

Office of Neighborhood Involvement budget gets chilly reception from City Council

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement, which is the principal source of funding for Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. and other neighborhood offices, wants to give up a little less this budget year. Last month it received a less than warm reception from City Council.

Anticipating sharply reduced revenue, Mayor Sam Adams has asked each City bureau to prepare "cut packages" equal to 2.5 and 5 percent of their current budget.

In the case of ONI, however, they have been operating largely on "one-time-only" appropriations which are given with no assurance that they will be retained, and which are normally the first expenditures to be cut. If the City proceeded in that fashion, ONI's budget would in fact be reduce from 16 to 18 percent of what it is now.

Last month ONI administrators and Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees the bureau, presented what they called the "Right Budget," ten percent below their current one. It would retain current outreach efforts to "under-represented communities" because, executive director Amalia Alarcon de Morris told the City Council, "They were the last at the table."

The budget would also retain the popular Neighborhood Grants program while cutting it 10 percent. Other cuts

would be 2.5 percent for SWNI and other coalitions, five percent for the Neighborhood Mediation Program and Elders in Action, and 50 percent for the Graffiti Abatement Program.

The 2.5 percent cut recommended by the Portland Office of Finance and Administration would mean elimination of the grant program, a 2.5 percent cut to neighborhood offices, a 15 percent cut in Mediation, and reductions in the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Program budget.

At five percent SWNI would lose five percent of its budget, which would almost certainly necessitate cutting staff pay and limiting office hours. Fritz told her Council colleagues, "I do not believe that issues like diversity were intended to be funded for only one year. We decided to re-prioritize the entire budget."

Alarcon de Morris added, "One of the things I'm most proud about is that we didn't just say, 'Give us back our one-time money.' We looked at the

whole budget. I don't think we have unrealistic expectations."

Commissioner Nick Fish commented, "One-time-only funds are normally seen as fungible. We have a running tally of one-time-only funds that we see as essential." Essential or not, he implied, the City could not fund them all.

Commissioner Randy Leonard said, "I appreciate the services you provide, but I must echo Commissioner Fish. This is not done in a vacuum." His priority, he said, was that "homeless people have a place to sleep at night. There's nothing I feel more strongly about."

The Portland Parks Bureau has revised its budget proposal with regard to its

Community Garden Program. The bureau earlier had proposed to raise its seasonal charge for community garden plots from the current \$50 to \$75. Critics charged that this would deprive many poor people of the chance to grow their own food at the very time when they needed it most. Administrators responded that the current fees do not begin to pay for the program. A revised proposal call for raising the fees to \$75 a season, but offering reduced fees to food stamp recipients.

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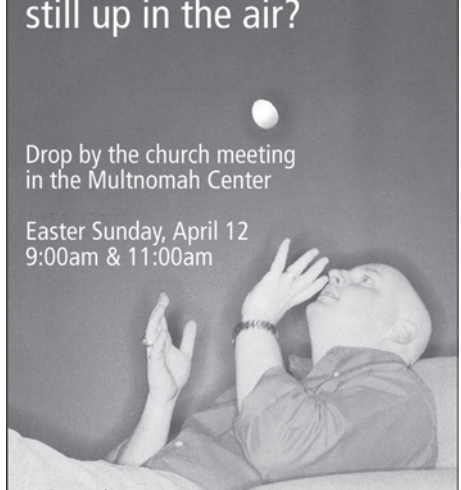


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