

# The Oregonian

## Portland Commissioner Nick Fish dies of cancer

*By Everton Bailey Jr.*

*January 2, 2019*

Nick Fish, the longest tenured member of the current Portland City Council, died Thursday from cancer. He was 61.

Fish died at home surrounded by his loved ones, according to Sonia Schmanski, his chief of staff. He announced on Tuesday that he planned to resign in 2020 to continue to focus on his health while battling abdominal cancer, which he was diagnosed with in 2017.

“The family wanted me to convey publicly their thanks for all the words of love and encouragement sent to Nick since his resignation,” Schmanski said. “Nick called his 11 years of service on the Portland City Council ‘the great honor of my life.’”

He is survived by his wife, Patricia Schechter, and their two children, Maria and Chapin.

A beloved figure in and out of City Hall known for his steady hand and self deprecating sense of humor, Fish was a strong advocate for affordable housing, environmental protections and services to aid the houseless.

A native New Yorker, Fish’s family has been involved in politics since the 1800s. Great-great-grandfather Hamilton Fish was a former governor of New York, U.S. House of Representatives member, U.S. senator and secretary of state under President Ulysses S. Grant.

Grandfather Hamilton Fish III also served in the U.S. House of Representatives as did father Hamilton Fish IV, a Republican who voted to impeach President Richard Nixon during his time in Congress from 1969 to 1994.

Nick Fish graduated from Harvard University in 1981 and earned a law degree in 1986 from Northeastern University in Boston. He and his family moved to Portland in the 1990s after his wife was hired by Portland State University, where she remains a history professor.

Fish had a 20-year career as a lawyer representing health care workers and labor unions before joining the city council. He has also served on the Housing Authority of Portland, Multnomah County Task Force on Vital Aging and other advisory boards.

Fish first ran for city council in 2002 and lost to Randy Leonard. He lost again in 2004 to future mayor Sam Adams. Fish ran again in 2008 and won a city special election to complete the term of former commissioner Erik Sten, who resigned mid-way through his fourth term. Fish would go on to be reelected to full terms in 2010, 2014 and 2018. His current term was to expire at the end of 2022.

Fish most recently oversaw the Bureau of Environmental Services and Portland Parks & Recreation. He was previously the commissioner in charge of the Portland Fire Bureau and Water Bureau, and he helped create the Portland Housing Bureau in 2009.

Politics and engaging in public life were part of his DNA. An attorney and former public affairs TV host on public access, Fish loved to pontificate on issues of national or local importance. Fish particularly seemed to enjoy debating issues with journalists from all outlets citywide. He also loved to talk about his children. He was an avid soccer fan, particularly fond of the University of Portland’s women and men’s teams.

Throughout his tenure on the council, he embraced issues not typically seen as city policy, like the arts and issues surrounding the elderly.

Fish often relished the role of diplomat on the council, working behind the scenes to help build consensus. But he stood his ground on issues where he vehemently disagreed. Calling on his years as a lawyer, Fish could pierce questionable arguments from adversaries and frame his own persuasive points while behind the dais, running his hand along his necktie as he made a salient point.

Fish frequently clashed with former Mayor Charlie Hales, who saddled the commissioner with two distressed utility bureaus in 2013. Fish embraced the role of reformer despite those assignments, keeping water and sewer rates in check while restoring public confidence after years of questionable utility spending. Fish regularly and successfully objected to several of Hales' most controversial ideas, helping block a street-fee plan and a proposal to open a massive homeless campus along the Willamette River.

Fish seemed most content managing the housing and parks bureaus. Early in his tenure, officials under Fish completed a preservation initiative to keep 11 buildings affordable to low-income tenants. Fish also pressed to make small but important improvements to the city's supply of underdeveloped parks in east Portland.

Fish's city council tenure was not without political hiccups. The commissioner oversaw the housing bureau in 2011, drawing fire for failing to take action against landlords who discriminated against prospective tenants. And Fish led the water bureau in 2016 as the city reeled from a lead-in-water crisis that roiled the school district.

In his statement Tuesday announcing his resignation, Fish cited the development of homelessness service center Bud Clark Commons and affordable housing projects Gray's Landing and the Riverplace Parcel as key achievements. He also mentioned helping bring down water rate increases, adding 1,000 community garden plots and helping the Parks bureau create a new funding model.

Days before his death, he said the city is ahead of schedule on its goals to build 2,000 new units of housing linked to services that address chronic homelessness. He also said he hoped a new memorial is built to honor fallen firefighters and that the city would continue to address climate change and embrace collaboration and inclusivity.

Fish said was grateful for all the support he and his family received since his cancer diagnosis and called it a privilege to have been elected to the city council.

"Thank you for allowing me this honor, and for all that you do to make Portland special," he said. "The future is bright."

According to the city charter, the city council decides when to hold a special election to determine who will complete the rest of Fish's term. That could be made a part of the May 19 primary election.

Fish's council seat will remain vacant until another person is elected.

Oregon Governor Kate Brown said she will remember Fish most for his kindness.

"Nick Fish was a devoted public servant, and a true leader who cared so deeply about serving the people of Portland," Brown said.

Mayor Ted Wheeler said Fish was "instrumental in shaping Portland for the better" and that he often went to the commissioner for guidance and advice.

“All of us who knew Nick understood how much he cared about his family, the city and his team,” Wheeler said. “Nick was a dear friend and a trusted public servant. He fiercely advocated for all Portlanders and always led with compassion, wit and intelligence.”

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, who was elected to the city council in 2018, said she’d known Fish for decades and “always respected his deep commitment and tenacity as a public servant, especially as he managed his illness.”

In a statement on Twitter, the Portland Fire Bureau said Fish frequently visited stations when he was in charge and continued to do so when no longer overseeing the agency.

“He was a passionate proponent of civic engagement,” the statement said. “He loved Portland. He will be missed.”

## **Local leaders react to the death of Portland Commissioner Nick Fish**

*By Jayati Ramakrishnan  
January 2, 2019*

Portland residents mourned the death of Nick Fish on Thursday, after the Portland commissioner died after a two-year battle with cancer.

Fish, who had announced his plan to step down from his position just two days earlier, was the longest-tenured member of the current Portland City Council. He was diagnosed with abdominal cancer in 2017 and announced that he planned to step down to focus on his health. Fish, 61, died at home Thursday surrounded by his loved ones, according to his chief of staff Sonia Schmanski. According to Schmanski, he called serving on the council “the greatest honor of my life.”

Dozens of city and state figureheads publicly mourned Fish’s passing, recalling his kindness and fierce commitment to public service.

Below is a collection of some civic leaders’ reactions to Fish’s death:

### **Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler:**

“We are mourning the loss of Commissioner Nick Fish. All of us who knew Nick understood how much he cared about his family, the City and his team. Nick was a dear friend and a trusted public servant. He fiercely advocated for all Portlanders and always led with compassion, wit and intelligence. He was instrumental in shaping Portland for the better and I often sought his advice and guidance. We are especially thinking about his family and his team – as we continue to grieve his passing. Nick was taken too early. He will be dearly missed.”

### **Portland Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty:**

“I’m very saddened to hear of Commish Fish’s passing earlier today. I’ve known Nick for decades, and while our time as colleagues on council was briefer than expected, I have always respected his deep commitment & tenacity as a public servant, especially as he managed his illness. I send my deepest condolences to his family and friends as they navigate this time.”

### **Former Portland Mayor Sam Adams:**

“Rest In Peace my friend. You did good, you did very good. Portland and much more is better for your work. Big hug and support to your family in the face of this terrible loss. I feel lucky to have known you. Portland is lucky to have had you as a leader.”

**Governor Kate Brown:**

“Nick Fish was a devoted public servant, and a true leader who cared so deeply about serving the people of Portland. An advocate for our environment, and a champion for the homeless. I will always remember his kindness. Dan and my thoughts are with his family.”

**Rep. Suzanne Bonamici:**

“I’m devastated to hear about the death of Portland Commissioner Nick Fish. Nick was one of the kindest and most authentic people I’ve known. Although he came from a long line of prominent New York politicians, Nick was truly humble. He worked hard and was passionate about our community, especially on issues of housing and homelessness, the environment, and parks. He was a strong advocate for the arts, and I’ll always remember when he joined me for a tour of the Portland Art Museum with the Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. Nick occasionally entertained me with stories about his time working with former Congressman Barney Frank. But most importantly, Nick loved his family. I hope Patricia, the children, and the extended family are comforted by memories of happy times together with this remarkable man. Rest in peace, Nick.”

**Rep. Earl Blumenauer:**

The passing of @CommishFish is a profound shock. Nick was a dedicated public servant who continued his service as he waged a courageous battle against cancer. We honor that service as we mourn his loss. My deepest sympathy to his family.

**Sen. Jeff Merkley:**

My heart breaks for Portland & all of @CommishFish’s friends, family, & constituents. He dedicated his life to the city & it was an honor to work w/ him on issues like housing, which was close to his heart & impacted 1000’s of families. He left a great legacy & we will miss him.

**Portland Timbers and Portland Thorns:**

Saddened by the passing of Commissioner Nick Fish. He was a lover of soccer and a great supporter and friend of the club. Our hearts go out to his family and friends.

**U.S. Senator Ron Wyden:**

“Today our community lost a once-in-a-generation public official. Commissioner Fish just kept showing up to better the lives of Portlanders. His heart for people was huge, his energy enormous, and tenacity rare. Nick - it was a privilege to serve with you.”

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish dies after battling cancer**

*By Jim Redden  
January 02, 2020*

**City Council must set an election to replace its most senior member, who died Thursday, Jan. 2, after a two-year fight with the disease.**

Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish died Thursday, Jan. 2, after a two-year battle with cancer.

Fish's Chief of Staff Sonia Schmanski released a statement saying Fish, 61, died peacefully at home. "This afternoon I received word that Commissioner Nick Fish passed away peacefully today at home, surrounded by his loved ones," Schmanski's said in the statement. "The family wanted me to convey publicly their thanks for all the words of love and encouragement sent to Nick since his resignation. Nick called his 11 years of service on the Portland City Council 'the great honor of my life.'"

Fish fought abdominal cancer for more than two years. He maintained a busy schedule before taking the last part of December off, after saying his cancer has gotten more "complicated."

The City Council will schedule a special election to fill the unexpired portion of his term. The council next meets on Wednesday, Jan. 8. The council also needs to decide when a run-off election would be held if no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote.

Fish was the longest serving member of the current City Council. He was elected in May 2008 to replace Commissioner Erik Sten, who resigned from the council.

Fish released a statement on Tuesday, Dec. 31, saying he would resign when his replacement was elected. "I have always brought energy and enthusiasm to my job as commissioner. Serving on the council has been the great honor of my life. Based on the demands of my illness, however, I no longer believe that I can do this work at the high level our community deserves and I expect of myself."

After Fish's announcement, Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury praised him for providing leadership on local issues. "That Nick Fish would prove to become a strong and vocal leader on issues related to affordable housing and homelessness was never a surprise," she said. "Those issues are etched into his heart and soul, and define him as a true public servant. It's what makes Nick more than just an able legislator or an administrator with the steadiest of hands. His unwavering desire to do the right thing, even when it wasn't easy, should be the gold standard for current and future elected officials because Nick Fish has never taken a shortcut. A bureau in trouble? Give it to Nick. Controversial issue? Give it to Nick. Time and time again he proved he could take care of it."

Fish, a lawyer, first ran for the council in 2004, losing to future Mayor Sam Adams. He won in 2008 and was then re-elected to full four-year terms in 2010, 2014 and 2018.

**Here is an edited version of Fish's New Year's Eve statement:**

"Last month, I shared that my illness had become more complicated and that I would be taking a few weeks over the holidays to be with my family and to learn more about what changes in my health mean for my public service.

"Since then, I have been talking to my team of care providers and adjusting to my new reality.

"I have always brought energy and enthusiasm to my job as Commissioner. Serving on the Council has been the great honor of my life. Based on the demands of my illness, however, I no longer believe that I can do this work at the high level our community deserves and I expect of myself.

"I cannot escape the very sad fact that I will be unable to serve out the remainder of my term. I trust my Council colleagues to determine the most appropriate date for an election to select my successor, minimizing disruption and cost to the City.

"Portlanders have inspired me every day since I was sworn in in June of 2008, and I am so proud of what we've accomplished together.

"For the past 11 years in office, I've worn many hats. I was honored to serve initially as Commissioner of one of the city's oldest bureaus, Portland Fire & Rescue and, with Mayor Adams, I helped create and lead a brand new one in 2009, the Portland Housing Bureau. Then I led our two utilities, Water and Environmental Services, and Portland Parks & Recreation — twice.

"I ran on a platform in support of affordable housing and ending homelessness. In my years as Housing Commissioner, we focused on serving our most vulnerable neighbors — the poorest people in our community. Even during the worst recession of my lifetime, we made important progress. At times, the only construction cranes in the air were the ones building affordable housing. We built new homes, saved hundreds of affordable apartments for older adults and people with disabilities, and helped hundreds of homeless veterans find stable, affordable homes. We worked closely with our partners at Multnomah County, in the non-profit community, and at the State to align our dollars and our priorities — and we made a lasting difference. Bud Clark Commons, Gray's Landing, and the new Riverplace Parcel are testament to what Portland can do when we work in partnership.

"Supportive housing is a proven, efficient tool to serve our most vulnerable citizens and I have worked hard to ensure that Council has maintained this priority. I threw myself into the recent bond measures sponsored by the city and by Metro that are now bringing hundreds of affordable new homes to our community. Later this year, I hope our region passes a new measure to fund the services that allow people to remain successfully housed. And I am gratified that we are ahead of schedule on our goal to add 2,000 new units of supportive housing — affordable homes with wraparound services — by 2028. We must never lose sight of the neediest in our community, those whose voice is often lost in policy debates.

"Back in 2013, Mayor Hales assigned me the two city utilities — the Bureau of Environmental Services and Portland Water Bureau. At the time, the bureaus were a source of frustration to citizens due to rate increases and accountability issues. I was excited by the opportunity to restore public trust, increase transparency, and improve the alignment of priorities. Five years of patient listening and rebuilding paid off. We brought rate increases down and sharpened our focus on mission-critical work, like water quality. We also won a major lawsuit challenging City spending of utility dollars. We did it together.

"My time leading the women and men of the Fire Bureau was brief, but my respect for their service is deep and enduring. Every day, firefighters do whatever it takes to keep their fellow Portlanders safe. At times, they make the ultimate sacrifice. It is my fervent hope that our community will rally to build a new memorial to fallen firefighters. The planned David Campbell Memorial, named for an early Fire Chief whose service cost him his life, will provide a peaceful refuge that commemorates those we have lost and honors those who serve today.

"Portlanders love their parks and so do I. Last year, almost everyone in our community visited a park or natural area. These green places draw new residents and visitors to Portland, and time and again citizens name parks as a top priority. I served as Parks Commissioner from 2009 through mid-2013, and again since November of 2018. Both eras brought unique challenges. In 2009, when the recession limited City resources, we focused on meaningful investments that would matter to Portlanders. Public-private partnerships brought us innovations like Harper's Playground and the Summer Free-For-All program, gems of inclusivity, beauty, and fun. We added 1,000 new community garden plots to our city-wide inventory. We passed new protections for our urban tree canopy. And we laid plans for new park development, so that when resources became available we'd be ready to move forward with fresh ideas.

"A decade later, Parks faces a different challenge. A structural problem in the way Parks is funded has meant that the bureau continually loses ground. Equipment, facilities, and fields deteriorate because we can't maintain them. The old fee-driven business model cannot sustain the system we have, much less improve it. Without new funding, Portland will never be able to conserve and develop a healthy, safe parks system or to close the inequities around access. Our parks must serve all Portlanders. The bureau has begun the hard work of crafting a more efficient, equitable funding model, exploring what a better, more sustainable future will look like. We cherish our green and open places and by working together, we can responsibly steward them for future generations.

"Care and stewardship of the environment are global as well as local issues. We are in a climate crisis and Portland must remain a leader and innovator. In my time on the Council, the city has begun to decisively reduce our impact on the environment. A raft of new initiatives are moving us in the right direction: limits on single-use plastics, shifting our automotive fleet off gas fuel, composting food waste, converting methane at our sewage treatment plant to renewable natural gas, and maximizing our use of nature rather than pipes to manage Portland's plentiful rainwater. These initiatives provide momentum that must grow. Cities will continue to be laboratories for innovation in climate protection, and I know that Portland can continue to be a leader.

"I have always believed that government can be society's greatest force for good, and that together we can do amazing things. As a member of the Council, I have insisted that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts, and I have focused on partnership, collaboration, and shared success.

"Across the country, the last decade has seen a stark decline in civility. Portland has not been immune to the national weakening of civil discourse. And, as we grapple with the future of our country and our planet, we are becoming a big city, with our own growing pains. We can rise to this occasion and embrace inclusivity, sustainability, and shared prosperity for all. We must unite around these values and make them real through collective effort. City Council can do its part by fostering diverse rather than divergent priorities. It is our obligation to find the common ground in order to advance the common good. I have seen the power of partnership, and I trust our community's leaders to see that the people of Portland deserve our best.

"I am grateful for the support and love my family and I have felt over the last two and a half years that I have fought against cancer. And I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the community I love for the past decade.

"Thank you for allowing me this honor, and for all that you do to make Portland special. The future is bright."

## **Nick Fish tributes pour in: 'He will be dearly missed'**

*By Jim Redden  
January 02, 2020*

**Longest serving City Council member is mourned after passing away from cancer on Jan. 2**

Heartfelt tributes to Commissioner Nick Fish were released following his death at age 61 from cancer on Thursday, Jan. 2. He will be replaced in a special election.

"We are mourning the loss of Commissioner Nick Fish. All of us who knew Nick understood how much he cared about his family, the City and his team," said Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"Nick was a dear friend and a trusted public servant. He fiercely advocated for all Portlanders and always led with compassion, wit and intelligence.

"He was instrumental in shaping Portland for the better and I often sought his advice and guidance.

"We are especially thinking about his family and his team — as we continue to grieve his passing.

"Nick was taken too early. He will be dearly missed."

U.S. Congressman Earl Blumenauer said, "Nick was a dedicated public servant who continued his service as he waged a courageous battle against cancer. We honor that service as we mourn his loss. My deepest sympathy to his family."

U.S. Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici said, "Nick was one of the kindest and most authentic people I've known. Although he came from a long line of prominent New York politicians, Nick was truly humble. He worked hard and was passionate about our community, especially on issues of housing and homelessness, the environment, and parks. He was a strong advocate for the arts, and I'll always remember when he joined me for a tour of the Portland Art Museum with the Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. Nick occasionally entertained me with stories about his time working with former Congressman Barney Frank. But most importantly, Nick loved his family. I hope Patricia, the children, and the extended family are comforted by memories of happy times together with this remarkable man. Rest in peace, Nick."

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty said, "I'm very saddened to hear of Commissioner Fish's passing earlier today. I've known Nick for decades, and while our time as colleagues on council was briefer than expected, I have always respected his deep commitment and tenacity as a public servant, especially as he managed his illness. I send my deepest condolences to his family and friends as they navigate this time."

Former Mayor Sam Adams said, "Rest In Peace my friend. You did good, you did very good. Portland and much more is better for your work. Big hug and support to your family in the face of this terrible loss. I feel lucky to have known you."

Portland Police Association President Daryl Turner said, "During his tenure serving as City Commissioner, Nick Fish was a champion of the people, he cared about the most vulnerable, he loved our city, and he was a fair and steady force in Portland's City Council. In all my interactions with Commissioner Fish, even when we didn't agree, he was honorable and a man of his word. What a great loss to our city. He will be greatly missed. Our condolences and prayers go out to his family during this tragic time."

Dan Lavey, President of Gallatin Public Affairs, said, "Nick was first and foremost a good person: smart, thoughtful and kind. Nick believed in public service and while progressive, wasn't rigidly ideological. He was a moderating, inclusive voice on the city council. He was a friend and mentor to many. Nick leaves an important legacy of both accomplishments and how to serve with integrity, wit and good humor. I've lost a friend. Portland has lost an outstanding leader and citizen."

Paul Phillips, president and owner of Pac/West Communications, said, "Nick was always the adult in the room. He would ask, why? Rather than listen to the loudest, he focused on doing the right thing for the long term."

The Portland Timbers — who Fish always supported — said, "Saddened by the passing of Commissioner Nick Fish. He was a lover of soccer and a great supporter and friend of the club. Our hearts go out to his family and friends."

The University of Portland, where Fish had long supported its soccer teams, said, "For more than a decade, Commissioner Nick Fish served our city with dignity, vision, commitment and passion. His approach to city hall governance was rooted in what was best for Portland, not just politically relevant or viable. For our University of Portland community, Commissioner Fish was both a friend and fan, especially of our Pilots women's soccer program. He often honored us with his presence and support, and we will miss him."

A lawyer and the son of former New York Congressman Hamilton Fish, he first joined the council in 2008 after winning a May special election to fill the unexpired term of Commissioner Erik Sten, who resigned to pursue other interests. Fish was re-elected to a full four-year term in 2010, in 2014, and again in 2018.

Fish was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2017 but had been maintaining a busy schedule until December, when he took most of last December off because his disease had gotten more "complicated."

Portland election officials say there is still enough time for the council to schedule the replacement vote for the May 19 primary election, when the other three other council positions will also be on the ballot. Like with those races, candidates would have until March 10 to file for Fish's position.

If no candidate receives more than 50%, the top two vote-getters will face off at a run-off election, the same as the other races. If they happen, those races will be decided at the November 3 general election. The council could also choose the Sept. 15 special election allowed by Oregon law, however.

## Willamette Week

### Portland Commissioner Nick Fish Has Died

*By Nigel Jaquiss and Rachel Monahan  
January 2, 2019*

**"He loved everything about being a public servant even when it was difficult to be a public servant," says Deborah Kafoury.**

City Commissioner Nick Fish, a stabilizing force in Portland City Hall who advised and tempered three mayors, has died of stomach cancer, two days after announcing his resignation. He was 61.

Fish, a Harvard graduate and labor lawyer, joined Portland City Council in 2008, and rapidly established himself as a champion for social services, a caretaker of the city's parks, and a peacemaker between progressive city officials and local business leaders.

A tearful Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury this afternoon paid tribute to her friend.

"I think it's probably going to be said a million times about him but he was true public servant," Kafoury says. "He loved everything about being a public servant even when it was difficult to be a public servant. He was such a good friend to so many people because he cared so much about people. He was a very special person and I'm very sad."

Nicholas Stuyvesant Fish came from a long line of public servants. Four generations of Fishes served New York in Congress. Nick Fish's father, U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish (R-N.Y) served 13 terms and famously broke with his GOP colleagues to vote for the impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

Nick Fish left New York in the late 1990s, when his wife, Patricia Schechter, then a history professor, took a job at Portland State University. While practicing law here, Fish first ran for City Council in 2002, losing to Randy Leonard and then again in 2004, losing to Sam Adams.

Like the Portland Pilots' women's soccer team, of whom he was a die-hard fan, he kept trying and won his council seat on his third try in 2008.

His onetime rivals today had nothing but praise for him.

"It's just awful. It's so unfair. He was so vigorous," says former City Commissioner Randy Leonard, who beat Fish in the 2002 race for council and later served alongside him. "He lived and breathed Portland."

"He was just a good person," Leonard told WW, repeatedly pausing as he broke down in tears. "He was more patient with people than I was and he would counsel me about that. He made me a better person."

Leonard cited Fish's father and grandfather's legacy of public service in driving him to revel in the "rubber chicken dinner" circuit.

"I think he felt like he was living his family's legacy and he did not want to let them down," Leonard says. "He had this ideal of public service. It was a legacy that he not only accepted but embraced and lived every day."

On the council, Fish delighted in his work leading the Portland Housing Bureau and Portland Parks and Recreation and also put in difficult stretches fixing the embattled Bureau of Environmental Services and the Water Bureau. His leadership was widely credited as staving off an effort by dissident ratepayers to wrest those utilities from City Hall.

Fish was the driving force behind two housing bonds and an early enthusiast for the Portland Thorns and Timbers soccer teams. He stayed on the job for two years after his 2017 cancer diagnosis, only announcing his resignation on Dec. 31—two days before his death.

"Nick was a dear friend and a trusted public servant," Mayor Ted Wheeler said in a statement. "He fiercely advocated for all Portlanders and always led with compassion, wit and intelligence. He was instrumental in shaping Portland for the better and I often sought his advice and guidance. We are especially thinking about his family and his team – as we continue to grieve his passing.

"Nick was taken too early. He will be dearly missed."

Housing advocate Israel Bayer was among the longtime observers of City Hall who today said Fish stood out from most politicians.

"Nick was a friend of the poor," Bayer tells WW. "On more than one occasion, Nick would visit people experiencing homelessness and offer individuals their first meal after getting into housing. Nick did this quietly and always asked for it to stay out of the press.

"There's no elected official," Bayer added, "that cared more about bringing people together across different political spectrums to work towards giving people a safe place to call home."

## **The Portland Mercury**

### **Commissioner Fish Has Died of Cancer**

*By Alex Zielinski*

*January 2, 2020*

Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish passed away this afternoon from cancer.

Fish, a labor attorney, had been an active member of Portland City Council since 2008, where he fought tirelessly for affordable housing access and environmental protections. Fish, 61, was diagnosed with abdominal cancer in 2017, but didn't let his illness slow his final years on council. Fish ran a rigorous re-election campaign in 2018 and went on to tackle the Portland Parks Bureau's floundering budget in 2019.

On December 31, Fish announced that, because of his illness' rapid progression, he'd be resigning from City Council in 2020. In a lengthy public statement issued at the time, Fish called his career on council "the great honor of my life."

Fish was halfway through a four-year term. The city must now hold a special election to fill Fish's now-vacant council seat.

In his December 31 message, Fish said this about the city's future:

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"Across the country, the last decade has seen a stark decline in civility. Portland has not been immune to the national weakening of civil discourse. And, as we grapple with the future of our country and our planet, we are becoming a big city, with our own growing pains. We can rise to this occasion and embrace inclusivity, sustainability, and shared prosperity for all. We must unite around these values and make them real through collective effort.

City Council can do its part by fostering diverse rather than divergent priorities. It is our obligation to find the common ground in order to advance the common good. I have seen the power of partnership, and I trust our community's leaders to see that the people of Portland deserve our best."

He concluded his message with this statement: "I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the community I love for the past decade. Thank you for allowing me this honor, and for all that you do to make Portland special. The future is bright."

### **A is for Amazon, Z is for Zenith: The Year in Portland News**

*By Blair Stenvick and Alex Zielinski*

*January 2, 2020*

The thing about the news is that it's never finished. The world—and, more specifically, the Portland news ecosystem—is a swirling ball of chaos, and the events, issues, and personalities that dominated 2019's headlines aren't going to stay neatly contained in that one year.

That said: 2019 was a hell of a year to be a Portlander, and lists are fun. So we've put together 26 of the biggest news stories of 2019—stories that we think will have repercussions in 2020 and beyond.

As luck would have it—and despite the fact that calendars are a social construct, and so is the alphabet, and neither can fully explain what happened over the last 365 days—those 26 stories just so happen to fit perfectly into an alphabet. Consider it our belated holiday gift to you.

### **Amazon**

In December, investigative news outlet Reveal discovered that an Amazon fulfillment center in Troutdale has an astoundingly high rate of workplace injuries. The industry average is four injured workers per every 100 each year—but Troutdale’s Amazon warehouse saw 26 injuries per 100 in 2018. “Amazon doesn’t want any long-term workers,” an employee told the Mercury. “They want you to work hard and fast and get rid of you when your body can’t take it anymore. That’s their business model.”

### **Bus and MAX fare**

2019 was TriMet’s 50th anniversary—but there wasn’t much love for the transit agency in October, when TriMet announced it was adding nine new fare inspectors. The announcement was accompanied by the rollout of a tactless ad campaign that likened fare evasion to not covering one’s share of the dinner check. The ad campaign was quickly abandoned, and by December, TriMet board members were flirting with the idea of transferring to a fareless system. TriMet management, meanwhile, says those board members’ statements were exaggerated. This is possibly the wonkiest will-they-or-won’t-they plotline ever.

### **Cider Riot**

This NE Portland cidery and bar became a central setting in the perpetual standoffs—and lawsuits—between right-wing agitators (Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys, etc.) and anti-fascist demonstrators (antifa, PopMob, etc.), including a Patriot Prayer-instigated May Day brawl that resulted in several arrests and a lawsuit filed by Cider Riot. In November, it also fell prey to another 2019 trend: Like several other breweries in town, Cider Riot closed shop.

### **Death penalty**

Oregon hasn’t executed a person on death row since 1997. But somehow, a new law that significantly narrows the use of capital punishment caused one of the fiercest political fights of the 2019 Oregon legislative session. District attorneys warned that the new law would send Oregon’s court system into a state of chaos, while progressives celebrated the near-end of capital punishment, which wastes millions of state dollars every year. The law went into effect in September.

### **E-cigs and vapes**

Two Oregonians died this year from a rapid-onset lung illness associated with using either cannabis vape pens or e-cigarettes, prompting the Oregon Health Authority to enact a ban on all flavored vaping products in October. That ban didn’t last long—the Oregon Court of Appeals halted it days later, after e-cigarette manufacturers filed a lawsuit—but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) still advises not using any vaping products.

### **Free Hot Soup**

Organizations like Free Hot Soup and Portland Assembly have long used Portland’s public parks as places to serve free meals to Portlanders in need. In October, Portland Parks and Recreation rolled out a new permitting process that could have financially stifled these groups. In response, Free Hot Soup sued the city, calling the new permit requirement unconstitutional. The city hasn’t been enforcing the policy since the lawsuit was filed. Stay tuned for the fallout in 2020.

## **Guns**

Gun control was one of the many big losers in this year's legislative session. First, Democratic lawmakers stalled a gun control bill crafted by Portland-area teens, fearing it was too far-reaching to pass. Democrats then sacrificed another, less-comprehensive gun control bill in exchange for a \$2 billion school funding package.

## **Hate crimes**

Lawmakers gave Oregon's outdated hate crimes law a needed revamp during the 2019 legislative session. Along with adding "gender identity" to the list of reasons why an Oregonian might be targeted for a hate crime, the new policy places harsher penalties on those who commit a hate crime. Multnomah County has already arrested several Portlanders under the stricter law.

## **Interstate 5**

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) plans to add two auxiliary lanes to a 1.7-mile stretch of I-5 in Portland's Rose Quarter, a \$500 million move the agency says will reduce carbon emissions and safety by fixing a traffic bottleneck. There's just one problem: Environmental advocates and transportation experts call bullshit. From a public comment period that started in spring through an important decision scheduled for December, these activists have made themselves heard at rallies and meetings. Keep your eyes peeled for news on whether ODOT will have to conduct a more rigorous environmental study before proceeding early in 2020.

## **JTTF**

Portland City Council voted to (again) withdraw Portland police representatives from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), a group of regional law enforcement officials who collaborate on domestic terrorist cases. Removing Portland from the JTTF was one of Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's primary campaign promises, as the program has been known to surveil and disproportionately target immigrant communities.

## **Killed by cop**

Portland police shot and killed five people this year, the highest annual number that Portland's seen since 2010. Four of those killed were experiencing a mental health crisis at the time they died, causing city officials to blame the shootings on the mental health system. In the past decade, no Portland police officer has been arrested or disciplined for killing a Portlander.

## **Lawsuits**

The city of Portland and Portland Police Bureau (PPB) found themselves on the receiving end of several lawsuits from people injured by police while protesting. Peggy Zebroski, a 68-year-old woman who had her nose broken by cops at a 2017 demonstration, lost her ACLU-assisted lawsuit against the city. Two different lawsuits from protestors injured during 2018 protests will likely be decided in 2020.

## **Milkshake**

June 29 saw the first alt-right-versus-antifa protest of the summer and, like any decent summer event, milkshakes were involved. PopMob, a group of antifascist organizers, handed out vegan milkshakes as part of their plan to draw attention away from Patriot Prayer's message—and some folks chose to throw those milkshakes at the alt-righters. The real trouble came when PPB's official Twitter account posted an unverified claim that there was quick-drying cement in those shakes, drawing national media attention. Months later, no "concrete" evidence has

emerged, and neither PPB nor Mayor Ted Wheeler, who oversees the bureau, have issued any sort of retraction, despite requests from PopMob to do so.

### **Neighborhood associations**

City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly proposed a new framework to bring more equity into the city bureau that oversees neighborhood associations—and neighborhood associations lost their shit. Despite having the support of minority groups who've long been underrepresented by the Office of Civic and Community Life, the association pushback pressured Eudaly to delay the decision until 2020.

### **Open and accountable**

Candidates participating in the May 2020 primary election will be the first folks to take advantage of Portland's new Open and Accountable Elections program, which helps level the playing field by matching a candidate's small-dollar donations six-fold. Mayoral candidate Sarah Iannarone has already benefited from the program, while Wheeler has declined to participate. But in September, the Mercury found that software issues could lead to problems with the program. We'll see what happens in 2020!

### **Parks budget**

During this year's budget cycle, it became apparent that Portland Parks and Recreation is facing a \$6.3 million dollar budget shortfall. The city is looking into solutions—including possibly creating a special parks district in Portland, which could open up new funding options—but for now, that debt is being eased by reduced programming and shorter hours at community centers. Oh, but don't worry: All of the city's unprofitable golf courses are still open!

### **Quake**

A controversial new city policy requiring old brick buildings to be labeled as unsafe in an earthquake was supposed to go into effect this year. But between criticism from the Portland chapter of the NAACP and tenants' rights advocates (both of which saw the rule as discriminatory), and a successful lawsuit from building owners who claimed the ordinance violated the First Amendment, the policy never got off the ground. City Council officially overturned it in October.

### **Rent**

City Council passed a series of rental reforms championed by Eudaly, including requiring landlords to assess applications on a "first-come, first-served" basis, placing limits on security deposits, and imposing new regulations on Airbnb. The rent is still too damn high (even nine whole years after that reference was relevant!), but this should help.

### **Sondland, Gordon**

For a few weeks during the Trump impeachment hearings, Portland's millionaire weirdo became America's millionaire weirdo. Sondland's testimony ("President Zelensky loves your ass!") was among the most damning for Trump, and local politicians suffered fall out as well: Wheeler, Commissioner Nick Fish, and former state Rep. Knute Buehler had all taken donations from the hotelier. (After Sondland's testimony, each passed those donations on to charities.) In November, a joint investigation by Portland Monthly and ProPublica revealed that Sondland is an alleged sexual harasser, putting the final nail in his reputation's coffin.

## **Texts**

In February, Willamette Week and the Mercury broke the news that PPB Lt. Jeff Niiya, acting as a community liaison, exchanged texts with Patriot Prayer's Joey Gibson that suggested preferential treatment for the alt-right group. A city investigation cleared Niiya of any wrongdoing, though it also found PPB's training for liaisons lacking.

## **Unions**

The threat of an employee strike loomed over many Portland institutions this year, including Portland State University, Fred Meyer, and Kaiser Permanente. For the most part, the unions ended up winning higher wages and new benefits for workers—inspiring employees at other Portland workplaces, like Grand Central Bakery and Disability Rights Oregon, to start fledgling unions of their own. Meanwhile, the unions at Little Big Burger and Burgerville continued to make measured progress, battling their higher-ups every step of the way.

## **Vision Zero**

At least 46 people—including pedestrians, bikers, and drivers—died in Portland traffic collisions in 2019, significantly more than in the previous several years. The always-climbing tally has become a rallying cry for bike activists demanding safer road conditions. It's also raised questions about how effectively Portland is enacting Vision Zero, a series of road infrastructure and rule changes meant to bring traffic deaths down to zero.

## **Wapato**

Wapato is an unused jail built by Multnomah County. Jordan Schnitzer is a wealthy man who bought it and is relentless in his pursuit to turn it into the world's most inconvenient homeless shelter, despite almost zero support from experts in homeless services. **JORDAN SCHNITZER! STOP TRYING TO MAKE WAPATO HAPPEN!**

## **Title X**

Governor Kate Brown decided Oregon would stop receiving Title X funds—money from the federal government that helps cover reproductive health services for low-income people—after realizing a new Trump administration policy linked to Title X presented a barrier to abortion access. This was just one of many ways Oregonians resisted Trump in 2019, along with protests, bold new Oregon Supreme Court rulings, and federal lawsuits.

## **Youth**

There's a new movement in town: Sunrise Movement PDX, the local chapter of a national youth-led fight to curb the effects of climate change. Sunrise helped organize the massive Portland Climate Strike in September and has pushed local leaders to take more aggressive stances on issues like freeway expansions and fossil fuel infrastructure. Its organizers have also gotten into a few tangles with Wheeler's communications team, which means they've officially arrived as a progressive Portland institution.

## **Zenith**

Early this year, OPB reported that oil company Zenith Energy was running crude oil trains through Portland and planned to expand its oil terminal facility on the Willamette River. A wave of pressure from environmental activists emboldened the city to deny Zenith an important building permit. The buzz around Zenith also brought a new focus to the Critical Energy Infrastructure Hub, a six-mile stretch along the Willamette that houses most of the state's fuel supply that would be extremely vulnerable during an earthquake. County and city leaders are

now studying the area and looking for ways to hold fuel companies accountable, so expect more on the issue in 2020.

## **The Portland Business Journal**

### **City Commissioner Nick Fish dies at 61**

*By Andy Giegerich  
January 2, 2020*

Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish, known for his friendly demeanor and commitment to bettering Portland, died Thursday at the age of 61.

His death was confirmed in an email sent by his Chief of Staff Sonia Schmanski. Fish revealed Tuesday he'd resign from the council to address complications from the stomach cancer he'd battled for for two-plus years.

"This afternoon I received word that Commissioner Nick Fish passed away peacefully today at home, surrounded by his loved ones," she wrote. "The family wanted me to convey publicly their thanks for all the words of love and encouragement sent to Nick since his resignation. Nick called his 11 years of service on the Portland City Council 'the great honor of my life.' He fought abdominal cancer for more than two years."

Fish was first elected to Portland's City Council in 2008. He embraced the role spearheading changes in the city's parks and water bureaus while establishing a reputation as an attentive, thoughtful council member who earned respect from all walks of Portland life.

In the past two years, Fish oversaw the city's efforts to clean the Willamette River Superfund site, work that earned him audiences with business operators and environmentalists who generally praised his ideas. He was also known for creating the city's housing bureau and, in one of his proudest accomplishments, oversaw the opening of Old Town's Bud Clark Commons in 2011.

## **OPB**

### **Portland Commissioner Nick Fish Dies At 61**

*By Anna Griffin Follow and Dirk VanderHart  
January 2, 2020*

UPDATE (Jan. 2, 6:05 p.m. PT) — Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish, the scion of an East Coast political dynasty who spent more than a decade serving his adopted hometown, has died.

Fish, 61, died Thursday surrounded by family, according to his office. That was just two days after announcing that the abdominal cancer he was diagnosed with more than two years ago had left him incapable of continuing to work.

A native of New York state, Fish attended Harvard University as an undergraduate and earned his law degree at Northeastern University. He was an employment lawyer by trade and began his public service career working on neighborhood issues in New York City.

The Fish family has been involved in government and politics since the Revolutionary War; His father and grandfather — Hamilton Fish IV and III, respectively — both served in the U.S. House of Representatives. His great-great-grandfather, also known as Hamilton Fish, was a congressman, senator, governor of New York and secretary of state to President Ulysses S. Grant.

Fish cut his political teeth as an aide to U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Massachusetts, but moved west in 1996 after his wife, Patricia Schechter, got a professorship in the history department of Portland State University.

Fish quickly became involved in civic life in Portland, joining the board of the Housing Authority of Portland and raising money for local nonprofits that helped victims of domestic abuse and vulnerable children. He ran two failed campaigns for Portland City Council before finally winning a special election to replace Commissioner Erik Sten, who had resigned.

On the Council, Fish's passions were affordable housing — he oversaw creation of a separate city agency devoted to housing issues — and expanding and renovating Portland parks. In 11 years at City Hall, he gained a reputation as a mature, steady influence on a sometimes dysfunctional political body, an elected leader who enjoyed behind-the-scenes parrying with reporters and was passionate about making government work for everyone.

“At times, I would get frustrated with him because I wanted my way,” said Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury, who frequently worked with Fish and other Portland officials on housing and social services issues. “He wanted me to see the bigger picture: that getting something was better than having nothing. In this day and age when our country is so torn apart with divisive politics, Nick really tried to bring the best out in everyone.”

“For him, it was important that people treat each other with respect and dignity,” said Zari Santner, who worked for Fish for several years as Portland parks director. “He truly believed that government can make a difference.”

In Portland's unique commission form of government, City Council members are responsible for the day-to-day operation of city agencies. Considered even-keeled and analytical, Fish frequently drew the toughest bureau assignments — including controlling both the city water and sewer bureaus at the same time.

“That's not an assignment that gets you a lot of attention or opportunities to cut ribbons or make flowery speeches,” said Commissioner Amanda Fritz. “He restored public trust in them. He made sure they worked together. He was very much concerned about rate payers, and about low-income rate payers. ... No matter what he was assigned, he was just like ‘OK.’ What are the principles and values? What do we need to focus on? I just learned so much from him.”

Again and again Thursday, those who knew Fish found similar words to describe the legacy he leaves behind — that of a consummate public servant.

“His style was that of a statesman, but his heart always prioritized people who didn't have access to Portland's economic boom,” said Liam Frost, who spent years on Fish's staff.

Fish, who is survived by his wife and two children, announced in the summer of 2017 that he had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. He was public about the complexities of his treatment, and the times in which they made it difficult for him to work.

At the start of December, he announced that he was taking time off through the holidays to focus on his health and consult with his doctors.

Just two days ago, he announced plans to resign from the City Council upon the selection of a successor, saying his health had made continuing to work impossible.

“I am grateful for the support and love my family and I have felt over the last two and a half years that I have fought against cancer. And I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the community I love for the past decade,” he wrote. “Thank you for allowing me this honor, and for all that you do to make Portland special. The future is bright.”

City Council members must call a special election to fill Fish’s seat. It’s expected to occur in May. His family has not yet set details for a public memorial.