

The Oregonian

\$24 million reimbursement fund ‘bolsters’ number of firms agreeing to clean contaminated Portland Harbor

By Everton Bailey Jr.

March 11, 2020

Businesses have recently committed to clean up more than half of the heavily contaminated 10-mile portion of the Willamette River in Portland, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The agency announced Monday that it reached agreements with nearly two dozen companies, including Chevron, Exxon and Shell Oil, between December and last Wednesday to restore eight portions of the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

Portland officials said the new contracts account for 140 contaminated acres or 57% of the superfund site.

The affected portion of the river flows from near the Broadway Bridge downstream to Sauvie Island. The site includes portions of the sediment of the Willamette River that have been contaminated with hazardous substances over the last century from industrial use in the area.

A state and federal study found in 1997 that the river sediments were heavily contaminated posing human health and environment risks. Three years later, the environmental protection agency designated the area a federal superfund site and placed it on its list of national priorities, requiring a long-term cleanup plan. Federal officials in 2017 released a final plan to clean up the harbor’s contaminated soil and toxic materials, which they estimate will take around 30 years and cost \$1.05 billion.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there are around 150 parties believed to be partly responsible for releasing hazardous substances into the river, including the Oregon Department of Transportation, Department of State Lands and City of Portland. The federal agency group also estimates around 3 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment need to be removed from the river bottom and banks.

Before the latest batch of agreements, some of the agreements the environmental protection agency already reached included the Port of Portland to clean up its marine Terminal 4 site near Sauvie Island; NW Natural for its Gasco property; and the City of Portland, electric power company PacifiCorp and four other companies to be responsible for River Mile 11 East, which stretches between the Broadway and Fremont bridges.

Last May, the City of Portland and the State of Oregon agreed to provide up to \$24 million in reimbursement funds as an incentive to any group suspected of taking part in the contamination to sign agreements with the Environmental Protection Agency to submit blueprints for the cleanup effort. The city and state would provide \$12 million each.

Before then, the federal agency hoped to have cleanup plans that accounted for the entire superfund site to be submitted to them by the end of 2019.

The agency said Monday that the funds “bolstered” its negotiations toward the new agreements. More than \$11 million of the reimbursement fund has been claimed, according to the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services.

“This is a unique and bold approach by public agencies and it’s resulting in the most significant progress we have seen since the site was listed 20 years ago,” Mayor Ted Wheeler said in a statement.

The companies that have signed the latest agreements also include BP Products North America Inc., General Electric Co., and Phillips 66.

Staff refused to bill feds for \$428,000 in spending by Portland police Sex Crimes Unit due to concerns work didn’t comply with grant

*By Maxine Bernstein
March 11, 2020*

Portland police finance staff refused to seek reimbursement of \$428,000 in expenses submitted by the bureau’s Sex Crimes Unit over concern the work didn’t meet terms of a federal grant intended to test and track hundreds of unanalyzed sex assault kits.

The staff tried for close to two years to get police supervisors to address the concern but got nowhere, the city Auditor’s Office found.

It took a tipster calling Portland’s Fraud Hotline in April 2019 to prompt action, according to Auditor Mary Hull Caballero.

The tipster reported that at least one employee but possibly more in the Sex Crimes Unit were doing non-grant work and submitting inaccurate time sheets.

Hull Caballero said she still isn’t sure whether the \$428,138 incurred by the Sex Crimes Unit would qualify for federal reimbursement under the \$1.2 million grant.

Her office referred the allegations to the Police Bureau’s Internal Affairs Division to investigate because they covered both sworn officers and non-sworn employees.

No sworn police supervisors were disciplined after the police inquiry, according to police union officials. The internal investigation found “minor misconduct” by one part-time, temporary non-sworn employee in the Sex Crimes Unit, who no longer works for the Police Bureau, according to Deputy Chief Chris Davis. It also revealed the need for improved timekeeping, he said.

The Auditor’s Office looked at whether police managers were aware of the problem and why no one addressed it for so long.

“This is just a complete management breakdown,” Hull Caballero said. “Fiscal Services had been trying for two years to get someone to pay attention.”

Unfortunately, she said, no one in the Police Bureau’s Fiscal Services Division put their concerns to command staff in writing.

Portland police won the grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative to help them send more than 2,000 untested kits to a private lab for testing. The grant was to run from Oct. 1, 2015, through Sept. 30, 2018.

Money from the grant was intended to cover the cost of the private lab’s tests on the stockpile of sex assault kits and reviews by the state crime lab, training for police sex assault investigators,

prosecutors and advocates who work with sex assault victims to stay current on national best practices on investigations and advocacy response.

In early 2017, the Police Bureau's grants analyst received information that some employees assigned to the grant were doing work that wasn't covered by the grant and weren't working assigned hours. For example, a worker in a data entry administrative position apparently was doing victim advocacy work instead.

The analyst reported the concerns to her boss, a business operations supervisor, and to his boss, the Police Bureau's fiscal manager.

The analyst said she received no feedback on what to do next or whether her concerns would be addressed.

In February 2018, the analyst shared her concerns directly with the police commander overseeing the Sex Crimes Unit. He told her he understood the importance of the issue and would address it, according to the audit.

A lieutenant more directly in charge of the unit dismissed concerns from the grants analyst, telling her that Fiscal Services needed to initiate an internal affairs investigation if they wanted the bureau to look into a report of grant improprieties.

The next month, the grant analyst said her boss told her to stop seeking reimbursement from the grant for the Sex Crimes Unit personnel expenses because of the questions raised.

"The Sex Crimes Unit command did not address the concerns in a way that assured the Fiscal Services Division that the Bureau could bill for reimbursement on the grant," the Auditor's Office found.

In April 2018, the analyst tried to tell the bureau's assistant chief of investigations, then-Jami Resch, through a city human resources staffer working in the Police Bureau.

Resch, now police chief, told the Auditor's Office she didn't receive any reports about problems with the grant.

Resch did recall meeting with the city human resources staffer, who presented a list of issues, but she did not recall discussing problems with the grant expenses, the auditor's report says.

"The Assistant Chief said that if she had heard concerns from the Fiscal Services Division about documenting work for a grant-funded employee, she would have understood the significance of the information and followed-up on it," the auditor's report said. "She said that she did not receive any reports about problems with the grant."

In April 2019, Davis, then an assistant chief and now the bureau's deputy chief, said he also separately received a tip about the alleged grant improprieties. Davis said he immediately referred the case to internal affairs.

"This is deeply impactful to us as we always want to ensure that we are in compliance with our grants," Davis said.

In a January written response to the auditor, Resch wrote that she shared the auditor's concerns about what she termed the bureau's "miscommunication over requesting grant reimbursement."

The bureau is now reviewing whether any of those expenses can now be reimbursed from the grant, Resch said. They had been covered through the Police Bureau's budget and the city's general fund.

“It is my hope the Police Bureau will recover a significant portion of the unbilled amount,” Resch wrote.

Hull Caballero said the bureau first must verify that the work done qualifies for reimbursement under the grant.

The bureau has created a Grants Management Review Committee to meet quarterly to review all grants and resolve any identified compliance issues. If the committee can’t resolve the problems, an assistant chief of the services branch will be notified. It also has adopted written guidelines for the control, review, and approval of grant-related billings.

When the fiscal staff stopped submitting packets for reimbursement on the grant, it appeared that no one in the sex crimes unit, the broader Detective Division or anyone in the chain of command, including the chief of police, was even made aware, according to the auditor.

The Police Bureau is expected to release the investigative records later Wednesday.

Portland passenger ferry leader says idea is ‘getting closer to a reality,’ eyes 2023 launch

*By Andrew Theen
March 10, 2020*

The organizers, financial supporters and volunteers hoping to bring passenger ferries to the Portland area said Tuesday they are making progress and still hope to launch the commuter transit service in spring 2023.

Susan Bladholm, founder of the nonprofit Friends of Frog Ferry group, said she also believes there’s still time to include public dollars for the ferry proposal in the Metro regional government’s \$7 billion transportation package expected to appear on the ballot in November.

“We’re doing everything we can on our end,” Bladholm said, saying there is still time for the Metro council to “make room for us” this fall.

“We’re feeling good about it, candidly,” Bladholm said, adding that Metro Council President Lynn Peterson “has been very supportive of this, but time will tell.”

Peterson didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

Nick Christensen, a Metro spokesman, said projects on the second tier of options being considered in the November ballot measure must have a local sponsor. “We are unaware of any such application or support from Frog Ferry. Metro continues to support their research into the viability of the system,” he said in an email.

Bladholm said she’s banking that a comprehensive study of the ferry’s financial and operational viability, expected to be released this summer, could move the needle and answer some lingering questions from the general public and large bureaucracies alike.

That study is being paid for largely by a \$200,000 state grant and \$40,000 from the Portland transportation bureau. “This is really an important plan,” Bladholm said. The document will include a deeper dive into the project’s financial viability, what types of infrastructure like docks may be needed, and how a ferry system would be maintained and operated and how best to pay for it.

If that report shows the system is financially and economically viable, Bladholm said, she plans to go to public agencies and ask for support.

The ferry idea calls for a roughly 100- to 149-person vessel that would transport passengers from Vancouver to downtown Portland. That trip would take roughly 38 minutes, with a shorter commute on the way back to Washington, given that the Willamette River flows north. Bladholm envisions a “scalable” approach that would potentially add up to 9 stations along the route, with stops in St. Johns, Sellwood, and potentially suburban points to the south like Milwaukie, Lake Oswego and Oregon City.

A ferry from Cathedral Park in St. Johns to downtown would take 16 minutes. The group is proposing to use lower-profile boats along the entire route, so bridge lifts are not necessary.

During a news conference with views of the Willamette from The Portland Business Alliance’s downtown offices, Bladholm said much has happened in the past 15 months since she last spoke publicly about the ferry plan. The nascent effort is now formally a nonprofit, she said, and she envisions an operations model “loosely based” on the Portland Streetcar’s setup. The streetcar is run by a nonprofit, which has its own board of directors, but the vehicles are owned by the city. Dan Bower, the executive director of the streetcar, sits on the ferry group’s board.

Bladholm said ferry service in Portland is financially viable, in part, because there’s a large pot of untapped federal support available. She said Oregon is one of 10 states that doesn’t seek government support through the Federal Transit Administration’s grant program to support ferry operations. Unlike bus or rail projects, which now typically draw a 50% federal match, ferry proposals can receive up to 80% from the federal government.

Last year, the feds distributed \$33 million to various states for ferry programs.

But it’s still unclear how much demand exists for a ferry system in Portland and Vancouver today. A demand modeling report released this month by ECONorthwest found much of the demand would hinge on parking availability and whether riders could connect to other public transit. “To demonstrate the viability of ferry service, a financial feasibility study should be completed to ensure enough revenues can be generated to cover the cost of providing the service,” the report said. “Within that context, the revised demand estimates may be sufficient to sustain a financially feasible initial phase of operations proposed by Frog Ferry.” It was not immediately clear if that assessment applied strictly to a Vancouver to downtown Portland route.

Bladholm said she will be transparent about the projected public subsidy needed to operate a ferry here. She said she doesn’t believe a ferry will cost more to operate than a bus.

The ferry group said it has received seven different proposals from companies about what a proposed ferry may look like and might cost, and Bladholm said she’d share those designs later this summer.

Bladholm said she continues to gain local support from volunteers and business leaders including the Zidell family, which owns 33 acres along the waterfront in Southwest Portland. She said that she will release in a couple weeks the group’s latest financial support from a private entity, whose identity she is keeping secret until then.

Charlene Zidell, vice president of strategic partnerships for her family’s south waterfront real estate company, said she’s dreamed of a ferry system for years. She called the ferry proposal “visionary.”

The Portland Tribune

ODOT, PBOT ship more cash to Willamette River ferry project

*By Zane Sparling
March 10, 2020*

With new quarter-million in grants, Frog Ferry is on track to open in spring 2023, says project founder Susan Bladholm.

The proposal to add passenger ferry service to the Willamette River continues to chug forward, with its backers saying the project is on track to open as soon as spring 2023.

It's been 15 months since Frog Ferry founder Susan Bladholm made a splash by going public with the idea, though she still hasn't nailed down exactly where passengers would hop aboard or disembark.

"Once we start the service, it's fairly easy to scale," Bladholm said during a press conference at the Portland Business Alliance's 14th-floor offices in downtown Portland.

But Bladholm did have news to share, including that the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Portland Bureau of Transportation have granted Frog Ferry a combined \$240,000 in order to fund a feasibility and financing study.

It's a soft step of support in the courtship dance between Bladholm and the public agencies, status TBD, that would own the vessels and ensure they run on time. The Friends of Frog Ferry nonprofit also recently received a large "capacity building" grant from a supporter whose identity remains under wraps.

"Local transit agencies have acknowledged that the river provides a viable mode of transportation," Bladholm said, "but they can't take the lead on this, and they've asked us to do it, so we are."

One public supporter is Charlene Zidell, whose family owns 33 acres on the Willamette. Zidell bemoaned the hassle of getting in her car, driving along Front Avenue, snaking across a bridge — and then finding a place to park — just to visit the Moda Center or OMSI.

"By this time, I'm completely stressed out, my neck is hurting, and I get to the event and I don't even want to be there anymore," Zidell said. "The Frog Ferry is the answer to my dreams."

Frog Ferry documents state that launching with four low-slung passenger ferries would remove 5,360 commuter vehicles from metro area roads and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 22,126 metric tons a year.

Ticket prices are estimated at \$5.50 daily, or \$125 a month. Up to 80% of the proposal's start-up costs could come from federal coffers, while operating costs are pegged at \$1 million yearly.

The boats are likely to have slots for at least 15 bikes and sell coffee (or perhaps beer), though Bladholm doesn't envision building parking at more than one or two of the nine proposed stops in Vancouver, Cathedral Park, the Convention Center, downtown Portland, OHSU, Milwaukie, Lake Oswego and Oregon City.

The Tribune reported last year that lack of parking could doom a proposed gangplank across state lines. Bladholm, however, now says Vancouver is adding 2,000 new parking stalls as part of the new waterfront project east of the Interstate 5 bridge.

"This is not only possible," Bladholm said, "but we're getting closer."

Willamette Week

Real Estate Developer Randy Rapaport Is a Last-Minute Entry into a Crowded Mayor's Race

*By Nigel Jaquiss
March 10, 2020*

The east-side developer joins 16 other candidates challenging incumbent Mayor Ted Wheeler.

Today, the final day to file for the May 19 primary, saw little activity at the city elections office. One notable exception: the entry of Southeast Portland real estate developer Randy Rapaport into the mayor's race.

Rapaport, 59, developed the Belmont Street Lofts and the Clinton Condominiums, among other projects. More recently, as WW reported last year, he battled with the city's Bureau of Development Services over the Pegasus Project, an artists' collective and food cart pod he developed in Montavilla. (Rapaport says that dispute has been resolved and that BDS waived penalties.)

Today, Rapaport decided he will join 16 other candidates who have already filed to challenge incumbent Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"I feel a kind of agency for this office because fresh and creative solutions are needed to better address homelessness, affordable housing, livability, and governance," Rapaport said in a statement.

Portland-Area Officials Are Preparing Two Shelters for Homeless People, Expecting More COVID-19 Cases

*By Tess Riski
March 10, 2020*

The shelters, which typically close in March, have 125 beds combined.

Portland-area governments are extending the use of two winter homeless shelters into spring, expecting that more people living on the streets will need a place to sleep indoors as the novel coronavirus spreads.

Multnomah County officials say people diagnosed with COVID-19 won't be staying at the two shelters. But they expect to shelter people fleeing camps where the virus may spread, as well as people with symptoms.

"We want to maintain our year-round bed capacity," said Denis Theriault, a spokesman for the city-county joint office of homeless services. "People with respiratory symptoms may be in our shelters. No one with a confirmed COVID diagnosis will be in our shelters."

The shelters will be open to anyone who needs housing, Theriault said, and not specific to people who are sick. But in general, unhoused people may be more susceptible to contracting illness because they don't always have access to running water, soap, and other means of sanitation.

The two winter shelters typically close in March. But this spring the 5th Avenue Shelter in downtown Portland and the North Portland Emergency Warming Shelter in the Portsmouth neighborhood will remain open for the foreseeable future so the county can maintain a higher bed count, expecting that more people will fall ill.

The 5th Avenue Shelter, located in Southwest Portland, can house up to 75 people. The North Portland shelter, located in Portsmouth Union Church, has 50 to 60 beds, Theriault said.

The city-county office is still deciding the layout of the shelters, so the bed counts may be lowered, Theriault said, in order to comply with space guidelines given the fact that the shelters are likely to be housing people who are ill.

Anyone who's coughing in the shelters needs to wear a mask, according to county health guidelines, and there will be at least six feet between the beds of those who are coughing or have other symptoms of illness, and those who do not. If someone tests positive for COVID-19, they will be quarantined elsewhere.

The decision is part of the joint office's broader plan to aid unhoused people in the wake of the COVID-19 spread.

The office is also collaborating with various advocacy groups to hand out face masks and hand sanitizer at the city's homeless camps, beginning on March 11 through March 18.

To date, Oregon has 14 confirmed cases of COVID-19. The majority have been in Washington County, and half of the cases are of people 55 and older.

The Portland Mercury

Former City Commissioner Steve Novick Endorses Chloe Eudaly for Portland City Council

*By Alex Zielinski
March 10, 2020*

Former Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick wants Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, the very person who ousted him from office in 2016, to remain on Portland City Council.

"I tend to think that politicians who deliver on what they campaigned on, if they're not bad things, deserve to be reelected," wrote Novick, in an email to the Mercury. "Chloe ran as a tenants' rights activist, and she's delivered more tenants' rights than you can shake a stick at. She's done what she was elected to do."

Novick, who—like Eudaly—served as transportation commissioner while on council said that Eudaly shares his values on transportation. He's particularly supportive of Eudaly's Rose Lane project, which aims to create bus-only lanes across the city to speed up public transit commute times.

Eudaly was a political newcomer when she beat incumbent commissioner Novick in 2016 by more than 24,000 votes. Novick, a former Department of Justice lawyer, now works for Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum as an environmental law fellow. Novick was on City Council

for a four-year term that didn't overlap with former Mayor Sam Adams' tenure. Adams is one of Eudaly's top challengers in the May 2020 election for her seat. Novick's not a fan.

"Sam Adams' biggest accomplishment was passing an extremely regressive tax with high administrative costs," wrote Novick, referencing the Arts Tax. "Adams as Transportation Commissioner let the streets rot for eight years. I probably have an unusually negative perspective on Sam because of specific issues I cared about and worked on. While I was in office I often thought of myself as the anti-Sam Adams."

Eudaly also has garnered the support of several sitting elected officials, including City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, Metro Regional Government President Lynn Peterson, US Senator Jeff Merkley, and US Congressman Earl Blumenauer.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Community development eyed for Hill Block parcel

By Chuck Slothower

March 10, 2020

The Prosper Portland board is poised to vote Wednesday on a proposal to bring the historic Hill Block parcel into the Interstate Urban Renewal Area.

The board will be asked to vote whether to increase the urban renewal area's debt cap by \$67 million and expand the URA's geographic boundaries.

The moves indicate the future of the Hill Block parcel – stakeholders now prefer to call it Williams and Russell – is beginning to come into focus after more than two years of study, outreach and conversation that were preceded by decades of inaction and neglect by city and health care leaders.

With approval, raising the URA's debt cap would provide capacity for an injection of tax-increment funding to redevelop the vacant block in North Portland. Approximately \$45 million would be available for affordable housing, and \$20 million for economic development, said Lisa Abuaf, development manager for Prosper Portland.

The parcel between North Russell and Knott streets and North Williams and Vancouver avenues is fraught with the troublesome history of Portland redevelopment. It was home to a large commercial building that was a center for black commerce before its demolition in the early 1970s by the city of Portland and the Portland Development Commission (now Prosper Portland) for a planned Emanuel Hospital expansion.

That expansion never happened, and the increasingly valuable parcel has since sat vacant. In 2017, Prosper Portland officials rediscovered deed language requiring Legacy Health to develop the property. That led to an August 2017 public announcement of a joint effort to plan for the property's future.

A move in August 2017 to bring the property within the URA was halted after neighborhood leaders protested at a Prosper Portland board meeting that they were not adequately consulted. A work group made up of church, community and city representatives was formed and given broad powers to shape the property's future. The group has met 19 times and conducted public outreach.

“They spent much of the past couple of years focused on two key areas: Understanding the development-related opportunities and constraints, and where community resources could come from,” Abuaf said. “And, also, undertaking community outreach to understand what are the community priorities on the site.”

Legacy Health Systems has agreed, in a memorandum of understanding, to donate the 1.7-acre block to a development team selected by the work group. The group is preparing an initial request for interest from developers, nonprofits and any other organizations that want to participate in the project. The request for interest is likely to be issued after the work group meets in April, Abuaf said. A request for proposals would follow this fall, she said.

The Portland Housing Bureau is involved with an eye toward providing affordable housing on the parcel, Abuaf said.

“PHB is a key partner on this one,” she said. “Affordable homeownership or rental units are a priority coming out of that conversation.”

Prosper Portland has not modeled development scenarios for the site, Abuaf said.

“We really have started with what are the project working group’s priorities for the site, and undertaking a pretty robust community engagement process,” she said.

Officials are well aware of the possibilities for a sizable parcel in an increasingly dense area of urban Portland.

“It’s a pretty large parcel, so you could have multiple uses on the site and perhaps multiple projects,” Abuaf said.

OPB

'You're A Liar': Portland Mayoral Candidates Spar In Sunday Night Climate Debate

By Rebecca Ellis

March 9, 2020

Name-calling. Accusations of “weak sauce” policy plans. Rowdy booing from the audience.

While some in the audience critiqued the Portland Mayoral Climate Debate for being light on policy, the discourse was heavy on jabs against the two contenders who have so far garnered the most attention: incumbent Mayor Ted Wheeler and educator Sarah Iannarone.

The event played out Sunday evening at a sold-out Revolution Hall. It was presented by the local chapter of the Sunrise Movement, the climate justice nonprofit 350PDX, and the Environmental Justice Club from Harriet Tubman Middle School, which sits in the path of a proposed project to widen Interstate 5 through the Rose Quarter. The young activists — along with a lone adult moderator — took turns asking questions.

The sitting mayor took a few hits — perhaps the bluntest of which came early on.

Asked how the candidates would support migrant communities displaced by climate change, Wheeler said he appreciated the question, as he’d been asked on the campaign trail how he was going to put his privilege as “a blue-eyed, blonde, white, middle-aged, cisgendered male” to use. Part of the answer, he said, lay in advocating for immigrant rights.

“When we said we were a welcoming, inclusive sanctuary city, we did put teeth behind it,” he said, noting the city council’s support for local coalition Portland United Against Hate. “And then, when white supremacists wanted to come to our community to commit acts of violence and hate and white supremacy, we fought back. ... We had 80 different organizations gathered together — community organizations, frontline organizations, those who do not always come together on political issues, and we said those are not the values of our community.”

Red construction paper, which the audience had been told to wave if they disagreed with an answer, flew up. Iannarone asked to respond.

“I find this very difficult to listen to because when our community mobilizes to protect our vulnerable people against hate, the police brutalize us in the streets,” she said, noting the mayor had allowed the police to escort the Proud Boys across the Hawthorne Bridge, while young climate change protesters met a different fate weeks later.

Teresa Raiford, the founder of anti-gun violence nonprofit Don’t shoot PDX, jumped in.

“Ted, you’re a liar,” she said, then paused. “Period.”

The two other contenders on stage — Ozzie González and Piper Crowell — snapped approvingly. Wheeler quietly muttered, wow, twice. Twenty-five seconds of silence ensued.

Wheeler wasn’t the only one taking hits.

González, an architect and TriMet board member, used a notable sliver of his time to go after Iannarone, seated just to his right. He called her climate policy “weak sauce” and said her answer on ways to invest in the Cully Neighborhood and the Jade District “hurt [his] ears a little.”

Crowell, Nike’s director of global and innovation policy, was the sole candidate to refrain from a direct attack. Some in the crowd were feeling less amicable.

Facing a question on how she would address the housing crisis, Crowell said this was one of the reasons she entered the race.

“It did not make sense to me, as a concerned citizen, why Portland was not doing better. We have a great economy for some, we have a super low unemployment rate, and yet we are not living up to our values,” said Crowell, before being interrupted by jeers of “Tax Nike.”

“Thanks, organizer,” Crowell retorted.

The speaker corrected her. She was, in fact, a volunteer.

The contentious interactions left at least one voter dispirited.

“I don’t like the contempt towards the audience. I didn’t like some of the audience’s contempt towards the candidates, and I don’t like candidates bad-mouthing each other,” said Portland resident Edith Gillis, adding she felt like there was a lot of fluff and few concrete proposals. “I want specific actions that ‘I am doing and I will do.’ And I didn’t hear that.”

It wasn’t all crowd-appeasing statements, however.

After telling the crowd he did not support the controversial widening of Interstate 5 along the Rose Quarter “if it’s not done right,” Wheeler warned the crowd he was about to say something slightly controversial and to get the boos out of their system.

“I don’t believe we should end the project,” he continued, noting that in 20 years, a large number of trucks will still need to move through the area, even if they’re electric and can be operated

with renewable energy. He added that Albina Vision, the plan to build a neighborhood on top of the highway, depended on freeway caps being placed over the I-5. “So do it, but do it right.”

Other candidates differed. Raiford said she believed the plan would likely create displacement and disenfranchisement for nearby communities; Iannarone said it was a poor use of billions in the middle of a climate crisis.

“The fact is ODOT is trying to sell this to the public on bad data, bad analysis and the false premise that this is a safety project,” she said. “We need to be making sure that when it comes to fossil fuel infrastructure that we are managing the decline, not making increasing investments in it.”

González used his 30-second reply to tell Iannarone her response was “just not good enough.”

“It shows that you’re not really thinking of the big picture,” he said. “If we were to do the thing you’re saying and dismantle the I-5, what are we going to do tomorrow?”

For all the rebukes, the event ended with a display of unity — albeit one requested by the organizers.

To close, an organizer asked everyone to join in a song they had learned over the summer working in youth advocacy. The lyrics were projected on the screen behind the candidates, who acquiesced.

“I’m madly in love with you,” the candidates sang along, some more confidently than others.

“I’m madly in love with you.”