

Commissioner Novick brings OurStreetsPDX media tour to Multnomah

By Erik Vidstrand and Don Snedecor
The Southwest Portland Post

Community activists, reporters, and city officials gathered at the corner of Capitol Highway and Garden Home Road, across from Handy Andy’s in Multnomah Village, on Aug. 19 to meet with Portland Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick.

This was the last stop on a media tour of a few of Portland’s maintenance and safety needs as part of the Our Streets PDX transportation funding conversation.

The tour showcased busy streets that lack sidewalks and commercial corridors in need of preventive maintenance.

City officials also introduced the Portland Transportation Needs Guidebook, an online compilation of the maintenance and safety needs identified by the Portland Bureau of Transportation and prioritized by community input over the years.

The main topic at the news event was the extreme cost of putting in sidewalks along Capitol Highway from Taylors Ferry Road to Garden Home Road.

It’s been 18 years since the completion of the 1996 Capitol Highway Plan, which called for sidewalks and bike lanes the

entire length of the road. Large segments of that plan are still incomplete.

According to Don Baack, president of SW Trails, it currently costs \$21.7 million per mile for full street improvements (streets, curbs, sidewalks, and storm-drains).

The reasoning behind this is that the topography and stormwater management is more complicated in Southwest.

Novick said that first and foremost is the safety of citizens and maintenance of all the city’s existing streets.

“We must get a handle on the most basic street needs before constructing improvements,” Novick explained above the roar of cars and buses traveling along Capitol Highway.

According to Baack, who spoke first, the city must find more efficient designs to improve transportation and stormwater management.

“If we can build seven times as many sidewalks using different approaches,” Baack suggested, “SW Trails strongly support that effort.”

The organization has been supporting all steps toward improving connectivity, safer crossings, more complete streets, which in turn will make the community more livable.

Keith Liden, a Bridlemile resident and bicycle commuter, suggested that the key

to building new streets and sidewalks in Southwest was for the Bureau of Environmental Services and the Transportation Bureau to work together on improvements and to find ways to reduce costs.

“We need to be creative,” Liden said. “We need efficient designs to improve the safety of the streets.”

Baack suggested that recent improvements to rural Maplewood Road, which expanded gravel shoulders to allow for pedestrians, was the kind of solution folks in Southwest were looking for.

Mark Lear, a planner with the transportation bureau, said that approach could work on low traffic streets, but not on major arterials such as Capitol Highway.

The Post asked Novick why the city was continuing to issue “waivers of remonstrance” to developers building homes on unimproved streets, in a community so badly in need of improved streets and sidewalks.

Novick, who lives about 10 blocks from this event, explained that new construction projects create floating sidewalks (there is an example on Multnomah Boulevard across from Grand Central Baking).

“If we could have this money pooled,” Novick said, “more important sidewalk improvements could be developed to allow for better connectivity.”

One of Novick’s aides explained that the new website, Our Streets PDX, is an interactive site with tabs for maintenance, fees, repairs that are needed, and a list of “safe routes to school.”

“I don’t want to compare East County



Keith Liden (left) and Commissioner Steve Novick (right) listen as Don Baack talks about the lack of sidewalks in Southwest. (Post photo by Erik Vistrand)

and Southwest Portland,” Novick said. “We need to have the best bang for the buck.”

For more than a year, Mayor Hales and Commissioner Novick have been calling for more investment in transportation. They have been addressing longstanding issues with diminishing resources from the gas tax.

Since January, Hales and Novick have asked the public for input on transportation priorities and options for raising money. They expect to have a proposal for City Council to consider in November.

According to Novick, workgroups have been created to work on the street tax. One group is looking at business fees; another at residential fees, a third is considering how low-income residents can contribute.

“We’re trying to find a new formula,” Novick said. For more information about the transportation funding conversation visit www.OurStreetsPDX.com.

Baskin-Robbins to be torn down and replaced by OnPoint Credit Union

THE COUNTRY STORE

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Bob Dylan sang it, “the times, they are a changin’.” Sorry ice cream cake lovers, the Hillsdale Baskin-Robbins is no more. Demolition is next. That, and construction of a new concept for the community.

Located in the Hillsdale town center, OnPoint, a community credit union, recently broke ground and will serve the area in a so-called “credit union desert.”

Community leaders have been trying for years to draw some type of business at the site of the old Estby gas station.

Bankers from JP Morgan Chase had presented plans to build a branch at the site some years ago, but activists and business leaders shut them down due to several issues the community did not agree to.

OnPoint was founded in 1932 as Portland Teachers Credit Union. Sixteen schoolteachers gathered to create

a safe place to save their money and to provide low-cost loans for those looking to build a better life.

Two other branches are also being built: one on the bus mall at Stark and Fifth; the other on West Burnside at 20th Avenue.

The branches will create approximately 25 jobs for the local community.

“We’re committed to the financial well-being of our members and adding new branches is one way we are helping them achieve their goals with better access to our financial products and services,” said Rob Stuart, OnPoint’s president and chief executive officer.

The Baskin-Robbins has been in the Hillsdale neighborhood since 1967 and has no plans to reopen anywhere else. The closest one is in Garden Home.

The project will consist of a four-unit commercial building spanning both sites and won’t open its doors until early next year.

Richard Brown Architect AIA has designed a building to replace Hillsdale’s Baskin-Robbins and the vacant lot next door. (Drawings courtesy of Richard Brown Architect AIA)

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