

# Park restrooms in the crosshairs of city's budget woes

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
STAFF WRITER

Among the items caught in the squeeze of City Hall's budget crunch are nearly 200 public restrooms in Portland parks that could be shuttered this summer during peak season.

Portland Parks and Recreation's Budget Advisory Committee says the city could save \$771,910 by closing most of the city's public park restrooms and replacing them with half as many portable toilets. In all, 189 toilets would be closed.

Not all toilets are included in the proposal. Those toilets not affected would be those at Hoyt Arboretum and Lower Macleay Park, as well as all restrooms that are already closed or maintained by contracted services, including most of those in the downtown area and Pioneer

Courthouse Square.

This is one of numerous cuts proposed for the Parks and Recreation Bureau to reach the 4 to 8 percent spending reductions Mayor Sam Adams has asked of

all city departments. Other cuts include reducing daily trash removal from the parks and discontinuing the elm program to fight Dutch elm disease.

The proposals come from the bureau's Budget Advisory Committee. The final recommendations from all city bureaus will be submitted to the mayor's office at the end of the month.

Not only will there be half as many toilets at these parks, but cleaning and other services for the portable units will be performed only three times a week, if the cuts go through as proposed. The savings include cutting 10 full-time positions.

"All cards are on the table in terms of

considerations," said Mark Ross, media relations coordinator with PPR. "This is the fourth straight year in budget cuts. I think people will notice a tangible change in the services we deliver."

Ross said the department has trimmed \$2.7 million from its budget over the past three years, including 24 percent cuts to administration. The 4 to 8 percent in cuts proposed this year represents between \$1.7 million and \$3.5 million. The park restroom cuts were part of all reduction package proposals.

The proposed closures are not sitting well with the city's leading restrooms advocacy group, PHLUSH, who say the bathrooms serve many hygiene needs, specifically for the homeless.

"You can't close restrooms where they're already serving a population that needs water," said Carol McCreary with PHLUSH. "You can't wash your face with hand sanitizer."

"There are homeless people who live throughout the city, families who live throughout the city, these are the quiet communities who we don't hear from a lot," McCreary said. "These are the ones who are disenfranchised by this."

In its proposal, the Budget Advisory Committee noted that fewer restrooms are going to place greater stress on those portable toilets available, and the watered-down cleaning and maintenance schedule will also reduce the quality and cleanliness of the service.

Just over a year ago, the city, under the direction of Commissioner Randy Leonard, launched the Portland Loo project and began installing public toilets around town. Those are under the management of the water bureau and do not fall under the PPR cuts. The downtown service contract was awarded to Portland Habilitation Center Northwest.



Portable toilets like this are one money-saving proposal for Portland Parks and Recreation, which, like all city departments, is compiling proposals to cut between 4 and 8 percent of its budget.

All budget proposals head to the Mayor's office at the end of the month, and the budget process will continue through May.

Ross said that one silver lining in this proposal is that if and when the economy improves, the bathrooms will still be there and can be reopened.

"It's not like we're tearing apart programs," Ross said.

**"You can't wash your face with hand sanitizer."**

CAROL MCCREARY  
PHLUSH

# Right 2 Dream Too plans direct appeal to City Council

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
STAFF WRITER

Denied a waiver for city code violations, the members of Right 2 Dream Too are planning to take their case to City Council on Feb. 1, the date the first monthly fine of \$641 comes due.

For more than three months, Right 2 Dream Too has operated a rest area for the homeless at the corner of Northeast Burnside and Fourth Avenue, an operation the city says is in violation of city code.

In December, the group sent an administrative review request to the city to waive the fines and allow the camp to continue. The Jan. 16 deadline to file a formal appeal, which comes with a \$1,215 appeals fee, passed without action.

Ibrahim Mubarak, one of the organizers of Right 2 Dream Too, said putting fees and charges on a group of homeless people is typical America.

"We're sleeping on a gravel lot, in tents, and they're trying to extract that much money from us?" Mubarak said.

Art Rios with the Right 2 Survive, the nonprofit organization that launched Right 2 Dream Too, says R2DToo is planning to take its case to the Feb. 1 City Council meeting, employing direct action, holding a press conference, and appealing to the commissioners for relief. The Bureau of Development Services (BDS) is under the direction of Commissioner Dan Saltzman.

"Even if we don't get a chance to talk we're still going to be there," Rios said.

The group has a one-year lease on the property, which before "developed" as a homeless rest area, was an empty gravel lot. Mubarak said they want to rally supporters



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Ibrahim Mubarak, with Right 2 Dream Too, being interviewed at the organization's homeless rest area at the corner of Northwest Fourth Avenue and Burnside.

to appeal to the BDS, the bureau's supervising commissioner Dan Saltzman, and Housing Commissioner Nick Fish. The city recently started a pilot project waiving enforcement against car camping on designated parking lots, and Mubarak wants the city to do the same for Right 2 Dream Too.

"We're going to try to get them to waive the fines and try to have this be a better place where people can come and stay,"

Mubarak said. "Because we don't have that type of money."

Right 2 Dream Too began leasing the vacant lot at the entrance to Chinatown in October, and has established a peaceful camp, or rest area, that accommodates about 70 people experiencing homelessness. The organization is in the process of becoming a nonprofit, and operates with a board of directors and management rules. The group constructed a fence made of used

doors along the Burnside border.

For all intents and purposes, the city says the organization is operating a recreational campground and is in violation of city code for not having the required permits. The organization is also in violation for the fence, which exceeds 6 feet in height. The fines will be assessed monthly for as long as the site is in violation of city code.

In his response letter to Right 2 Dream Too, Mike Liefeld, section manager with the BDS, said permits are possible and suggested the city was willing to work with the group if it wants to either bring the operation into compliance or pursue channels into housing for people using the site.

"It is possible to pursue legalizing the operation by obtaining the required permits for this type of development," Liefeld writes. "If you are able to obtain issued permits for the Recreational Park-Campground development and receive final inspection approvals by April 10, (which is six months from the date the Bureau originally contacted Right 2 Dream Too representatives regarding the campground), the Bureau will consider reducing the amount of the monthly code enforcement fee assessments. I would also encourage you to contact the Portland Housing Bureau to further explore other housing options and alternatives that relate to issues raised in your Dec. 20, 2011 appeal letter."

Mubarak said relocating the camp isn't on the table at this time.

"It's going to be raining soon, and moving people in the rain and the cold - it's the wrong time. Unless they have some place for us to go."