

Portland celebrates 10th anniversary of Sunday Parkways (but not in Southwest)

By Don Snedecor
The Southwest Portland Post

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler proclaimed Sunday, June 25, "Portland Sunday Parkways Day" to celebrate 10 years of these events. June 25 marked the 10th Sunday Parkways event in North Portland, the route that has typically attracted the largest crowds.

According to a Portland Bureau of Transportation press release, "Sunday Parkways is a series of free community events opening the city's largest public space—its streets—for people to walk, bike, roll and discover active transportation.

"The events are loved by Portlanders of all ages. Total attendance for the 10 years has topped 690,000 over 38 Sunday Parkways events.

"Residents and visitors say they come to enjoy the traffic-free streets connecting parks and schools filled with activities, music and vendors. It's safe, family friendly and a chance to meet neighbors."

All of those things may be true in other parts of the city but not in Southwest.

In a letter to Don Baack and the Southwest Trails board dated

April 14, 2016 from Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat said, "PBOT has struggled to craft and implement a Sunday Parkways program for southwest neighborhoods that meets our program goals and invites neighborhood participation, while also providing a parkway route that cyclists, pedestrians and other modal users can safely and reasonably access."

According to Treat, there were several reasons for not having Sunday Parkways events in Southwest. Among those were topography, lack of infrastructure, lack of connectivity, conflicts with volunteers, and lack of program participation.

"Hills are a staple part of the profile in Southwest," said Treat in her letter. "Neighborhood greenways in Southwest are significantly steeper than the streets and routes that Sunday Parkways has used in other locations in previous years."

The lack of curbs and fully improved streets, composed of gravel and uneven paving surfaces, would likely mean families who are not already avid cyclists or walkers would spend more time navigating the hills and terrain than enjoying the spirit and comradery created during the day's events, said Treat.



Treat noted that there were limited options available for alternate detour routes. "Adding to this challenge is the fact that participants are uncomfortable sharing streets with moving vehicles."

According to Treat, "Lack of connectivity has also proven to be a strenuous experience for our volunteers... Sunday Parkways relies extensively on volunteer staff. In order to retain this dedicated corps, Sunday Parkways must ensure that their experience is meaningful, safe and reasonably free of conflict."

Treat noted that unfortunately, given the experience of volunteers at previous events Sunday Parkways, the city could not guarantee that future events would be "reasonably free of conflict."

Program participation was another problem for Sunday Parkways events in Southwest, said Treat.

"Participant numbers in Southwest, even on the sunniest of days, have been the lowest of any event hosted by Sunday Parkways in the eight years of its operations," said Treat. "Unfortunately, this has led to fewer season-wide sponsors and fewer vendors willing to sign up with events scheduled for

Southwest." Despite the total lack of success with Sunday Parkways outlined by Treat, the city still tried to put a positive spin on the situation when contacted about this story by The Post.

According to Bureau of Transportation spokesman Dylan Rivera, "In 2018, Sunday Parkways returns to Southwest Portland for the first time since 2014. A Sunday Parkways route will introduce the public to the Green Loop, a planned 6-mile active transportation loop in the Central City.

"This will include a segment from the Tilikum Crossing in South Waterfront to downtown Portland. So folks riding in from elsewhere in Southwest Portland will be able to join up with Sunday Parkways in South Waterfront – or ride the Portland Aerial Tram to Sunday Parkways!"

Despite the rhetoric, it sounds like the city has decided to hold off on traditional Sunday Parkways events in the Southwest neighborhoods. At least until the area is flattened, a grid pattern established, streets are paved, sidewalks built, participation levels improve, and neighbors get along better with volunteers.

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