

The Oregonian

Portland spent \$1,100 a night on hotel for mayor's aide, records show

*By Gordon Friedman
August 22, 2019*

Mayor Ted Wheeler's office billed Portland taxpayers \$1,123 a night for an aide's hotel accommodations while at a conference in Austin, Texas, in likely violation of city rules, according to newly released documents.

The files show Wheeler's office paid for Elisabeth Perez, a senior adviser, to attend the 2019 South by Southwest technology conference and charged \$3,371 for three nights at Marriott's luxury W Austin hotel.

Including airfare, meals and conference registration, the trip in early March cost \$5,714, according to the documents, provided to The Oregonian via public records request.

Wheeler has since made Perez an acting bureau director.

City rules require lodging expenses to be "reasonable." Employees may only stay in standard rooms. And the rules state hotel costs significantly higher than standard per diem rates must be clearly explained.

The per diem rate for Austin hotels during the time of the conference was \$164 a night, according to the federal General Services Administration. Perez's travel forms do not show an explanation of the extra cost.

In an interview Thursday, Wheeler's chief of staff, Kristin Dennis, said she approved Perez's travel expenses and that the high hotel costs were "a minor, isolated mistake" made by another aide who was being trained on how to book travel arrangements for the mayor's staff.

Dennis said she spoke to the aide after learning of the hotel expense, who Dennis said became "mortified" upon the realization he spent so much.

"It was a mistake that we have since corrected for all future travel," Dennis said. She added that she strives to be a vigilant steward of taxpayer money and that the mayor's office spent less than its allotted budget last year.

Perez's attendance at the conference was approved just days before the conference, which Dennis said left no other nearby hotel rooms available. Documents show the room was marked as one of the hotel's "premium" options, though it's unclear what kind of room it was. Dennis said she did not know and Perez was not made available for interview.

The conference webpage shows the W Austin offered rooms between \$379 and \$1,165 a night during the South by Southwest event. A search of the hotel's offerings during the dates of next year's conference shows rooms booking above \$1,000 a night are all suites.

At the time of the conference, Perez was a senior adviser to Wheeler on Portland's "Smart Cities" initiative, which calls for using sensors to collect data that informs policy-making. In June, Wheeler named Perez the interim director of the Office for Community Technology, a small bureau that manages city telecom licenses.

Perez's travel request documents state her attendance at the conference would benefit the city by listening to talks that provided "insight into smart cities." Attending another panel on city

politics “offers new ideas and ways to govern” and is “a great networking event,” the documents state.

Dennis said Thursday that Perez reported to her about what she learned at the conference, which left her satisfied the expense was justified.

The information Perez gleaned from the conference was “unique and valuable,” Dennis said, adding, “It is something I think the city and taxpayers got value out of.”

Portland police hire new homeless community liaison

By Molly Harbarger

August 22, 2019

On Thursday, the Portland Police Bureau introduced a new liaison who is supposed to be a connection point between people experiencing homelessness, social service agencies and police.

Stephanie Herro will not be a sworn officer, but will be a representative of the police bureau for homelessness issues. She will be expected to help guide the police bureau’s policies on how to interact with homeless people.

In 2017, about 52 percent of all arrests in Portland were of homeless people, according to an Oregonian/OregonLive report. The vast majority of those arrests were for low-level and non-violent offenses.

Homeless advocates and some officials have called for changes in how law enforcement treats homeless people.

The civilian will be asked to develop a plan to guide police responses to the homeless community, and help the training division instruct officers on how best to communicate, police and provide services to people living on the streets. The salary will range from \$53,280 to 98,796, according to the city's job posting.

Chief Danielle Outlaw proposed the liaison position to help facilitate those conversations and possibly lead changes in training and policy.

"We welcome Stephanie and are excited about moving forward with this critical component in how police respond to those who are homeless in our community," Outlaw said in a news release.

Herro served as a reserve and full-time police officer with the West Linn Police Department for six months in 2017 and three months in 2018. She was also a police officer in Wisconsin, her home state.

She also worked as Clackamas County’s manager for a state program that helps people who are elderly or have disabilities remain independent, find jobs and community, and access services for food and housing.

Before moving to Oregon in 2014, she worked in the geriatric psychiatry field.

The Police Bureau has had two officers assigned to Central Precinct’s Neighborhood Response Team, which has until now served as the bureau’s contact with the city’s homeless. They will continue their work in regards to officers’ response to police calls.

The Portland Tribune

Police hire first Homeless Community Liaison

*By Jim Redden
August 23, 2019*

Former West Linn police officer Stephanie Herro will represent the bureau on matters related to the homeless community

The Portland Police Bureau has hired its first-ever Homeless Community Liaison.

Stephanie Herro will represent the bureau on matters related to the homeless community. She will also be the primary interface between the bureau and the homeless advocacy community, including social service, governmental or law enforcement agencies.

"We welcome Stephanie and are excited about moving forward with this critical component in how police respond to those who are homeless in our community," said Chief Danielle Outlaw.

The hiring was announced following the release of acity review of the bureau in that found that about half of the arrests made in 2017-18 were of people without a fixed address. The review by the City Auditor's Office supports previous reporting by The Oregonian/OregonLive, which found that one in two people arrested by the bureau in 2017 was experiencing homelessness at the time of the arrest.

Recruiting for the liaison position was underway before the review was released. Herro was hired August 15 after an eight-month hiring process.

She has extensive experience working with vulnerable populations, including adults with developmental disabilities, those experiencing mental health challenges, and older adults. She also was also a police officer in her native state of Wisconsin and, more recently, in West Linn.

Stephanie moved to Oregon in 2014 from Chicago, where she earned a Master of Arts in Gerontological Counseling and spent time working in the geriatric psychiatric field. Most recently, she was a manager for the state's Aging and People with Disabilities program in Clackamas County.

The liaison position is charged with developing an action plan for police response to the homeless community, and will collaborate with the bureau's Training Division to develop ongoing training for officers regarding contemporary best practices for communicating, policing, and providing services to the unsheltered community.

Oregon Public Broadcasting is a news partner of the Portland Tribune and contributed to this story. [You can find their report on the bureau review here.](#)

Willamette Week

State Officials Reject Portland's Plan for Taller Buildings in Chinatown

By Nigel Jaquiss
August 22, 2019

Critics said proposed skyscrapers would throw the Lan Su Chinese Garden in shade and dominate venerable structures.

38 feet: The height of the Chinatown Gate.

125 feet: The maximum height of Chinatown buildings recommended by preservationists.

200 feet: The maximum height of Chinatown buildings preferred by developers and City Council.

The city of Portland will have to convince the Oregon Court of Appeals that it acted appropriately when it set controversial new building height limits in Chinatown last year.

The City Council vote infuriated Portland's historic preservationists. In a statement, the Bosco-Milligan Foundation/Architectural Heritage Foundation said the decision would promote "out-of-scale, incompatible development in one of the most diverse and culturally significant districts in the city." Critics said proposed skyscrapers would throw the Lan Su Chinese Garden in shade and dominate venerable structures.

The 10-city-block neighborhood north of West Burnside Street and east of Broadway has been referred to as "the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District" since it won protected status in 1989. For years, city officials, landowners, neighborhood residents and others have grappled over the future of the neighborhood, which has physically changed little even as the city around it has grown dramatically.

As part of the Central City 2035 plan, city officials last year revisited height limits in the neighborhood, which is dominated by low-rise shops. Under existing city code, developers could in theory have built structures up to 425 feet tall—although for a variety of reasons, including a requirement that new structures go through historic design review, nothing remotely near that height was built.

The city's Planning and Sustainability Commission initially recommended the City Council lower the height limit to 125 feet. Under pressure from developers and owners, including Tom Brenneke's Guardian Management and the Menashe Family, the council initially considered a 160-foot limit—then, in a contentious June 6, 2018, vote, raised the limit in parts of the neighborhood to 200 feet.

Critics, including Bosco-Milligan, Restore Oregon, the Oregon Nikkei Endowment and the Portland Chinatown History Foundation, appealed the 200-foot limit to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals.

On Aug. 8, LUBA returned its decision, declaring the city of Portland had failed to justify the extra 75 feet of height.

"The city's findings in support of the 200-foot height limit are inadequate," LUBA ruled Aug. 8.

An attorney for Bosco-Milligan and Restore Oregon was not available for comment.

Eden Dabbs, a spokeswoman for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, declined to comment on the city's plans.

The deadline for the parties to file replies with the Oregon Court of Appeals is Aug. 27.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Landlord Fatigue

By Alex Zielinski

August 15, 2019

The landlords have lost their spark.

In late July, Portland City Council considered a new policy that would require landlords to register each of their rental units with the city's housing bureau—and pay the city \$60 per unit every year. The funds would go toward the city's burgeoning Rental Services Office, which focuses on overseeing Portland's relatively new slate of pro-renter regulations and helping educate tenants about their legal rights.

Two years ago, a proposal like this would have packed council chambers with worried landlords, irate lobbyists, and flustered property management companies. A landlord would get into a yelling match with a city commissioner. At least one person would slam their fist on a table.

But the July 31 meeting only brought out a handful of weary-looking landlords to contest the new registration fees. No one raised their voices, and everyone thanked the commissioners for their time. A week later, the new policy was approved.

What happened?

The past two years have seen an unprecedented rise in pro-renter policymaking in Portland, beginning with Commissioner Chloe Eudaly's hotly debated pitch in 2017 to require landlords to help cover moving fees for their evicted or priced-out tenants. Eudaly's policy drew a barrage of opposition—and a lawsuit—from Portland landlords who had grown accustomed to a largely unregulated market. But in March 2018, the policy was enshrined by a unanimous City Council vote.

A few months later, the city suggested that all landlords owning older, unstable buildings pay thousands to reinforce their wobbly properties—or warn all who enter their buildings that they might be crushed in an earthquake.

But the tipping point came earlier this year, when Portland property owners were smacked with two pro-tenant policies. One was another city ordinance from Eudaly's office that would both regulate security deposits and reward landlords who ditch discriminatory screening criteria for prospective tenants. At the same time, the state legislature proposed a bill that would cap annual rent increases at 7 percent and ban no-cause evictions for long-term tenants.

Despite a well-organized outcry from landlords, both policies went into effect.

By the time those registration fees landed in council chambers in July, it seemed the landlord bloc had finally gotten the message: Lawmakers are done with favoring property owners' wants over tenant's rights.

That includes Mayor Ted Wheeler. While Wheeler ran in 2016 on a platform to improve renters' rights, he's often parroted landlord talking points during City Council meetings. His campaign

promises were easily overshadowed by Eudaly's work to enact meaningful pro-renter policies—and Wheeler seemed content to let Eudaly serve as an easy antagonist for the landlord lobby. But unlike previous tenant-supporting policies, July's rental registration proposal came from Wheeler's office—signaling an alliance with Eudaly.

It seems landlords' last ally may be in Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who plans on leaving office at the end of 2020.

“I would have supported this if it had come to us last year, before all the other changes,” Fritz said on August 7, before casting the lone council vote against the policy. “I agree that we need a rental registration program... However, on top of all the other additional regulations that we've put on landlords... it's regressive.”

Even then, Fritz's comments felt more like sympathy for a losing team than support.

The shift in City Hall's landlord appeal can only mean one of two things: Either Portland's pro-tenant movement has successfully made renters' rights mainstream, or the landlord lobby is simply licking its wounds before mounting another fight.

Pressure Grows For Group Tasked With Mending Portlanders' Relationship With Police

*By Alex Zielinski
August 15, 2019*

Seven years ago, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) found that Portland police had a “pattern and practice” of using excessive force against people with a mental illness. Now—after years of establishing de-escalation policies, misconduct review standards, and a crisis intervention team—city officials say they're close to satisfying the terms the DOJ set forth in a settlement agreement that aimed to dramatically improve the actions of officers within the Portland Police Bureau (PPB).

“We're very optimistic that this will occur in the next few months,” says City Attorney Tracey Reeve.

To get there, the city still needs to meet a few more federally mandated goals, including one that's proven to be far more challenging than expected: Showing the DOJ that the police bureau has taken steps to improve community trust. Per the terms of the settlement agreement, that can't be achieved until the PPB works with a volunteer committee of informed community members to create a substantial “community engagement plan.”

This lingering requirement has put unparalleled pressure on the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing (PCCEP), the group of community members tasked with making sure PPB's engagement plan meets the public's needs.

That's a significant challenge. In March, the PPB released a study showing that 73 percent of Portlanders surveyed believe the PPB “considers race and ethnicity when enforcing the law,” and 84 percent said they had only limited experience with PPB officers participating in “authentic community engagement.” It's on PCCEP to understand why Portlanders feel this way, gather solutions from the public about how to improve the PPB's mediocre relationship with the public, and convince PPB to consider these ideas.

PCCEP was established only nine months ago, and the 12-person group is still in the process of getting up to speed on the complex history of Portland policing, the goals of the settlement agreement, and the legal boundaries—enshrined by the government and police unions—they must work within. PPB is expected to share its proposed community engagement plan with PCCEP within the next few months; by then, PCCEP is expected to have its own set of recommendations for the PPB to consider including.

With city officials eager to improve the reputation of a police force that discriminates against the mentally ill, skeptics fear that PCCEP will be rushed into green-lighting a weak, police-determined plan. But those who've dedicated their time to sit on the committee believe that PCCEP can still kick-start an overdue process of reconciliation between the PPB and the people it professes to serve.

PCCEP is the second iteration of the city's attempt to meet the settlement agreement's community engagement requirements. The first committee, the Community Oversight and Advisory Board (COAB), began meeting in 2015, but fizzled out after heated public meetings ended in member resignations—and arrests. Critics and COAB members accused city staff of failing to adequately train them for the labor-intensive work.

COAB's failure didn't only push Portland further away from meeting the DOJ's requirements, it also intensified the public's distrust in the city's ability to hold PPB accountable. So it wasn't surprising that, when Mayor Ted Wheeler created PCCEP as a replacement committee in 2018, the public held its applause.

“We're still waiting to see how PCCEP will be any different than COAB,” says Dan Handelman of Portland Copwatch.

Wheeler hand-picked PCCEP's members from nearly 100 applicants, prioritizing membership for people representing historically marginalized communities. Before holding their first meeting, PCCEP members went through an extensive training process—meeting with mental health advocates, civil rights groups, and Portland Copwatch to understand the history of police violence against the city's minority communities. Members also spent time with PPB, joining officers on ride-alongs and hearing about the bureau's new programs to deter discrimination and unnecessary use of force.

PCCEP's monthly meetings, held in venues across the city, have attracted surprisingly paltry crowds in a city where police accountability is a hot topic. Police officers and city staff, however, are regularly in attendance.

Handelman, who's attended nearly every meeting, is concerned that the city isn't giving PCCEP members the support they need to function independently. Only in July—eight months after PCCEP's first meeting—did Portland hire a full-time project director to oversee the group.

Handelman's also worried the city may be pushing PCCEP to make recommendations to the police bureau before they're fully prepared to do so.

“The city had five years to think about this agreement, but PCCEP has been asked for feedback on a dime,” says Handelman. “It's hard to not see this as the city just trying to check off boxes and move on.”

PCCEP member Andrew Kalloch says he completely understands why many Portlanders are dubious of his group's ability to make significant changes.

“There’s a history here... and we’re all cognizant of the shortcomings of the previous group,” says Kalloch, who works as a policy manager for Airbnb. “The city’s operating under a deficit of trust.”

Kalloch adds that the skepticism comes from all sides.

“The police think we’re these crazy radicals pushing reform,” he says, “and the public thinks we’re stooges for the mayor.”

Lakayana Drury, one of PCCEP’s co-chairs, says the group is now operating without the “training wheels” provided by the city, which assisted with scheduling meetings and educating members about the settlement agreement. Nicole Grant, a policy advisor for Wheeler who helped PCCEP get off the ground, calls this the “wait and see” phase for the committee.

“There’s still this perception that PCCEP is the PR body for the police bureau,” Grant says. “It’s just about building trust over time.”

Drury doesn’t think it’ll take long to prove to the public that PCCEP isn’t operating under the city’s thumb.

“It’s about results,” says Drury, a high school teacher and director of Word Is Bond, a nonprofit focused on building relationships between young Black men and law enforcement.

“It’s about sticking to our truth and operating in a way that’s true to us,” Drury continues. “Actions speak louder than words.”

However, Drury admits, there’s a feeling PCCEP is already behind schedule.

“There’s definitely pressure to produce some massive thing,” he says. “But we can’t get lost in how we should be any farther ahead than we are. We need to take our time to put forward something we’re confident in... something that really reflects input from the community.”

To better understand the community they’re representing, members of PCCEP have held listening sessions with Portlanders from different demographics—like high schoolers, mental health advocates, homeless Portlanders, and leaders of historically Black churches. It’s particularly important, members believe, that PCCEP meets with groups that have been disproportionately targeted by Portland law enforcement.

To prepare for potential vacancies on the committee, the city’s prepped a number of people to serve as alternates. One of them is Thabiti Lewis, an English professor at Washington State University in Vancouver, who’s been observing PCCEP meetings for a few months. He’s not happy with what he’s seen.

“I believe the police are going to put their plan on the table and say [to PCCEP], ‘We’ll hear what you have to say and take it under consideration,’” Lewis says. “But they don’t have to do anything. That’s not collaboration. That’s the same division we’re trying to move beyond.”

Lewis believes the city is only doing the minimum needed to meet the terms of the DOJ agreement.

“I don’t blame them,” he says. “If I was mayor, I would want the DOJ off my back.”

But the work will be a waste, Lewis says, if PCCEP doesn’t have time to gather community input.

“[PCCEP] is fighting against a system that wants to function a certain way,” he says. “There’s definitely a fear of change coming from the police.”

Data from the PPB itself backs up Lewis' suspicions. In March, the PPB's study noted that 46 percent of surveyed officers believe "change is not possible at PPB."

PCCEP's new project director, Theodore Latta, is confident the group will be able to change PPB's mind. But he doesn't think it'll be solved by the fall, when the city hopes to be finally deemed in compliance with the settlement agreement by the DOJ.

"We need to take our time to hear from the community," says Latta. He says that PCCEP was created to outlive the goals of the DOJ agreement, and he's excited to wrap up the settlement work so PCCEP can focus on more long-term solutions to police distrust.

"This isn't some temporary thing," says Latta. "This is the beginning of a systemic change in the way we view law enforcement in this community."

While Latta is employed by the city, he works in a Northeast Portland office building—intentionally distanced from City Hall staffers who could influence PCCEP's work. He's eager to connect PCCEP with groups that have traditionally been excluded from city decisions, like local Native American councils and the disability community.

"I'm here to connect the dots," he says.

PCCEP is already thinking beyond the goals of the settlement agreement. At the group's July meeting, a PCCEP subcommittee proposed a new policy that would require Wheeler and Police Chief Danielle Outlaw to issue apologies to the families of those killed by a PPB officer. The group has also recommended PPB create a Hispanic Advisory Council and increase the size and influence of PPB's internal Community Engagement Office, which currently has a staff of one.

Some PCCEP members have met with the family of Andre Gladen, a man who was fatally shot by the PPB in January while in a mental health crisis, to better understand their frustrations with the city. To create a robust community engagement plan that will continue to benefit all Portlanders in the future, PCCEP alternate member Thabiti Lewis says it's crucial to look at the challenges and the failures of the past.

"We need to be able to process our city's history with the police so that the actions that we take going forward work," he says. "Otherwise, we'll be right back here in 20 years."

The Portland Business Journal

HR Leadership Award winner 2019: Serilda Summers-McGee, city of Portland

August 22, 2019

The city of Portland was hoping for a marathoner when it hired Serilda Summers-McGee as its human resources director in 2017, but got a sprinter instead.

Hit with the recent resignations of several department heads, Mayor Ted Wheeler's administration touted the fast-tracked hiring of the (then) 35-year-old as a "legacy appointment."

"When I was hired by the mayor he said, 'Here are the things I want done.' And I said my goal is to be here as long as it takes to complete the list you provided me, but my plan is not to be here more than three years — the end of his term, essentially. And he said there's no way you're going to turn it around in three years."

He was right – it took less than two years. Summers-McGee, responsible for 11,000 full- and part-time employees, isn't built for plodding. She announced in July she is leaving the city in September to start her own HR consulting firm, Workplace Change LLC.

During her tenure, Summers-McGee:

Oversaw strategic improvements in workforce recruitment and training that cut the average timeframe for hiring from 216 days to 94 days.

Spearheaded the development of the city's new Access to Work program to provide pathways for people with significant disabilities.

Opened another avenue of communication with union employees through the development of a first-ever labor/city non-bargaining committee.

Led a movement to make HR quantifiable through the development and implementation of statistical data and metrics.

Summers-McGee will be missed.

"She is eager to listen, learn, teach, share and is a fountain of ideas on how to get to a better place," said Larry Nelson, City of Portland finance manager.

Connecting the city of Portland's HR staff with its purpose was her greatest achievement, Summers-McGee said.

"What I was able to identify very early on was that the team didn't operate like a team. It didn't have a very positive outlook on the work and our contributions to the city of Portland. (Our successes) came as a result of the team operating as a team, believing in the vision, and being willing to put in the long hours into making change.

"I was able to get them to hope, to dream and to re-imagine, to be free to create and to be kind of entrepreneurial in the way they do their work," Summers-McGee said.

At any given time, Portland's HR department is dealing with 100 or more active recruitments between its 28 bureaus. Centralization of employment applications among those bureaus has helped identify opportunities for expanding diversity early in the process.

Summers-McGee also launched an in-house executive recruiting process and developed a comprehensive approach to identifying local, national and international candidates not currently in the job market.

"We now have the most diverse pool of city bureau directors in the history of the city of Portland," she said.

The Access to Work program is creating flexible, adaptable, entry-level employment for people with disabilities, and new training and learning programs are accelerating advancement.

Noted Summers-McGee, "For the first time, we now have a blind person and a deaf person doing significant work for the city."

One of her HR teams' most important achievements came in December with the culmination of four years of hard work in publishing a Class Compensation Study to ensure compliance with new pay equity laws.

"Now you cannot make an offer (of employment) at all, unless it's vetted by class comp, but we have a 100 percent, 24-hour turnaround time, so those candidates don't have to wait," Summers-McGee said.