

*I was taught how to
be a civic leader by
Mayor Katz.*

Charlie Hales

CHARLIE HALES

An interview with Portland mayoral candidate Charlie Hales.

Just Out: When did you first realize some people are attracted to their same gender?

Charlie Hales: I think it was in my sophomore year of college that I realized this fact had been around me all the time. I had no one in my immediate family who is gay or lesbian, but was very involved in music and drama in high school, and some of my friends in that community were able to be a little more open than perhaps my friends on the football team. This was in Northern Virginia, so a more enlightened place than the rest of the south, but still it was Virginia and it was in the 1970's.

JO: When did you first meet transgender folk?

CH: Oh, probably not until Portland did I really encounter transgender folks.

JO: How did this feel to you?

CH: Um, kind of strange and very urban. I mean I came to Portland by choice. I wanted to live in an enlightened, progressive city. The environmental values in Portland are what really attracted me at first. That's what I was looking for, and the Tom McCall vision of Portland as a green, sustainable place was the hook for me that pulled me all the way across the country with no job. I didn't know anyone here. So like a lot of twenty-somethings, I was 23, I came to Portland in an old car, from somewhere else, drawn by the vision of the place, and then came to appreciate the diversity of who lives here.

JO: There are estimates that as many as 40% of homeless youth are LGBT, queer, or questioning. What role does the City of Portland play in working with this population?

CH: A very direct one. I started my day today serving breakfast at New Avenues for Youth, a drop-in breakfast for whoever comes in from the street that morning. To see those young people, that diversity ... you've got diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. You've got ethnic diversity. And you've got diversity of why they're homeless in the first place.

In some cases you've got kids who have not been well served by the foster care system. In other cases you have kids who've been with an abusive parent, or kids who have substance-abuse problems, mental illness. There's a huge spectrum, and the city is a huge player in dealing with homelessness in partnership with the county and great non-profits like New Avenues, Outside In, Central City Concern, and all the rest.

JO: Are there programs the city is involved in that would change if you were mayor?

CH: There's a famous quote where someone asked Samuel Gompers, an early labor union leader, what he wanted for the labor movement, and he said "more." And I think when you look at what needs to be done with respect to this partnership that tries to address homelessness, it's "more." More shelter beds, more opportunities to get into transitional housing, more job training like they do at New Avenues, more chance for kids who've fallen through the cracks of education to finish and get their GED.

JO: The CEO of Chick-fil-A has spoken publicly against LGBT equality, and Boston mayor Tom Menino responded saying he would oppose Chick-fil-A opening in Boston. If Chick-fil-A wanted to put new stores in Portland, how would you respond as mayor?

CH: I would use the bully pulpit of the office, and the authority that I have, to make sure our values are reflected in more than just words. So, that means I would pick up the phone and I would say, 'if this is really your philosophy you should consider locating in other cities and not here.' I'd start with that.

Now understand, you don't want to over-promise in this business, so if Chick-fil-A files for a building permit and doesn't need any discretionary approvals from the city, we have to give them one. There's stuff we can do and things we can advocate for, but there are limits to our powers.

JO: What is your opinion of Mayor Adam's efforts to support transgender inclusion in Portland, including healthcare coverage, restroom policies in public buildings, and so on?

CH: I support and applaud what Mayor Sam has done. This is another area where Portland has done the right thing. It ain't broke, and I don't need to fix it. We just need to continue to do more, to carry on this agenda, which has had pretty strong leadership.

I was taught how to be a civic leader by Mayor Katz, and Sam was her chief of staff. She was a great mentor to me in a lot of ways, including helping to build my understanding of the LGBT community and the importance of related public policy going back to domestic partner ordinances that we passed, and fighting against Ballot Measures 9 and 13 together. She really showed me how to be a leader for the whole community, for that agenda as well. So Sam has done the right thing, and I'll try to carry that on. No course correction needed.

Continues on Pg. 32