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The Southwest Portland Post

Southwest Portland's Independent Neighborhood Newspaper

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Volume No. 16, Issue No. 4

www.multnomahpost.com

Portland, Oregon

Complimentary

February 2008

City Council considers Commissioner Adams' street improvement plan

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

Commissioner Sam Adams' Safe, Sound and Green Street improvement program received praise and criticism from 29 people, including several from southwest Portland, at a three-hour City Council hearing last month.

Adams' proposal calls for raising \$422 million in local business and residential property assessments for road projects. They include work on intersections with a large number of crashes, expanding the city's bike route system, paving substandard streets or those in disrepair, expanding the Safer Routes to School program, and creating or upgrading pedestrian facilities on major traffic routes.

Each of the city's seven district neighborhood coalitions, including Southwest Neighborhoods Inc., would be allotted \$50,000 a year for transportation projects, and would have input into the selection of projects in other categories.

To pay for this, the city would assess each dwelling \$4.54 per month. For 83 percent of businesses, the average monthly assessment would be \$33 per month, based on the amount of vehicle traffic the business is deemed likely to generate, Adams told the City Council. Residents would get discounts if they didn't own a car, owned a fuel-efficient car, did purchase bus passes, or were low-income. Businesses could get discounts for subsidizing employee transit passes. In addition, businesses that consider their bills to be unfair would be entitled to free appeals.

The program is necessary, Adams said, because the legislature has failed to raise the statewide gas tax from its current 24 cents a gallon, the lowest rate in the west, since 1993. As a result, he said, the backlog of substandard streets has reached 221 miles, and is growing every year. More significantly, 378 people were killed and 2,662 were injured last year in traffic or pedestrian accidents "due to a lack of funding for obvious safety measures," he said.

The heaviest concentration of spending will be in east Portland, followed by southwest. "We could spend the whole budget in one area of the city and still not fund all of the potential projects," Adams said. "This is for the worst of the worst, the most unsafe."

In addition to 20 public open houses, the program was reviewed by an 89-member Stakeholder Committee. One of the members, Jim Gardner of the South Portland Neighborhood Association, told Council, "The process has not, for one day, been dull or predictable. I believe it was a careful and evolving search for that combination of taxes that would be as fair as possible, to be spent on projects that would solve as much as possible of the city's maintenance and safety needs."

Referring to the long-delayed South Portland Circulation Study, Gardner said, "We in southwest Portland have long felt...that we've been led to expect far more city transportation help than we've actually received. But I can enthusiastically support today's

proposal because it does *not* follow that pattern...The proposal before you may not be perfect, but it is good. Don't let the former be the enemy of the latter."

Another Stakeholder, Sandra McDonough of the Portland Business Alliance, said, "It's not often backs a fee increase, but it's critical that we address our most pressing needs after years of disinvestment. This is not a complete solution, and we need to recognize that." McDonough urge Council to direct additional General Fund and licensing fees to the problem. "I urge you not to wait until the potholes get big enough to swallow a Smart Car," she said.

Portland Police Chief Rosie Sizer, Multnomah County Commission Chair Ted Wheeler and Sen. Rick Metzger (D-Welches), among others, added their support. Wheeler noted that replacement of the Sellwood Bridge will cost about \$400 million, of which at least \$100 million will have to come from within the state. Metzger pledged to seek a statewide

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Bookstore's feline ambassador still feisty after all these years

By Polina Olsen
The Southwest Portland Post

Nobody notices the dainty jet-black cat unless they look underneath the sale-books table, and she opens her almond-shaped green eyes. Oscar Wilde's current hiding place, also known as "the cave," doubles as a storage spot for stacks of folding chairs. Their mottled-colored cloth seat-covers make the perfect kitty bed.

A tall woman wearing a long black coat stops at the table and flips through a book on Monet. Oscar decides her paw needs washing and scrubs with her pink tongue. Then, she closes her eyes - it's time for another snooze. The tall woman walks by again.

"Since Fup (Powell's Technical Book-

store's cat) died, Oscar Wilde may be the oldest store-cat in Portland," said Bobby Tichenor, the owner of Annie Bloom's Books in Multnomah Village.

Like bookstore cats everywhere, she gives the place a comfortable, homey feeling. Her Halloween look and quirky personality make Oscar a neighborhood fixture.

Oscar's life started 16 years ago, when Tichenor's son's Saturday Market cat, Jazz, had a litter. He found homes for all but Jazz and one kitten, so Tichenor brought them to her store. Jazz was large, feisty and also jet-black.

"Once a dog came in and Jazz came tearing from the back of the store and attacked him," Tichenor remembers. The kitten ran around wildly, too, so they named her "Oscar Wilde." When Jazz deserted for better treats at nearby

Fat City Café, Oscar became the store's only cat.

"Oscar doesn't like me," says a staff member who asked not to be identified. "I feed her, and she still doesn't like me." "She can turn from purring to not purring fast," concurs another shop assistant. "She's 16 and like most of us when we reach that august age."

Tichenor explains: "Oscar's not sweet; she's selective. She loves to be petted, but doesn't like to be held. If you pet her and stop, she'll swat or bite you." And, she doesn't like dogs.

"Once when Oscar was in her cave, a little dog came up. She whacked him."

"She likes the calm ones who let her come to them," said Mary Fellows who has known Oscar for 16 years.

Sometimes that backfires, as in the case of one customer who didn't like cats. She jumped on his lap and tore his pants when she kneaded her paws. (The store compensated with a replacement pair.)

Still, most customers enjoy the petite neighborhood cat "People come in the store just to see her," says staff member Jennifer Weinberg. In fact, when Oscar left to live with Tichenor's mother, cus-

tomers expressed real concern.

"We swore she wasn't dead but customers were very upset," recalls Tichenor. "Oscar was having trouble - overgrooming, nervous -- and we thought the crowds bothered her." When Tichenor's mother moved to a retirement center, the cat returned to the store.

"She seems to have revived," reports Tichenor, who assumes another of Oscar's nine-lives kicked-in.

A creature of habit, Oscar likes a change, sort-of, and her favorite spot varies over time. Now it's the cave, but last summer she preferred the window or rather, the small stuffed toy cat in the display.

She adopted the toy, snuggled, and washed it, until she changed her mind and ignored it completely. The warm photocopy machine, the heating duct, and the sunny spot under the skylight; all have been her favorites and may be her favorite again.

"She's a community cat - a Multnomah Village ambassador," says Weinberg. "And, she's a different cat around 9:00 p.m. at night. She sits on the counter and purrs on people's laps. She greets everyone as they walk in the door."



Oscar and Annie Bloom's Books staff member Pat Balmer enjoy lunch in the staff kitchen. (Post photo by Polina Olsen)

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