

The Oregonian

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, 3 other local candidates hit with campaign finance complaints

*By Everton Bailey Jr.
December 19, 2019*

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, his primary election opponent Ozzie Gonzalez and City Council candidate Jack Kerfoot were hit with campaign finance complaints Thursday that claim they violated a voter-approved \$500 contribution limit.

Ronald Buel, a member of political action committee Honest Elections Oregon, filed complaints with the Portland City Auditor's Office claiming that since September, Wheeler accepted 15 donations that exceeded \$500 and Gonzalez and Kerfoot each accepted four.

At issue is whether the limits, approved by voters in November 2018, are in effect. A Multnomah County Circuit Court judge ruled in June the \$500-per-donor limit is an unconstitutional restriction on free speech and struck down those provisions of the law.

Attorney Jason Kafoury, another Honest Elections Oregon member, said he believes the city campaign finance policy as a whole is still enforceable although Bloch deemed parts of it unconstitutional.

"Our goal is to get the candidates to follow the will of the 87.4 percent of constituents who approved this measure," Kafoury said.

Buehl's complaint against Wheeler takes particular issue with four in-kind donations from Melvin Mark Brokerage worth \$1,278 to \$2,210 as well as other individual contributions between \$1,000 to \$5,000. The Oregonian/OregonLive is a tenant of a Melvin Mark office building.

Buel is asking that all three campaigns be fined and that the city auditor conduct an audit of all contributions of \$100 or less received by Wheeler's campaign.

Last year, Portland voters approved Measure 26-200, which amended the city charter to limit individual or political committee donations to \$500 per election cycle in city races, limit campaign spending and require campaigns to disclose advertising funders and as well as impose other restrictions.

Multnomah County voters approved a similar measure in 2016.

Multnomah County Circuit Judge Eric Bloch struck down the county rule in 2017 and did the same to parts of the Portland rule in June, saying they violated the Oregon Constitution.

The circuit court's decision on the county measure was appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments regarding the matter in November, Kafoury said. He said a ruling in the case is expected sometime in 2020 and will likely impact the Portland measure.

The city has appealed Bloch's ruling in the city limits case to the Oregon Supreme Court, which this month said it is putting that appeal on hold until it rules in the Multnomah County case.

Honest Elections Oregon organized both measures.

Buel also filed a similar campaign finance complaint Thursday against Multnomah County Commissioner Lori Stegmann with the county director of elections.

Gonzalez, a TriMet board member, is one of seven opponents who have filed to challenge Wheeler's re-election campaign. Kerfoot, a retired renewable energy consultant, is one of three challengers opposing Commissioner Chloe Eudaly for her seat on the city council.

Wheeler announced in November that he would limit accepted contributions by individuals to \$5,000 and \$10,000 from organizations.

"Our campaign is committed to transparency and disclosure, and we are operating within the current law," said Amy Rathfelder, Wheeler's campaign director. Gonzalez declined comment, saying he hadn't yet seen the complaint. Kerfoot did not immediately return messages for comment Thursday.

According to the Portland City Auditor's Office, after each campaign is notified of the complaint, they have 10 business days to submit any matters supporting or opposing the complaint. The city auditor's office then has 10 days to investigate and render a ruling.

Vision Zero: Portland saw most traffic deaths since 1997, many 'out of our control'

*By Andrew Theen
December 20, 2019*

Sue Bartlett seemed to be involved in, and aware of, everything.

The 66-year-old software engineer was, in many ways, the quintessential Oregon transplant. She moved from the Midwest in the late 1980s and planted roots. She was a dedicated environmental advocate, an active volunteer with animal rights groups, a former board member at the community radio station KBOO, and a singer in the Portland Peace Choir. She skied, hiked and was an avid reader.

A trip to Greece in recent years introduced the Renaissance woman to a new passion: Motorized scooters. She was hooked, eventually buying two and making them her primary form of transportation. She joined the St. Johns Scooter Club, an all-comers band of sorts that goes on organized rides across town. Like everything else in her life, one brother said, Bartlett was conscientious about the new toys. She liked reducing her carbon footprint. She wore a helmet and reflective gear when she rode.

On Aug. 30, Bartlett became the 37th person to die on the city's streets this year when police said the driver of an SUV turned left and crashed into Bartlett head-on. She later died in surgery. Months later, the crash remains under investigation, and the Multnomah County district attorney's office declined to comment further.

Since her death, another dozen people have died in crashes across Portland. It's the most deaths since 1997 and comes one year after Portland saw a significant decline, seemingly advancing its years-long campaign known as Vision Zero, which seeks to eliminate all fatalities and serious injuries by 2025.

The crash, which occurred roughly two miles away from Bartlett's Cully home, shocked her family and friends.

"Sue had the reputation of being the safest person in the scooter club," Paul Bartlett, a younger brother, said. She was "always concerned about being seen," he said.

As of this week, 48 people have died in crashes on Portland streets this year, according to the Bureau of Transportation's figures. Police include two suicides and a third death that occurred on private property in their tally. Neither agency includes perhaps the city's most prominent traffic-related death, that of 23-year-old antifascist activist Sean Kealiher, who was hit and killed this fall. That case remains under investigation, and no arrests have been made.

In an interview, Bureau Director Chris Warner said 2019 "has been a terrible year," which he described as "heartbreaking" for the city.

"Our hope is that it's an anomaly," he said, "But we are making a lot of investments."

In 2020, Portland plans big safety projects on wide, dangerous streets in east Portland like Division and Stark, long designated as two of the deadliest streets within city limits. The bureau is flush with millions in revenue from development fees and the 10-cent gas tax, and officials hope projects to add center medians, reduce the number of dangerous left-turns, and add pedestrian crossing beacons and protected bike lanes will reduce the number of fatalities.

But Bartlett, and several other people who died this year, perished in what's long been ordinary in Portland and nationwide. A "normal" intersection, this time Northeast 40th Avenue and Tillamook. An unremarkable day. A news release with scare details. An investigation. A life ended.

Warner, who also commutes on a motorized scooter, said he makes a point to ride past every crash site he can to think about what happened and what more, if anything, can be done.

He didn't need directions to find where Bartlett was hit. Warner intentionally rides through that intersection en route to his Rose City Park neighborhood to avoid a more dangerous stretch of nearby Sandy Boulevard. "It's just a daily reminder that our work never stops," he said.

Whenever there's a traffic fatality, Dana Dickman and a team of a half-dozen folks at the transportation department are notified by investigators inside the police bureau's Major Crash Team.

That police team responds to fatalities and some serious injury crashes. It's been activated more than 50 times so far this year.

On April 25, following a string of 10 deaths in less than a month, Portland City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly directed her transportation bureau to do more.

She ordered that prominent electronic message boards be temporarily placed near every fatal crash to mark the site and capture the public's attention, if possible. She created a new checklist to address road design flaws or engineering mistakes at a crash site soon as possible.

Dickman, the transportation bureau's traffic safety section manager, said inside her office, the postmortem includes flagging any obvious flaws in road design that could have led to the crash or made a mistake more likely to turn deadly.

The office conducts an "initial engineering review" and looks back at five or 10 years of data to see if a trend emerges. They see if a big safety project is upcoming, and if they can do anything to speed it up.

Trends can be difficult to spot. "Even at high crash corridors," Dickman said, using a term to describe streets like 82nd Avenue, Lombard, Foster and Division, where a preponderance of fatalities occurs, "there's a lot of randomness as to why or where crashes are occurring."

Sometimes the engineering review takes weeks or even months to complete. Sometimes the fatality doesn't merit that much analysis in the first place, for instance if a lone drunken driver slams into a tree.

Jillian Detweiler, executive director of the nonprofit advocacy group The Street Trust, said the city can go further and be bolder.

"We want the city to be more aggressive in the kind of systemic change that Vision Zero is about," she said. While Portland has reduced speed limits on neighborhood streets and on stretches of deadly roads like outer Division or Marine Drive, Detweiler would like to see more action.

Large swaths of the city need better lighting, she added, so everyone is more visible. She also wants pedestrians to get priority at more intersections. She wants to see some turn lanes – where drivers often make dangerous attempts to cross oncoming traffic – eliminated altogether.

In the case of Lori Woodard, a woman killed April 19 while crossing Northeast Broadway at Grand, the city did quickly identify one fix.

Crews installed a Leading Pedestrian Interval signal, which gives pedestrians a head start crossing the street at a traffic light before vehicles get a green light. The signal was installed within 10 days, Dickman said.

The bureau set a new policy of installing those signals "at new or upgraded traffic signals" on high crash corridors.

Since Woodard's death, five more people died on high crash corridors while trying to cross the street. None of those deaths was related to vehicles turning at intersections with traffic signals, transportation spokesman John Brady said, so the leading pedestrian signal "didn't come into consideration." Portland has added 16 such signals since Woodard's death, bringing the total number of signals citywide to 42.

One of those five pedestrians, Louanna Battams, died crossing Southeast Foster Road near 74th Avenue.

She was killed just a few hours after Portland transportation officials held a news conference mere steps away to celebrate finishing \$9 million in safety projects on a 40-block stretch of Foster.

WHERE PORTLAND FALLS

Vision Zero, which started in Sweden in 1997, is built off a three-legged approach to changing the culture around transportation: Educate people about the dangers of speeding and impaired driving, enforce traffic laws and engineer streets in a different way to limit fatalities, and emphasize safety over free-flowing traffic.

In June 2015, Portland City Council pledged to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2025. In December 2016, the council approved a two-year action plan that set a series of steps and priorities for getting there.

Since then, at least 129 people have died in Portland traffic crashes.

Some 765 people were also seriously injured in traffic crashes in 2017 alone, well above the city's 10-year average. Portland doesn't have preliminary figures for the number of people seriously injured in 2018 or 2019. Dylan Rivera, a city transportation spokesman, said Portland relies on receiving that crash data from the state and it doesn't expect data from last year until February.

Seattle, which reported 25 traffic fatalities in 2019 so far, works with its police department and Washington's transportation agency to compile preliminary figures for the number of residents seriously injured in traffic crashes.

According to those estimates, 160 people have been seriously injured in Seattle in 2019. Seattle's death toll doesn't include freeway fatalities, city spokesman Ethan Bergeson confirmed in an email, nor deaths on State Route 520, which runs from the city to Redmond, so the city's death toll is likely higher.

Dickman notes that Seattle, at roughly 84 square miles, is significantly smaller in land mass than Portland.

Seattle also doesn't have an east Portland, she notes, an area with wide streets that function like urban highways. In 2018, two-thirds of the people killed in Portland traffic crashes died east of 82nd Avenue.

Dickman said absent obvious road engineering flaws, the causes of deadly crashes remain stubbornly persistent. "We continue to see impairment," she said, with causes like drunken driving or driving under the influence of drugs accounting for 54% of crashes. "We continue to see speed. We continue to see signal disregard. Things that we know are contributing to fatal crashes. We haven't fixed them."

The city spent \$300,000 in marijuana tax revenue last year on an advertising campaign seeking to raise public awareness about the risks of speeding.

Warner, the transportation director, said he'll continue to push out the message urging people to pay attention and slow down. "A lot of it is out of our control," he said.

It's not just a Portland problem, and the fatality issue is more pronounced in many cities of comparable size.

Nationally, the number of motorists killed in traffic crashes is on a slow decline, but pedestrian deaths nationally rose 3.4% last year. The number of bicyclists killed is also rising.

Transportation advocates point toward the increasing rise of SUV ownership in recent decades as a contributing factor. A Detroit Free Press/USA Today investigation this year found that SUVs are the constant factor in what amounts to a skyrocketing pedestrian death toll since 2009.

Bartlett believes the driver who struck his sister with an SUV is symptomatic of a broader issue. "They can kill if you just make the slightest mistake," he said of the larger-profile vehicles.

More Americans have died in the 19 years since the turn of the century than in World Wars I and II combined, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration figures cited by The Washington Post this summer.

Advocates say the system is designed to favor automobiles and the human drivers who operate them.

Detweiler said Vision Zero, and the public attention given to it, is shining an important light on a long-standing problem to which people often didn't pay attention. "There was a time when we weren't tracking it," Detweiler, a long-time TriMet official who also worked for the Portland urban renewal agency and Mayor Charlie Hales before helming the nonprofit, said of traffic fatalities. "When we were so complacent about the violence associated with driving that we weren't even taking account of the death toll. Like many things, pulling back the curtain on what's really happening is painful."

While Portland's death toll is the highest in more than two decades, the likelihood of dying on streets here is significantly lower than in many cities of similar size.

According to figures reported to the federal government in 2017, the fatality rate per 100,000 people in Portland was 7.26. That amounts to half the rates of similarly sized cities like Memphis or Oklahoma City. But Portland has twice the fatality rate of Boston and Las Vegas.

Portland has a higher pedestrian and total traffic fatality rate than Denver and Seattle, according to the most recent data available.

SPEED TRAPS

When it comes to Vision Zero's three e's -- education, enforcement and engineering -- the enforcement portion is often pointed to as lacking.

"Speeding is pretty socially acceptable," Dickman said, "and there's not a recognition of the risk that you're putting other people in."

The police bureau today has 18 motorcycle officers and one officer in a standard sedan assigned to the traffic division. In 2010, the city had 40 officers assigned to that division.

According to city transportation records, some 26 people died that year, the second-lowest total since 1997.

The short-handed police force is still out there writing tickets. Cops issued 21,499 citations for traffic related offenses from January through October this year. The top violation, 30% of stops, was for speeding.

With fewer cops, Portland is trying to turn to fixed radar and red-light cameras to pick up the slack.

Portland obtained state authority to install speed cameras on 10 dangerous corridors. It currently has cameras on 122nd Avenue, Division, Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway and Marine Drive.

But it hasn't yet expanded to the remaining roads. "We need a new contract for a camera operator," Rivera said in an email, adding that the city posted a contract solicitation last week. He added that the police bureau, which is required by state law to issue traffic citations, doesn't have the staffing to handle additional cameras.

A police spokesman said officers must process and mail citations to violators caught on camera within 10 days. As of December, it had issued more than 43,300 tickets through its fixed speed camera and red-light citation program and more than 23,000 from pictures snapped by its mobile speed van.

Eudaly has said she was interested in trying to change state law to allow non-officers to process the tickets or find ways to contract the work to other law enforcement agencies.

Portland believes the speed cameras work. On Division, fatalities stopped for a year- and- a- half after cameras went in, Dickman said.

Elena Davkina, 48, died on Division this August.

The driver of the other car involved, Zodiac Clark, was charged with driving under the influence, reckless driving and manslaughter. He is scheduled to appear in court next month.

In an interview in October, Eudaly said she wanted to expand the speed radar camera network and that she was frustrated with how long it takes to get cameras installed, hire a contractor and process the tickets.

“While I’m not a fan of punishment, I’m even less of a fan of people dying on our streets.

These cameras are the least biased, safest and possibly most effective tools we have in changing the behavior,” she said.

ALWAYS AWARE

Just as the city didn’t celebrate 2018 when it saw traffic fatalities dip, it isn’t wavering on Vision Zero.

Dickman said it’s a huge task to shift the public culture. “We are in it for the long game, but every single crash is deeply troubling,” she said.

Humans are flawed. People make mistakes. City officials hope they can reduce the risk of fatalities by changing how roads look and feel. Maybe that mistake will result in a serious injury rather than a death.

Paul Bartlett said when he thinks back on his sister’s death, he doesn’t linger on the driver. To him it’s more systemic.

“When people are in vehicles, they have to be aware that there are vulnerable people out there,” he said.

Like everything else in her life, he said, his sister was present and visible at the end. She was always aware. “There was absolutely nothing she could do,” he said.

Willamette Week

Complaint Filed with City Auditor Says Mayor Ted Wheeler’s Campaign Disregards Portlanders’ Wish to Cap Contributions

*By Sophie Peel
December 19, 2019*

Last November, Portlanders passed a measure that capped individual campaign contributions at \$500. But it's not in effect.

A complaint filed today with the Portland City Auditor alleges Mayor Ted Wheeler's re-election campaign accepted nearly a dozen individual donations above the city's allowed threshold of \$500—a standard that isn't being legally enforced.

In Nov. 2018, Portland voters approved a ballot measure that capped individual campaign donations at \$500. But it was immediately challenged in the courts and is currently halted as the measure undergoes court proceedings regarding its constitutionality.

Last month, Wheeler said in a statement he would follow the same contribution limits that federal candidates are bound by, which are ten times higher than what Portland voters wanted.

The measure, currently not in effect, would also forbid campaigns from accepting corporate donations. The complaint, filed by Portland campaign-finance reform advocate Ron Buel, alleges Wheeler's campaign has accepted four corporate donations.

"We are mystified at the actions of Mayor Wheeler, who is not above a law that is the will of the people," Buel said in a statement. "His Portland City Attorney has filed briefs in court supporting

the constitutionality and validity of [the measure]. We do not understand why he is choosing not to comply with voters' clear desire."

Oregon does not place any caps on election contributions.

The highest individual contributions listed in the complaint came from three separate donors at \$5,000 apiece. That amount is the cap for federal candidates accepting individual contributions.

A spokesperson for the Wheeler campaign tells WW that "Our campaign is committed to transparency and disclosure, and we are operating within the current law."

The Portland Mercury

Mayor Wheeler Target of Complaint for Accepting Large Campaign Donations

*By Blair Stenvick
December 19, 2019*

Mayor Ted Wheeler and three other local political candidates are facing scrutiny for accepting hefty donations that clash with local campaign finance regulations passed by voters. On Thursday, a Portland resident who campaigned for the new policies filed official complaints against those four candidates, kicking off an investigation that could land the candidates in court.

In 2018, Portlanders voted by an overwhelming majority to approve Measure 26-200, a campaign finance reform initiative that, among other things, limited campaign donations from individuals to \$500 each. It was similar to another measure passed by Multnomah County voters in 2016 (both were crafted by the organization Honest Elections Oregon).

These measures are currently being challenged in court by business groups Portland Business Alliance and Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors, on the grounds that contribution limits interfere with Oregon's broad free speech protections. The Oregon Supreme Court heard arguments from both sides in November, and will likely issue a ruling in 2020. But no judge has actually placed a stay on the policies in the meantime, meaning that they're technically enforceable, according to Honest Elections Oregon member Jason Kafoury.

"We're currently in legal limbo land," Kafoury told the Mercury.

But several candidates running in 2020 elections are conducting their campaigns as if the measures don't exist—in fact, Wheeler is collecting individual contributions as high as \$5,000. So Portlander Ronald Buel filed complaints against Wheeler, mayoral candidate Ozzie Gonzalez, and Portland City Council candidate Jack Kerfoot with the Portland City Auditor's office. He also filed a complaint against Multnomah County Commissioner Lori Stegmann with the Multnomah County Director of Elections.

Kafoury says that if the Supreme Court rules in Honest Elections Oregon's favor, candidates like Wheeler could face major fines—potentially as high as \$800,000.

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"From our perspective, Wheeler is taking a big risk by taking big money in this campaign," Kafoury said.

The four candidates have ten days to respond to Buel's complaints, either by giving back the excessive donations or by filing appeals.

The Mercury has reached out to Wheeler's campaign for comment, and will update this post if we hear back.

Homeless Advocates Push to Delay Camp Cleanup Contract

By Alex Zielinski

December 19, 2019

A decision to renew a contract with a company that carries out homeless camp cleanups for the City of Portland has sparked a divide within City Hall.

Rapid Response Bio Clean, a company that cleans up everything from murder scenes to hoarder homes, has been one of the two companies hired by the city to clean up homeless campsites erected on public property (and hold salvageable items in an accessible storage facility) for nearly five years. On December 18, Portland City Council was poised to approve a five-year contract expanding Rapid Response's scope of work and granting the company an annual \$4,528,000 stipend.

Shortly before the morning council session began, however, this decision was pulled from the council agenda by Mayor Ted Wheeler. According to Wheeler spokesperson Tim Becker, the mayor was concerned the day's packed council schedule wouldn't allow for enough time to discuss the contract.

"The council had an overloaded agenda and we wanted to ensure there will be a thorough presentation so the item gets the full council consideration it deserves," said Becker in an email to the Mercury.

But the decision comes in the midst of a debate over the role Rapid Response should play in the city's extensive camp cleanups.

The new contract, buoyed by \$2 million from the Oregon Department of Transportation, doesn't just expect Rapid Response employees to clean up personal property and trash from these campsites. The staff is also required to complete training on de-escalation techniques and how to administer naloxone, a drug that reverses opioid overdoses. And, during Portland's extremely cold days, Rapid Response staff are expected to work as homeless outreach staff—distributing handwarmers and blankets to campers and encouraging them to move into a warm shelter.

Kaia Sand, director of homeless advocacy and media group Street Roots, doesn't believe Rapid Response is an appropriate agency for that job.

"If the city needs biohazards removed, this makes sense," she says. "But we can't be asking biohazard cleanup folks to do frontline outreach work. The city says this is the best system they got. But I say, if the system is broken—we go after the system."

Sand wants to see a six-month delay on the council vote, allowing city officials to reconsider the entire cleanup program.

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty shares Sand's concerns. While a member of Hardesty's staff sat on the committee that selected Rapid Response to be the city's cleanup contractor in early September, the commissioner does not support the company being involved in every step of the cleanup process.

According to Hardesty's office, the commissioner would like to see the responsibilities that are included in the contract split between several different contractors that offer more specific expertise.

"We need to do listen to people most impacted, and what we've learned is that when people are given the opportunity to self manage and live with dignity, everyone benefits," Hardesty says.

The homeless cleanup program was created in 2014 in response to a lawsuit accusing the City of Portland of unconstitutionally barring houseless people from sleeping in public spaces. The settlement agreement reached after this lawsuit laid out strict rules for the city to follow when cleaning up homeless encampments on public property.

Now enshrined as city policy, those rules mandate that city employees must give people at least 48 hours' notice before sweeping their campsite and that, if people don't clear the area before the cleanup crew arrives, the city must collect all property that is "recognizable as belonging to a person and that has apparent use." That property is then stored in a contractor-operated warehouse, where individuals have 30 days to reclaim their property.

Since the program's creation, homeless Portlanders have raised concerns about items—including medications, money, and family heirlooms—lost during these cleanups. Sand has joined a group of homeless advocacy groups—including Right 2 Survive, Sisters of the Road, and WRAP—in calling on the city to re-examine the entire system.

On Monday, the US Supreme Court let stand a lower court's decision that struck down a Boise law allowing police to give homeless people tickets for sleeping or camping in public spaces.

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"With the Boise decision out there, it seems strange for the city to put so much money into this system," says Sand. She adds that, if council follows through with approving the Rapid Response contract, she wouldn't be surprised if the city faced new legal action.

This afternoon, a coalition of houseless Portlanders and advocates called Stop the Sweeps PDX will hold a press conference in front of City Hall demanding a moratorium on all campsite cleanups conducted by the city.

"We believe people should be able to rest and to survive in public spaces without harassment from the city, as represented by the police, private contractors, and service workers," reads a press release for the event. "The interests of the business community should not outweigh the needs of actual people."

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Industry professionals foresee challenges, changes ahead

*By Sam Tenney
December 18, 2019*

A survey of the Portland-area economy in the final days of 2019 reveals strong conditions much like those of the year prior.

"It's been mostly 'Groundhog Day,'" said Mike Wilkerson, a senior economist with ECONorthwest, said during a Builder Breakfast panel event on Tuesday.

The area remains in uncharted territory in terms of expansion. Employment is strong, construction is growing 4 percent per year, and the manufacturing sector is doing very well. A year from now, however, that picture is likely to look very different, according to panelists, as the current boom cycle winds down. Despite industry-wide confidence as high as it's ever been nationally, in Portland and within the state of Oregon, Wilkerson is less bullish.

"We see strength through the remainder of (next year) into 2021, but after that the questions are going to be what's going to continue to fill the pipeline," he said.

Apartment construction is trending downward, with about 8,000 units under construction right now, as opposed to 12,000 last year. That number could dip to 6,000 by this point next year. The demand drivers don't exist for hotels, which Wilkerson says have been overbuilt in the current cycle and will see much lower occupancy rates as more projects are delivered.

Similarly, he said, multiple factors will result in a dearth of office space. The region absorbed about 600,000 square feet of office space this year, and about 1.7 million square feet are in the pipeline. Employment is slowing down, and the sectors that continue to grow – logistics, manufacturing, construction – are not major office users.

By Wilkerson's estimation, the largest tenant in town right now is the city of Portland, which has leased space throughout downtown while the Portland Building undergoes renovation. City workers are due to return to the building next spring, leaving a vast amount of vacant office space.

"Who's going to take that hundreds of thousands of office feet, on top of what's already in the pipeline?" he asked.

The panel discussion, a 2020 outlook for the construction industry, was the Daily Journal of Commerce's fourth Builder Breakfast of the year, and also included panelists Kristina Thomsen, a partner with ZGF Architects, and Aaron Bouchane, a workforce and professional development manager with Associated General Contractors' Oregon-Columbia chapter. Stephanie Holmberg, leader of the real estate and construction industry group at Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt, served as moderator.

The skilled labor shortage persists here and throughout the U.S. An annual workforce survey conducted by the local AGC chapter showed members are overwhelmingly, and unsurprisingly, still having a hard time finding skilled workers. Only 2 percent of respondents think it will become easier to do so in 2020.

"So, not a lot of optimism where we sit currently or into the future, in terms of the skills gap or the workforce shortage," Bouchane said.

Some contractors say the skills gap is having little effect on them, and that they're adapting as best as possible to make it through each day and quarter. On the other hand, many others are reporting that it is impacting budgets, lengthening timelines, and changing how they bid on projects. Contractors in areas like Medford, Klamath Falls and along the coast are having an especially hard time finding help. Despite the looming end of the current building boom, a worsening workforce shortage has the potential to impact builders even more severely than it already is.

One-third of construction workers within the Portland-metro area are older than 45, Bouchane said, and contractors are worried that once work slows down, those older skilled workers who have been hanging in and making good money during the boom years will decide the time is

right to retire. Their exodus from the industry will not only drain the workforce from a numbers perspective, but also result in a widespread loss of institutional knowledge.

“Even if there is a bit of a slowdown and companies aren’t as busy as they were the last couple of years, the idea of retirement and baby boomers getting to the point of leaving the industry is something that we’re hearing more and more as an immediate and future concern,” he said.

Efforts to stem the effects of the skills gap are helping, Bouchane said, citing the AGC’s increasingly popular educator externship program as well as Measure 98 funding for career and technical education programs.

Looking forward from a design perspective, Thomsen continues to worry about the effects of tariffs and trade wars on projects. One project, she said, suffered a six-figure price increase due to escalating rebar prices. Owners are responding by removing major components from projects, decreasing footprints, or not finishing shell space in order to keep costs down.

“That keeps me up at night – just figuring out how to deal with this,” she said.

Thomsen cited sustainability as a major concern, pointing toward the building industry’s heavy carbon footprint and emphasizing the responsibility of designers and builders in helping change that. Fortunately, she said, developers are more frequently trending toward energy efficiency as costs come down for sustainable building features. Owners are realizing better returns on investment via reduced operating costs and higher rent rates from tenants, who want to be in sustainable buildings that are demonstrated to benefit occupants.

As a health care design specialist, Thomsen is seeing that market segment begin to adapt as popular transportation modes change. Clients are planning for ride sharing and micro-mobility options like electric scooters to become more widely used, and the possibility of automated cars following suit. Health care clients in other parts of the country are building less parking, she said, and exploring options for converting parking garages into occupiable space further down the road.

“Clients are really looking at it big-picture-wise, in terms of what they’re actually building,” she said. “So they know they need to build parking garages now, but what does it look like in the future, and how can they adapt their buildings to provide less parking in the future because someone’s arriving by autonomous vehicle or a scooter?”

OPB

Campaign Finance Reform Advocates Press Portland Candidates To Follow \$500 Donation Limit

*By Rebecca Ellis
December 20, 2019*

Advocates are pressing a crop of political candidates to abide by local campaign finance limits, which were passed by voters last year but quickly faced legal challenges.

On Thursday, members of Honest Elections, a local group pushing for campaign finance reform, filed a complaint with the Portland City Auditor. The filings accuse three candidates for upcoming local elections — including Mayor Ted Wheeler — of violating the ballot measure approved overwhelmingly by voters last November, which capped individual donations at \$500.

Those limits were struck down in June. A judge found they violated a two-decade-old decision by the Oregon Supreme Court, which ruled political contributions were a form of free speech.

The Oregon Supreme Court is currently considering whether to overturn the landmark ruling. Most reason whether or not Portland's finance limits go into effect hinges on the outcome.

But not Honest Elections.

In Thursday's complaint, advocates with the group argue the measure is in effect right now — and the mayor, who they say has taken 11 contributions of over \$500, is in violation of it. So, they allege, is mayoral candidate Ozzie Gonzalez, who they say has taken four donations greater than \$500, as well as city council candidate Jack Kerfoot, who has allegedly contributed \$106,000 to his own campaign.

Portland attorney Jason Kafoury, a member of Honest Elections, said the campaign finance limits remain in effect as no lower court has intervened and issued an injunction against the measure.

“There's no hold process in place, meaning it's a live bill,” Kafoury said. “It's just the legality of it is being questioned at the high courts.”

Wheeler's campaign said, in a statement, they were “committed to transparency and disclosure” and were “operating within the current law.”

Last month, Wheeler said he'd impose his own personal limits on campaign contributions, accepting checks from individuals of up to \$5,000 and from organizations up to \$10,000.

Open Elections filed a similar complaint with the Multnomah County Director of Elections Thursday against Lori Stegmann, a candidate for county commissioner, alleging she's in violation of a similar ballot measure passed by Multnomah County voters in 2016. The fate of that measure similarly rests on the decision made by the Oregon Supreme Court.

Kafoury said the candidates have 10 days to respond to the complaints.