my God,'" Ramsey said. "The light bulb went off."

Ramsey said he followed the clean energy tax's progress to the ballot and was a big believer in its potential to assist housing developers.

Through it, he said, "I think that we can marry one of Portland's big issues — affordable housing — with what needs to be done in terms of climate change."

Specifically, Centri Capital aspires to buy large, aging apartment complexes where rents are low because of the units' location or state of disrepair. The company would rehab the buildings, improve their energy efficiency, then commit to keep rent increases modest for decades to come while still turning profits for investors.

Proponents of the clean energy tax never talked about the money being used that way, but it did make clear that energy-saving home retrofits would be a prime expenditure.

Voters were told the money, raised by a 1 percent tax on retail sales by large corporations operating in Portland, would be spent on renewable energy infrastructure, energy efficiency retrofits and green jobs training.

Ramsey had long sought to return to Oregon and liked Sten's idea of investing in Portland. He hired Sten in January to lead Centri's Pacific Northwest efforts and set what he described as an "aggressive" fundraising target.

The transition was a natural fit for Sten, a longtime affordable housing advocate who during his 12 years as an elected city commissioner served nine years as the official overseeing affordable housing programs.

Sten, in turn, has brought to Centri his business partner, David Thurman, who was treasurer of Portland's city government for 10 years.

When he left city office at the height of the Great Recession, Sten founded companies to help homeowners avoid foreclosure; he hired Thurman as chief investment officer.

The firms worked by purchasing junk mortgages from underwater homeowners, which they refinanced with government loans. Ramsey is folding the mortgage businesses under Centri's operations, Sten said.

Separately, Thurman launched his own capital management firm, where he employed Sten.

Also on the Centri team is Edwards, the former state treasurer. Along with serving in that office from 2001 to 2009, Edwards is husband to powerhouse Nike lobbyist and Portland Public Schools official Julia Brim-Edwards.

The connections between Ramsey, Sten, Thurman and Edwards are numerous and stretch back many years, according to public records and contemporaneous news reports.

Ramsey and Sten knew each other while in government and through housing activism; in 1999, a foundation operated by Ramsey loaned \$20 million to the city to jumpstart a housing project boosted by then-Commissioner Sten. When he was state treasurer, Edwards separately approved issuing \$20 million in government bonds to finance another of Sten's housing initiatives. Sten and Thurman were business partners for years.

Their connection to City Hall: Marshall Runkel.

Runkel was an aide to then-Commissioner Sten from 1996 to 2005. He worked for Ramsey's tech-focused foundation from 2005 to 2007. And he crossed paths with Edwards and Thurman, neither of whom returned messages seeking comment, during their many years in government.

Runkel is also deeply networked in the clean energy and home retrofit industries that the Portland Clean Energy Fund seek to boost.

In 2008, Runkel became a partner at EcoTech, a construction company that performed energy efficient home upgrades. Along with running the company, he personally installed insulation and helped homeowners weather-strip doors and windows.

Five years later, Runkel was hired as director of contractor services for Oregon Clean Energy Works, which offered similar services to EcoTech. Among its notable projects was a retrofit of the governor's mansion with special storm windows and low-energy light bulbs.

By 2015, Runkel was back to politics, managing the startup campaign of Chloe Eudaly, who won a surprise victory the next year.

In City Hall again, Runkel was a key figure in the campaign for the clean energy tax. Emails show he interfaced with the many private nonprofits that supported the tax and obtained advice on its wording and effects from city lawyers and economists. Runkel relayed the feedback via his private Gmail account.

Portland voters adopted the tax in November 2018 with a 65 percent "yes" vote. It applies 1 percent tax on retail sales by businesses with U.S. sales of at least \$1 billion, and city estimates show it may collect \$70 million a year.

Tax-financed projects are to primarily benefit low-income people and people of color.

Shortly before the tax passed, Rich Rodgers, an affordable housing developer in Portland, emailed Runkel to discuss what he called the "last pieces of the financing puzzle." Rodgers worked with Runkel for many years as an aide to Sten.

In his email, Rodgers recommended the tax be written so 20 percent of its revenues go to affordable housing projects and that a nonprofit administer it. As an example, he pointed to Meyer Memorial Trust, the organization seeded by grocer Fred Meyer. Private capital could also be mixed in, Rodgers said.

By February, Runkel had reached out to Sten to share this idea. Sten then emailed Runkel with information about Centri Capital's affordable housing fund.

“I think the model fits nicely with Commissioner Eudaly’s vision and work in support of renters and could be paired with any number of strategies to add additional impact,” Sten wrote.

He raised the possibility that Centri could tailor-make its fund “to align with local strategy and timing.”

Runkel forwarded Sten’s message to Rukaiyah Adams, the chief investment officer of Meyer Memorial Trust. He told her he had been mulling a way “to compete for significant funding from the clean energy fund by aggregating it with other sources of capital.”

Runkel said he knew Meyer Memorial was exploring its own housing investments and suggested he and Adams meet with Sten and Ramsey, the Centri chief executive.

A spokeswoman for Meyer Memorial did not respond to requests for comment and Adams declined to comment.

City officials beyond Runkel have recognized the value of blending the energy tax with cash-laden nonprofits like Meyer Memorial Trust.

Sam Baraso, the city’s manager of the energy tax, organized a meeting between himself and the many social justice-oriented nonprofits that backed the tax at the Meyer Memorial Trust headquarters building on June 17.

The meeting’s purpose, according to a copy of the agenda, was to explore “promising leverage opportunities” for the tax funds.

The agenda states those opportunities “could involve the use of innovative financing techniques and market development tools, often in partnership with private sector funds and/or additional public sector funds.”

It’s conceivable that Meyer Memorial may play a role in such an arrangement.

According to a senior Meyer official, who was not permitted to speak on the record, the nonprofit’s board has committed \$20 million to start a real estate investment trust with development firm Gerding Edlen.

Negotiations are complete, but the trust has not been publicly announced because Gerding Edlen is undergoing an internal reorganization, the official said. The official added that the trust will be structured to invest in affordable housing and Meyer leaders hope for it to grow into a \$1 billion publicly-listed fund.

Sten acknowledged talks with Gerding Edlen but declined to give details. Ramsey said Centri has engaged in talks Meyer Memorial Trust, which he called “a great institution.”

According to Meyer Memorial’s grants database, the nonprofit awarded nearly \$600,000 to one of Ramsey’s foundations, One Economy Corporation, in lump sums in 2001, 2005 and 2010. Also formerly employed at One Economy: Marshall Runkel.

Runkel said a partnership between the city government, Centri Capital, Meyer Memorial Trust and others would be a “powerful” enterprise. But he added, “There’s no ‘there’ there yet.”

To be sure, Runkel has no direct power to award Centri Capital or any other firm an appropriation of energy tax money, which is to be allotted by a not-yet-formed committee appointed by the City Council.

He said he has approached would-be recipients of energy tax funds with a helping hand besides Sten and Centri Capital.

As an example, Runkel provided a PowerPoint slideshow he presented in February to a trade group for energy efficient home builders, which implores potential grant recipients to formulate their ideas.

He also provided an April email showing a brief exchange with staff from Living Cully, a neighborhood group founded by energy tax supporters, about the construction of affordable backyard cottages. The possibility of building those units with energy tax revenues was raised at a later meeting, Runkel said.

It's far from unusual for public officials to assist business people, said Frank Zerunyan, a professor of governance at the University of Southern California. But Runkel's status as Commissioner Eudaly's chief of staff and his close ties to Sten may cause the perception of giving an unfair leg-up.

"This is not some janitor who knows a couple of people," Zerunyan said. "It's a chief of staff who presumably has a strong influence on decisions his boss makes."

Runkel said in interviews that he was helping Sten because he views his business plan as smart and, if put into practice, good for Portland.

"Involving talented people who have a proven track record of getting things done? You bet I'm doing that," Runkel said. "You have to start from a deeply cynical place to say this is some kind of insider deal."

Sten and Ramsey have "sterling reputations and long track records of doing good," Runkel said. If it's wrong to help them, he said, "then I don't want to be right."

Though Centri's plans are still aspirational, the company is ingratiating itself with city leaders.

A spokesman for Kimberly Branam, the city's economic development director, confirmed she met in March with Sten and Runkel to discuss opportunity zones, the tax-preferred areas Centri wishes to invest in. Sten met Branam again later in March, this time with business partners Thurman and Edwards, to talk more about the tax zones.

Sten then introduced Branam to Ramsey in May. She was receptive to the premise of more affordable housing and private equity capital in Portland, Ramsey said: "Who would not be interested in bringing additional resources to their city?"

Sten also met with Mayor Ted Wheeler to discuss Centri business. He recalled the mayor being "very supportive" of the company's aims. Wheeler, Sten said, "asked us what he could do to help."

The company's nascent closeness with key officials is helpful not only to the city, which regularly seeks financing for public housing projects, but is also "attractive to investors," Sten said.

The former commissioner said he realizes his many connections to Portland's elite opens doors for pecuniary ambitions. He insisted, however, that he has always "put the needs of the community first" and continues to do so.

"I'm not a person who's trying to trade on anything I used to do," Sten said.

"I may be able to easily get a meeting with the mayor," he said, but energy tax grants should not be awarded to his or anyone else's company "without a very scrutinized, transparent process."

Beyond the city government, Sten sees another potential partner for Centri Capital.

Along with being managing director of the real estate investment firm, he is also a part-time lobbyist at Strategies 360, a multi-state political consulting outfit.

In that role, Sten is an adviser to the Portland Diamond Project, a group of businessmen seeking to bring a Major League Baseball team to Portland. (Sten said he has not registered as a lobbyist for the baseball effort because his work on it is internal rather than with government officials.)

“I don’t personally have any relationship to the Diamond Project. I’m not trying to be cute about it,” Sten said, before acquiescing to the fact that he is “on the baseball strategy team.”

If the baseball effort is successful, its backers will be under pressure to construct thousands of affordable apartments near a Major League stadium as they have promised. Asked if Centri Capital would seek to finance construction of those units, Sten replied, “Absolutely.”

The Portland Tribune

Sources: Wheeler criticized by both sides of protests

By Jim Redden

July 25, 2019

Plus, the Southern Poverty Law Center wins a new lawsuit with a Portland tactic and the Multnomah County DA race is off to an unexpected start

Mayor Ted Wheeler continues to be criticized from both sides for the police handling of the dueling downtown political protests.

Left-wing protesters have repeatedly accused Wheeler, who also is police commissioner, of allowing the police to protect the right-wing protesters. And now right-wing protesters are accusing Wheeler of ordering the police to allow left-wing anti-fascist protesters — sometimes called "antifa" — to run rampant through the streets.

National right-wing provocateur Joe Briggs has even announced he will hold an "End Domestic Terrorism" rally in Portland on Saturday, Aug. 17, with such far-right groups as the Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Oathkeepers, Patriot Prayer and American Guard. If Briggs goes through with his plan, anti-fascist protesters and others on the left undoubtedly will show up, fights will erupt and both sides will accuse Wheeler of supporting the other side again.

Law Center wins with Portland tactic

Lawyers with the Southern Poverty Law Center have won a lawsuit they discussed in Portland during a conference commemorating the 30th anniversary of the killing of Ethiopian refugee Mulugeta Seraw by racist skinheads.

Federal Magistrate Judge Jeremiah Lynch has ordered online neo-Nazi publisher Andrew Anglin to pay Tanya Gersh more than \$14 million for anti-Semitic attacks he inspired against her in 2016 and 2017.

Speaking at the Nov. 13, 2018 conference, two SPLC directors said the suit was modeled after the successful one the civic rights organization filed against White Aryan Resistance founder Tom Metzger and his son John following Seraw's death.

The directors included Portland attorney Elden Rosenthal, who represented the Seraw family in the Portland suit that bankrupted the Metzgers.

"The court today made clear that this type of conduct is intolerable in a civil society and that those who would engage in it must pay the price," David Dinielli, deputy legal director at the SPLC, said about the July 15 ruling.

DA race off to unexpected start

The Multnomah County District Attorney's race is not shaping up as expected yet.

The ACLU and other criminal justice report advocates have been supporting liberal outsiders in district attorney races across the country. But so far, only current and former prosecutors are lining up to replace Multnomah County DA Rod Underhill, who has announced he will not seek reelection in 2020.

As reported by the Portland Mercury, they include former Assistant Oregon U.S. Attorney Ethan Knight, former Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Mike Schmidt, and current Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Mariel Mota. But the Mercury notes that Schmidt has advocated for a more equitable cash bail system and reforms to the state's drug crime sentencing rules.

Portland OKs new oil train equipment at Zenith Terminal

*By Zane Sparling
July 29, 2019*

Bureau of Development Services issues permit to Zenith Energy Management for Front Avenue facility.

Zenith Energy Management is in the clear to unload oil trains using its new equipment in Northwest Portland.

The Bureau of Development Services issued a temporary certificate of occupancy — effective Thursday, July 18 — that allows Zenith to transfer crude oil from tanker cars to the preexisting storage terminals using a newly-built racking system.

The industrial facility on Front Avenue isn't the final destination for the oil, which is then shipped by sea to refineries.

City officials say the permit doesn't increase capacity above the 44 railcars already approved for that spur of train tracks, as the old offloading system has been shuttered so workers can add safety upgrades.

"As long as these facilities exist, it's important that they are as safe as possible," said BDS Director Rebecca Esau. "We completely share the Council's and public's concerns. Climate change is real, it's happening rapidly and action is needed now."

In April, environmentalists with Extinction Rebellion PDX turned the terminal into a stage for climate change protests and blockades that briefly disrupted operations and ultimately triggered 25 arrests. The group made headlines again on July 19 for pouring 50 gallons of fake blood outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Southwest Portland.

"Climate justice and immigration justice are intertwined," the group said in a statement.

According to city staff, the Zenith installation includes "state-of-the-art" improvements to safety infrastructure, including a foam fire suppression system, spill containment in the offloading area, a fire alarm and sprinklers.

City Hall blocked the expansion of all fossil fuel infrastructure in Portland in 2016, but the rule didn't apply to Zenith because the previous owners, Arc Terminals, applied for their permits in 2014.

"Decisions on permit applications are made according to the regulations that are in effect when the application is submitted," said Terry Whitehall, a city building official. "The project meets all applicable code requirements, so we have no authority to delay or deny [the permit]."

Mayor Ted Wheeler claims his hands are tied as well, but says he doesn't support the project because it's built on an earthquake liquefaction zone.

Geotechnical evaluations prepared for Arc Terminals don't dispute that notion. One report notes that the facility was originally constructed before the region's elevated quake risk was identified.

"Given the potential for liquefaction at this site, the cost of seismic restraint for the proposed structure would be prohibitive," states the 101-page report dated Feb. 18, 2015.

Representatives from Zenith did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but the Tribune will update this article if we hear back.

Ted Cruz seeks federal probe of Wheeler's antifa 'sympathy'

By Zane Sparling

July 25, 2019

Texas senator calls for RICO investigation by U.S. Attorney General William Barr into local anti-fascist movement.

Is Antifa a racket? U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz thinks so.

In a new letter, the prominent Texas Republican seeks a federal racketeering investigation into Portland's anti-fascist movement — and Mayor Ted Wheeler's "apparent sympathy" to the black-cloaked cadre.

"You are surely aware that Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has staunchly refused to deploy and support local law enforcement to restore order and prevent Antifa robberies and armed assaults," Cruz wrote in a Tuesday, July 23 letter to U.S. Attorney General William Barr.

"It is no mystery why," the three-page letter continues. "Antifa's violence is aimed to silence dissent from authoritarian left-wing views. Mayor Wheeler apparently agrees with those views."

Racketeering charges, created by the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act of 1970, can take down entire criminal syndicates by grouping separate crimes together in one trial, with leaders on the hook for misdeeds they ordered underlings to carry out. Prosecutors, however, must show a pattern, proof of organization and an impact on interstate commerce.

Cruz, the runner-up for the GOP's presidential nomination in 2016, says Mayor Wheeler denied Oregonians their civil rights when he ordered local police not to patrol near an activist encampment surrounding a federal immigration facility last year.

Cruz also invoked the brain hemorrhage inflicted on live-streamer Andy Ngo during recent street clashes as an impetus to act, comparing Antifa with notorious groups like the Klu Klux Klan and the mafia.

Wheeler squabbled with Cruz on Twitter after the June 29 brawl drew national attention, denying that he ordered police to stand down at the protest and saying the investigation money could be better spent on "infrastructure, affordable housing [or] mental health services."

Wheeler has gone mum on the matter since. A spokesman, Tim Becker, told the Tribune the mayor "has no comment on Senator Cruz's new letter."

Portland police launch sexual assault evidence tracking system

By Jim Redden

July 24, 2019

Online portal developed by the Portland Police Bureau is expected to be available statewide to aid survivors

An online system that allows survivors of sexual assaults in Portland to track the progress of their evidence testing is expected to be available statewide in mid-2020.

The Sexual Assault Management System Victim Portal developed by the Portland Police Bureau has been active since May. It is an online portal where survivors of sexual assaults can track the status of their Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence kits.

"Being able to provide survivors with access to real time updates is a tremendous leap forward in improving our victim-centered approach in these investigations," said Chief Danielle Outlaw. "We are excited to be able to share this innovative technology throughout the state."

The system, also called the SAMS Victim Portal, was developed and launched in response to House Bill 4049, which was passed by the 2018 Oregon Legislature and requires law enforcement agencies to give survivors anonymous access to the current status and past progress of their sexual assault kits.

The 2018 law grew out of Melissa's Law, which the Legislature passed in 2016 and is named after 14-year-old Melissa Bittler, who was assaulted and killed by a serial rapist across the street from her family's Northeast Portland home in December 2001.

At the time of her death, sexual assault kits from at least two other young victims attacked by the same rapist four years earlier sat unprocessed on evidence shelves at Portland Police Bureau. They were tested only after detectives investigating Bittler's case noticed similarities in the attacks and sent the kits to the forensic lab for testing.

Sexual assault kits typically contain hair and body fluids from the victim and in some cases, similar samples from the attacker, which can be used to identify a DNA profile.

The law, which took effect Jan. 1, 2017, requires police to pick up a kit within seven days after notification from a hospital and submit it to forensic lab for testing within 14 days.

State lawmakers boosted state police's budget by \$1.5 million specifically to add nine new positions to help with processing the kits.

The portal was developed in 2018 by the bureau's IT Department in collaboration with the bureau's Sex Crimes Unit, and was funded by a Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant.

Survivors receive their SAFE kit number with their discharge paperwork from the hospital. That number can be entered in the website to receive real time updates on the status of their kit. Once

the number has been entered, the screen displays a diagram showing the kit's progress and current status.

The results are not available online.

According to the bureau, the portal was specifically designed with the survivor's privacy in mind and therefore does not require login information so users can remain completely anonymous. In addition, the portal only displays the status of the kit and does not provide any sensitive or personal information.

You can find the website at <https://trackit.osp.oregon.gov>.

Your City Hall: Council to vote on \$60 fee for rentals

By Jim Redden

July 30, 2019

Economic study says most landlords will pass the cost onto renters, hurting lower-income households the most

WHAT IS HAPPENING? This Wednesday the City Council will consider imposing a fee on landlords of \$60 per year on rental units in Portland to fund the Office of Rental Services. Regulated units that are affordable to families earning 60% or less of the region's median family income would be exempt. Multifamily NW, the largest organization representing landlords in the region, opposes the fee.

WHAT DOES THE OFFICE DO? The council created the office within the Portland Housing Bureau in 2017 to register all rental units in Portland and to provide a range of services to renters. The services include: education on landlord-tenant laws and policies; enforcement of fair housing laws; legal assistance; relocation assistance; mediation services and more.

WHY IS THE FEE NEEDED? The council funded the office this year with \$2.8 million in general fund and one-time dollars, including cannabis tax funds. The council directed the office to recommend a fee structure that would make it self-sufficient.

The office has determined there are 121,000 rental units in Portland. Of those, 20,000 are affordable to households earning 60% or less of the regional MFI. That leaves 101,000 for the fee to be applied to. The \$60 per year fee would raise \$3.6 million for the next fiscal year, which is what the office will be requesting.

With the current average market rate rent in Portland at \$1,425 per month, the office says the fee equals approximately one-third of 1% of the average Portland rent collected annually. The fee would increase each year for inflation.

HOW DOES THE FEE COMPARE TO OTHER CITIES? Many other cities charge similar annual fees. Some are higher, some are lower. According to the office, Boston charges \$25 (\$15 renewal), Los Angeles charges \$43.32, Seattle charges \$175 plus \$2 per unit, and Minneapolis charges between \$70 and \$700 plus \$5 per unit.

WHAT DO CRITICS SAY? When Multifamily NW learned the fee was going to be proposed, it commissioned a study of its potential effects by the local Johnson Economics consulting firm. The report says that most landlords will raise rents \$60 per year to pay the fee, increasing housing costs for renters. Because the fee is a flat \$60 per year, the increase will be regressive, meaning lower-income renters will pay more of their earnings to cover it than wealthier renters.

"Apparently the City Council has forgotten we are in a housing crisis," said Multifamily NW Executive Director Deborah Imse.

Some landlords also complain that the fee will be on top of other cost increases generated by the council, including mandatory relocation assistance in certain situations and new application screening requirements.

"We're doing everything we can as a housing provider to keep costs affordable, but these new policies are pushing prices in the other direction," said Jessica Greenlee, director of operations for Affinity Property Management.

WHAT CAN I DO? You can read the ordinance on the agenda page of the city's website. You also can find contact information for all council members at the website, which is portlandoregon.gov.

Willamette Week

Portland Homeless Camp Catches Fire, Igniting Roof of Nearby Home

*By Rachel Monahan
July 29, 2019*

A Portland homeless camp went up in flames, and the roof of a nearby home caught on fire as a result.

A Portland homeless camp went up in flames Monday afternoon, setting the roof of a nearby home on fire.

"Embers from the initial fire that had drifted across the street landed on the roof of this house and ignited it," says a press release from Portland Fire and Rescue.

A fire engine responded at 4:05 pm to the report of a fire at a Lents homeless camp on Southeast 96th Avenue.

Among the things that the fire bureau says were aflame at the homeless camp: tarps, shopping carts, "possibly tents" and a tree. The fire burned a 100-square-foot area. The fire bureau says the cause of the homeless camp fire is undetermined.

The bureau reports there were no reported injuries to campers or the residents of the home.

"PF&R crews extinguished the roof fire and then used chainsaws to cut off the roofing material to ensure it was fully extinguished," the news release states. "Upon further investigation, fire crews found that the roof fire had not extended into the house and was limited to the roof."

Portland Human Resources Director Serilda Summers-McGee Is Leaving for Private Sector Next Month

By Rachel Monahan

July 29, 2019

"The time has come for me to devote all my efforts to running my own business—Workplace Change, LLC," Summers-McGee wrote in a July 22 email.

The City of Portland's human resources director, Serilda Summers-McGee, is leaving her job for private employment.

Summers-McGee has been the city's chief human resources officer since 2017. She joined the HR bureau two years ago from Prosper Portland, the city's economic development agency.

"The time has come for me to devote all my efforts to running my own business—Workplace Change, LLC," Summers-McGee wrote in a July 22 email to all city employees.

In the email, she described her role at the city as, in part, "a secret mission: to re-imagine and reframe Human Resources within the City of Portland, embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into every traditional HR function; develop a healthy workplace culture and celebrate our individual complexities while balancing them against the risk of a litigious world."

She says she will concentrate on similar efforts in the private sector at Workplace Change, LCC. It's a human resources consultancy firm.

Summers-McGee is the wife of Charles McGee, who was acquitted in a sexual assault trial in March.

Trash Companies Gag at Portland Tax Hike

By Rachel Monahan

July 29, 2019

They say collection is confusing, and they want out.

Garbage haulers are still begging Portland City Hall to exempt them from the new Portland Clean Energy Fund business tax.

As WW reported last month, the city is hiking garbage bills 20 cents a month as an unexpected result of voters approving the tax on large corporations to fund green energy projects ("Garbage Tax," WW, June 26, 2019).

Under city rules, all 11 garbage companies operating in the city will pass on the 20-cent surcharge to their customers. But only three of those companies are big enough to be subject to the tax increase. That means some companies will be collecting 20 cents from customers each month, even though the companies don't owe the city any money.

In a July 1 memo, the companies ask what mechanism the city will use to rectify that imbalance. They specifically ask what the city wants the companies that don't owe anything to do with the money they collect: "It is unclear what they are to do with the additional 20 cent per customer per month revenue collected from their customers."

It's perhaps surprising that companies exempted from the tax would turn down free money. Instead, they've stuck together.

Less surprising: The garbage companies do not suggest a way to equally redistribute the collected fees. Instead, they ask to be exempted from the Clean Energy Fund.

"Exemption would eliminate inequities, discrepancies and confusion for the haulers," they write.

City revenue officials are still deciding on the rules for the tax. "All potential amendments are still being considered," says Mayor Ted Wheeler spokesman Tim Becker.

The Portland Mercury

Multnomah County and Portland Take Steps Toward Public Internet Access

By Blair Stenvick

July 29, 2019

Internet access could someday be a public utility in Multnomah County, just like water, trash pickup, and electricity.

Portland City Council will vote Wednesday to enter into an agreement with Multnomah County to conduct a feasibility study on constructing a publicly owned fiber network, which would allow the county to provide a public internet service. Such a move would break down the monopoly on internet access currently enjoyed by private companies like Comcast and CenturyLink, and ensure that county residents wouldn't have a barrier to entry for using the internet based on income level or geography.

In some parts of Multnomah County, only 40 percent of households have access to high-speed internet. A recent Harvard study found that public internet access tends to be less expensive for consumers than private options.

"The digital equity gap is real in our county," said Bob Leek, who directs the county's Department of County Assets, at a February county board meeting. "Access to connectivity should be like access to water and electricity."

Multnomah County dedicated \$150,000 to fund the study last year. The cities of Wood Village, Gresham, Troutdale, and Fairview will dedicate a combined \$50,000, and the city of Portland will contribute \$25,000, bringing the study's total budget to \$300,000. The study will look at Portland's existing fiber cables and other broadband infrastructure, and determine what would be necessary to provide a county-wide public internet utility service.

Hundreds of communities across the US already operate their own broadband networks—but as the Oregonian reported last year, a network that stretched across all of Multnomah County would be the country's largest municipal broadband system.

Portland has been seen as a leader in fair internet access since the late 1990s, when city leaders fought against a potential AT&T monopoly on cable lines; more recently, Portland City Council adopted a broadband strategic plan in 2011, and in 2014 Google considered building a fiber network in town, which City Council lobbied aggressively for. Google ended up passing on Portland in favor of projects in other cities, but the dream of public broadband in Portland was kept alive by Municipal Broadband PDX, a campaign managed by nonprofit Municipal Broadband Coalition of America, which is now set to facilitate the county's feasibility study. (For more on Portland's long will-they-or-won't-they relationship with public broadband, read the Mercury's deep-dive on the issue from last year.)

A feasibility study is just the first step in planning for a public broadband network, and it's not yet known how much this might cost, or how it would be paid for. When Google was considering installing a fiber network in Portland, the estimated cost of the project was \$300 million, and the cost of covering the entire county would likely be even steeper.

In addition to cost, the study will look at factors like infrastructure requirements, potential partnerships with other public or private agencies, and the public benefits and risks of public broadband. Multnomah County officials are spending the summer planning for the feasibility study, and will update the public on their plans in September.

"Given the size of our community and the complexity of our community," Leek said at the February county board meeting, "it's going to take a large coalition of people to pull this off successfully."

OPB

Northwest Portland's Urban Forestland Expands By 22 Acres

*By Monica Samayoa
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Nature lovers will soon have more urban forest to explore in Northwest Portland, now that 22 acres of undeveloped land have been donated by a local real estate investor.

Portland Audubon's Wildlife Sanctuary is now a 172-acre forest refuge.

That's after Marty Kehoe and his family decided to donate Pittock Place — a 22-acre plot of land that borders Forest Park.

"As a family, we talked a lot about this" said Marty Kehoe in a press release statement. "We loved the property and felt that it would make a wonderful gift – not only to the Portland Audubon, but as a permanent gift to the whole city."

The undeveloped land is worth an estimated \$14 million and was slated for the development of 32 multimillion-dollar homes. The Kehoe's only request for the donation was for the remaining mortgage of the property be paid off.

Audubon donors were able to raise the last \$200,000 to pay off the mortgage to ensure the protection of the new land.

"We've fought to protect lands like this for over a century and felt development would eventually happen if we didn't act," said Portland Audubon Executive Director Nick Hardigg in a press release statement.

According to the Audubon, the property is one of the largest, most ecologically valuable and at-risk parcels on the periphery of Forest Park.

"Driving up here, was not lost on me that this would be a prime place for development," said Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish at an ivy-cutting ceremony at the new obtained land. "So, to make a gift like this on such favorable terms, the idea of protecting the health of our community, Balch Creek and other assets is a legacy gift."

The City of Portland contributed to the acquisition of the new land by providing \$350,000 to purchase a conservation easement to help limit the potential of future development.

The city will also provide \$150,000 for restoration services which will include removing invasive plants and protecting water quality.

The partnership between the city and the Audubon helped discover unmapped wetlands and forest canopies.

Fish said protecting this land will ensure it will be healthy for generations to come.

“This is also a big win for fish and wildlife and it provides a wildlife quarter that connects our beautiful forest park with other natural areas as far as the coast range.”

The new addition of the land will be renamed as the “Katherine Lynn Kehoe Sanctuary” after Kehoe’s daughter who is an avowed environmentalist and nature advocate.

For now, the city of Portland will begin the restoration process in hope to open new trails for the public soon.