

Proposals sought on \$1 million for homeless programs

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

The Portland Housing Bureau plans to solicit proposals from social-service agencies on Aug. 26 on how to spend a special appropriation of \$1 million for homeless and housing services.

The money is earmarked for outreach and engagement services; placing homeless individuals directly into permanent housing from the streets, shelters, and transitional housing; providing rental assistance and eviction prevention funds to prevent people from becoming homeless, and programs designed to increase homeless or formerly homeless individual's income.

According to City Commissioner Nick Fish, the goal is to permanently house 200 individuals or families, increase the incomes of 47 people, and open 105 beds in shelters and transitional housing for people currently living outside to move into them.

The priorities for the money were determined a group of stakeholders, including social-service providers, activists, law enforcement and business leaders convened by Fish's office. It is a divergent group. The Portland Business Alliance, for example, has long advocated for the increase of shelter capacity in Portland, which is at loggerheads with Portland's emphasis on spending resources on ways to place homeless people directly into housing.

"Not everyone knew as much about housing (and homelessness)," Fish says, as the people involved in those spheres. But he says the meetings created consensus on what are the most effective and efficient strategies to ending homelessness, such as rental assistance and freeing up bottlenecks in shelters, rather than investing in more shelters and other short-term solutions.

"If I've got law enforcement, the business community, activists, neighborhood partners and social service providers all on the same page, that's a big win," Fish says.

As it stands, the \$1 million is a one-time infusion, and won't necessarily be available next year. Fish hopes to leverage "more resources and bolder programs" as a result of recent discussions and increased involvement among business leaders and other stakeholders.

City plans pilot for storage downtown

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
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A facility providing storage spaces for homeless individuals to store their belongings during the day is expected to open in mid-September as the result of a public-private partnership between the City of Portland and the Portland Business Alliance.

The facility doesn't have a home yet, but one consideration was the former Dirty Duck Tavern, however that site met with opposition from the Chinese community in Old Town/Chinatown. Negotiations are underway for a new, as yet undisclosed location. The Dirty Duck building is going to be demolished next year. The Blanchet House, and a hospitality center for the homeless that serves meals, will be constructing a new building at that location.

Between mid-September and June of 2011, the city hopes whatever space is found will accommodate 30 to 40 storage spaces the size of a shopping cart.

The facility will be open until the Resource Access Center opens in June 2011. The Resource Access Center is expected to have 100 storage spaces. The building will only be open for a few hours in the morning and afternoon during times that coincide with the opening and closing of shelters in the area.

"Who on earth would want to store their belongings under a bridge?" says City Commissioner Nick Fish.

Another reason the building will only be open for a few hours a day is to keep staff costs down, says Daniel Ledezma, a policy advisor in Fish's office. "We're doing this lean and mean," she says.

The city is spending \$30,000 on the storage facility over the nine months it will be open. The site being negotiated is owned by the Portland Development Commission, and no rent would be paid,

according to Ledezma. The Portland Business Alliance is expected to pay \$6,000 of the costs, Ledezma says.

Clean and Safe, a program started by the Portland Business Alliance to provide private security in the downtown area and cleaning services, will operate the facility. Clean and Safe has also been collecting abandoned carts for people to store their belongings in.

Each storage space, Ledezma says, will be a "cubby" that either already has an abandoned cart in it, or space for a cart to be rolled in.

Marc Jolin, the executive director of the homeless outreach agency JOIN, thinks the facility will prove to be extremely popular. "I think once people realize how they can use this resource, those 40 slots will be full, and we'll need to talk about finding additional capacity," Jolin says.

It would be ideal, he thinks, if there could be similar facilities in various geographic areas of Portland. Finding a place to safely store one's belongings, he says, is "a challenge homeless people have city-wide," he says.

There is no charge to storing belongings at the facility. Individuals will not be allowed to store drugs, weapons, other illegal objects, or perishable goods. Ledezma says Clean and Safe staff are only allowed to do a visual inspection and will not go through people's belongings item by item.

Individuals will also have to retrieve their belongings at the end of each day. "It's day storage," Ledezma says. "It's not long-term storage." However, Ledezma did not say that a person's belongings would be thrown out at the end of the day if not retrieved. "It's more like a three strikes and you're out approach," Ledezma says, meaning that people would be barred from using the facility if they do not abide by the rules.

The storage facility is expected to benefit both homeless people and the business community. By being able to store their belongings in a safe place where nothing cannot be stolen, homeless people will be more mobile and able to access services, go to job interviews, and other pursuits to help them end their homelessness.

And the business community benefits — one of the Portland Business Alliance's long standing complaints about the amount of homeless people downtown is the amount of personal belongings some homeless people have with them. Those belongings, business owners said, blocked public sidewalks, storefronts, and impacted business.

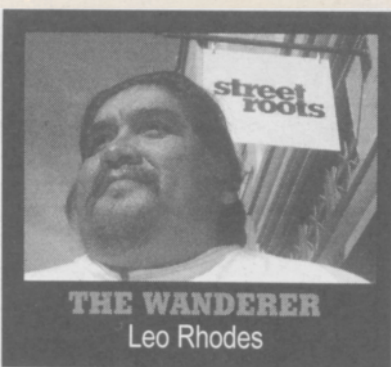
Jolin says there was an effort to create a storage facility three years ago, but a suitable physical space and agency to operate the facility could not be found.

"It never got the attention it deserved (from the SAFE committee)," Fish says.

What created enough momentum to start a public storage facility now is, in part, the discussions to create camping guidelines that would allow people to safely sleep in public places during the night.

Those discussions grew out of a lawsuit the Oregon Law Center is pursuing against the city that challenges the constitutionality of Portland's camping ordinance, which makes it illegal for homeless individuals to sleep in public spaces.

The city was considering a settlement to the lawsuit earlier this year that would have created camping guidelines outlining times of day and other restrictions that would allow people to sleep outside. Those settlement negotiations fell apart. Policy negotiations to create camping guidelines — essentially creating guidelines regardless of whether there was a lawsuit — have also stalled.



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