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INSIDE:
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--Page 4

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Southwest residents voice their opinions at community budget forum

By Allison Rupp
The Southwest Portland Post

In the third of three citywide community budget forums, nearly 100 residents of Multnomah County, mostly from Southwest Portland, gathered at the Multnomah Center on Tuesday night to discuss the programs they felt should or should not be trimmed from the 2009-2010 city budget.

"This is a very difficult budget for us," Mayor Sam Adams told the crowd. "We need to cut five percent from the budget for next year...But we take your input very, very seriously."

Organizers instructed those who attended the forum, which was open to the public, to choose one area of interest from the city's general purpose funds, such as Arts and Culture, Parks and Recreation, Housing, or Police.

Each area of interest offered its own table where guests could discuss and rank the programs offered by that service. A "table leader" representing that service facilitated the discussions and answered questions.

Some tables, like the Parks and Recreation or the Housing table, filled up

quickly. Others, like the Public Utilities or the Fire and Rescue table, attracted only one or two supporters.

At the Arts and Culture table, Jeff Hawthorne, the deputy director of Portland's Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC) explained that the City of Portland provides the vast majority of funds for the non-profit organization.

In three to five years, Hawthorne and Mayor Adams, who supports RACC, are actually hoping to increase funding from four million dollars to 20 million dollars.

"We need more city funding than what comes to us through the general purpose funds," Hawthorne said, which last year was 3.7 million dollars.

Meanwhile, at the Housing table, Housing Program Manager Stephen Fulton from the Bureau of Housing was explaining the City's ten-year plan to end homelessness, which began in 2005.

When a guest at the table asked how it was going, Fulton tilted his hand to indicate so-so.

"It doesn't really have the funding to get there," Fulton said.

The general fund money given by the city comes as both ongoing funds and one-time use funds, he explained. Much



Jeff Hawthorne (center with nametag), deputy director of Portland's Regional Arts & Culture Council, answers questions at the Arts and Culture table during the community budget forum, held Feb. 24 at the Multnomah Center. (Post photo by Allison Rupp)

of the homeless initiatives are funded by the one-time use funds, which he hopes to convert into ongoing funds.

At many of the tables conversations veered toward increasing funding for the programs discussed rather than cutting back. Many guests pointed to a handout outlining the current distribution of the budget and wondered why nearly 75 percent of general purpose dollars go to Fire and Police services.

Out of a representative \$1,000 shared among 13 services, fire services were shown to use \$277 and police services

\$459. During the budget adjusting exercise, many people deducted funds from these services first.

Organizers concluded the forum with an electronic vote that displayed results immediately on a screen. Out of 62 people who voted, a majority of 27 percent called housing their primary concern in their neighborhood, while a majority of 42 percent called economic development their primary concern for the city of Portland.

Laurel Butman, the principle management analyst for the Office of Management (Continued on Page 5)

Southwest activists call for reforming legal protection for trees

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

Planners and community activists, including several southwesters, are calling for reform of the city's laws on the planting, cutting and maintenance of trees. The Citywide Tree Project is trying to increase the city's total tree canopy, planner Roberta Jortner told the Portland Planning Commission last month.

Currently tree canopies cover 26 percent of the city's land area, which compared to other cities is "better than some, notably Seattle (18 percent), but not as good as others" such as Baltimore, which has 34 percent coverage, said Jortner.

More specifically, they have specific

targets such as public right of way, where the goal is to increase coverage from the current 17 percent to 35, and in industrial areas, going from seven percent to 15. To do this, the city needs to make its regulations "transparent, consistent, equitable and efficient," she said.

Currently, laws on this subject are divided among six city bureaus. Morgan Tracey, chair of a citizen stakeholders group that studied the issue, said that the "Multitude of laws make it difficult to see how they work together."

In fact, Tracey said, they are sometimes contradictory. They are also "inconsistently applied. One owner may be exempt from regulation while his next-door neighbor must undergo review to cut a single tree. The laws don't distinguish

between majestic and nuisance trees."

According to Tracey, when trees are cut for new development, "replacement requirements aren't clear." When laws are disobeyed or ignored enforcement is uncertain and inconsistent, in part because "inspectors are not trained arborists and may not recognize what is a big deal."

The project is proposing to "bring the codes and processes together to the extent possible," and to codify them into a single tree manual, Tracey said. There should be a "single point of entry" for anyone seeking information about the city's laws on trees, he said.

Owners should be encouraged to prune and thin trees rather than removing them. Since "It is hard if not impossible to preserve a damaged tree, the emphasis should be on preventing damage in the first place," Tracey said. During development review tree preservation planning should occur early in the process, "not what's left over after everything else is planned for."

Jortner suggested that community groups be encouraged to create neighborhood tree plans to "brand" their communities. She commented, "People care about trees as a living amenity, and

when they're gone they're gone, at least for awhile."

Among the other stakeholders who testified was Margot Barnett, who played a key role in the creation of Holly Farm Park. "I really enjoyed serving on the stakeholder working group," she said.

"We didn't always see eye to eye, but we saw how each other stood on this," Barnett continued. "Privately and publicly-owned trees are an important part of our green infrastructure, an important part of our livability. A single point of contact is important. Decisions should be made by people with knowledge of trees."

Regarding another recommendation – making design regulations and codes flexible enough to accommodate tree preservation – Barnett was more ambivalent, saying, "I don't want them so flexible that they hurt neighborhoods."

City Forester David McAlister was critical of the proposals. "Fix what's broken, not what's working," he told the Commission, and leave laws regarding trees in parks and parking strips alone.

"Emphasize education and incentives over regulation," McAlister said. "If we (Continued on Page 7)



Tree Canopy along 45th Avenue near Woods Park. (Post photo by Leslie Baird)

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