

DIRECTOR'S DESK, from page 2

ways, has amounted to the notion that downtown Portland's livability is at risk unless we act now. Right now. We've heard it time and again, year after year. The British are coming. Damn the torpedoes. Rush the gates. The Road Warriors and homeless people are coming to town and will have a stranglehold on our city.

One of the constant messages to leverage a more robust sidewalk and other quality of life laws has been the skateboard attack at the Outdoor Store downtown this summer. A elderly employee was injured badly by a young man who was presumed to be homeless. It's a very tragic story, and at this point, I would like to find the kid and throw him in jail for all the trouble he's caused. But let's be real, it was one incident.

That's not to say something bad won't happen again. It will. We live in a city with more than half a million people. Of course, we should constantly be working to deter violence downtown. What we shouldn't be doing is making homeless people Public Enemy Number One.

Now, if I've said it once, I've said it a million times. Downtown Portland is thriving. Tourism is at an all-time high, thriving neighborhoods have risen in the Pearl and South Waterfront, and crime is down — way down. We are a city on a hill.

When Chief Reese unveiled his proposal about Portland Prosper, my first thought was, that man is going to run for mayor. My second thought was, did Mayor Charlie Hales, his direct supervisor, know about this? My third thought was, does he actually have enough gas in the tank to pull it off?

The plan itself has some interesting aspects that Street Roots has advocated for, such as more police officers walking the streets and coordinated approaches to housing. It also has elements that felt like it was drafted by the same interest groups wanting stricter so-called "quality of life" laws.

I decided to do an afternoon's worth of research and talk to sources around the city. Many of the people I talked with thought that the mayor probably didn't know about Portland Prosper. What difference would it make if he did or he didn't? It might just be the right amount of leverage to pursue a more aggressive public safety agenda downtown. Something Hales has highlighted in public speeches.

Then there was the Thetus Corp., a downtown tech firm that has volunteered to work with the police bureau to do a free analytics for services and strategies on downtown homelessness. Thetus Corp., received funding from In-Q-Tel, a venture fund set up by the CIA. That's interesting. I wonder who its other clients are.

Reese recently had a meeting on his schedule with the Thetus Corp., along with police officer Jeff Myers, a controversial figure among the homeless and their advocates. Myers is known on the homeless front for being a renegade of sorts. His philosophies include targeting people experiencing homelessness through the criminal justice system. He worked closely with former City Commissioner Randy Leonard on a range of projects. His approach to public safety and housing has been a criticized by some and lauded by others.

So here we have a police chief, unveiling a program to target downtown homelessness, out of the blue, at a time when many believe there's a leadership gap at City Hall on the homeless front. How would the mayor and the rest of City Hall respond? Is it smart politics?

Will someone emerge from City Hall to champion the plan? Where will the money come from? Will other bureaus and nonprofits be asked to take part? Will Jeff Myers be overseeing the plan? How will the Thetus Corp. actually play a role? Does it mean passing stricter ordinances affecting the homeless?

There are more questions about Portland Prosper at this point than there are answers.

Stay tuned. We'll find out soon.

Developers pitch funds toward R2DToo's future

STAFF REPORTS

Pearl District developers want Right 2 Dream Too out of their neighborhood, so much so that they're willing to pony up more than \$846,000 toward the homeless groups future home.

This week, Portland City Council postponed a vote on whether to accept the money, and is expected to take up the proposal again Feb. 19.

Under the terms of the proposed agreement, Pearl Hotel Investors LLC, fronted by developers Homer Williams and Dike Dame, would pay the city just over \$1 million total for multiple uses. Of that amount, \$142,000 will be used to purchase Lot 7, a parking lot under the Broadway Bridge once proposed as new home for Right 2 Dream Too. The Portland Development Commission currently owns the lot.

Another cut of the payment, \$50,000, goes to offset parking needs to the nonprofit REACH, which had an agreement with the city for the space.

The remainder is dedicated to finding a suitable alternative site for the homeless rest area.

"It's a step forward," Fritz says. "No one's going to say it's a solution."

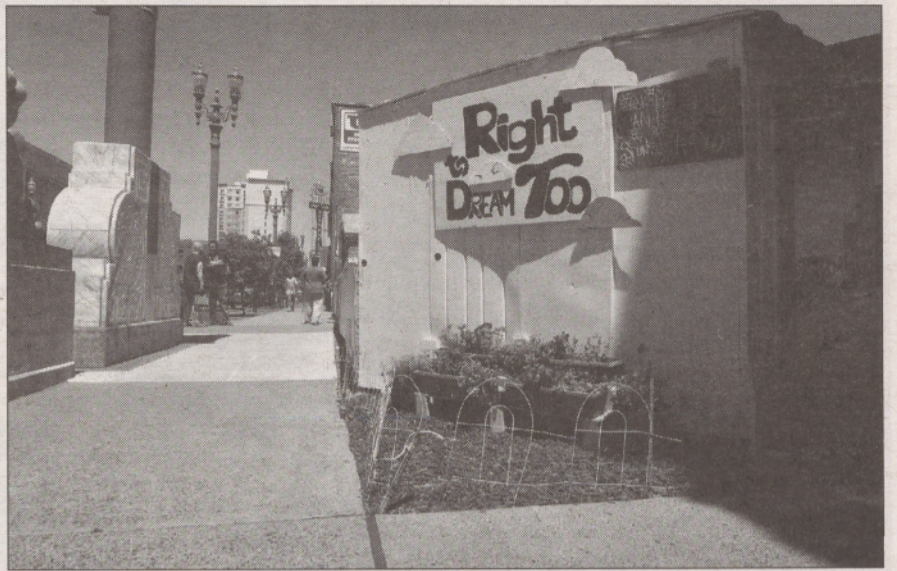
As part of the proposal, the city agrees to facilitate the sale of the current Right 2 Dream Too site — the high profile lot under the Chinese Gate — to the PDC. Even with that sale, Right 2 Dream Too would still be allowed to stay on the site until a suitable alternative was found, according to the proposal.

The agreement also waives the existing fines, and puts a halt on any future fines, assessed by the city for R2DToo's occupation at Fourth Avenue and Burnside.

For the developers, it takes Lot 7 off the table for R2DToo. According to the City Assessor's office, that property has a real market value of nearly \$1.4 million, and is assessed at \$172,000.

The past two years have been a series of false starts between Right 2 Dream Too and the city.

The organization — a fluctuating group of about 70 homeless individuals, governed by a board of directors — has been on the lot at Fourth Avenue and Burnside since Oct. 10, 2011. They have a lease with the property owners, but Right 2 Dream Too has to relocate: the property is for sale, and the city has been piling monthly fines on the



organization for violating city code.

By December 2012, the Right 2 Dream Too sued the city for relief from the fines. Nearly a year later, lawyers for both parties reached a settlement agreement. City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, as the freshly anointed commissioner with the Bureau of Development Services, signed the agreement that would allow R2DToo to move to a parking lot, known as Lot 7, under the Northwest Lovejoy Street off-ramp.

That met with considerable blowback from the Pearl District neighborhood, which rallied against such a move and was reinforced by an offer from developer Homer Williams to find another location. All sides agreed to a 60-day window to air out ideas.

What followed was an announcement on Dec. 4 from Mayor Charlie Hales that he had reached an agreement with the owners of an empty warehouse at 320 Hoyt Street to lease the property for 15 months to the homeless organization. The announcement came as a surprise to both Right 2 Dream Too and Fritz, who had brokered the earlier arrangement for Lot 7.

It wasn't to be. Right 2 Dream Too wasn't keen on the site, particularly having been left out of the negotiations to secure it, and it was later dismissed as an option because of the high cost to make it habitable and due to previous city agreements with the neighborhood.

"This whole process has been two steps forward and one step back," Fritz says. "It's a complicated situation."

R2DToo members say a suitable alternative site would be one that is close to social services and public transportation, with open space for tents and connections to water and electric service. And they say they want the proximity to be within 1.5 miles of the city center, a sticking point that prompted the City Council's delay in making a decision.

Mubarak said he is hearing increasing reports from people on the streets of police moving campers out of the downtown core. He said R2DToo has had to turn away increasing numbers of visitors to their rest area. Wednesday night, Mubarak said they had to turn away about 75 people who came looking for a place to stay.

"With the present sweeps going on in the city, we need to keep being a place where people can go," Mubarak says. "They're sweeping people who don't have anywhere else to go."

Despite its tenuous relationship with City Hall and downtown businesses, R2DToo has operated a low-cost, peaceful shelter area for more than two years without any tax dollar support. It has become a de facto resource within the homeless service continuum. Fritz acknowledged that the services offered by R2DToo are vital for the community.

"I think it's here to stay," Fritz says.

City Hall surplus draws pitch from Housing Bureau

BY JAKE THOMAS
STAFF WRITER

After years of austere budgets, City Hall has scraped up some extra cash for the upcoming budget cycle. Some of it could go to building affordable housing, aiding homeless individuals, helping distressed renters and other initiatives.

In December, the Office of Management and Finance announced that revenue streams for the city were picking up, generating \$6 million in ongoing program funding and \$3.3 million in one-time spending. With extra cash on hand, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales told bureaus that, unlike past years, they wouldn't have to make cuts. Hales also announced that bureaus could even get extra money if it was to be directed toward the mayor's three priority areas: complete neighborhoods; homelessness and hunger; and emergency preparedness.

Seeking to get some of this extra money, the Portland Housing Bureau has submitted a package of proposals asking for \$1.85 million in ongoing funding in addition to \$3 million in one-time funding for programs aimed at Portland's neediest.

Perhaps the most significant request in the package is for \$3 million in one-time funding to build affordable housing in Portland. If approved, this funding would come just as another source of cash for the bureau is tapering off. The bureau's largest source of direct funding, tax increment financing — a

method of public financing used to subsidize infrastructure and redevelopment — is projected to drop by half in coming years.

PHB spokesperson Jaymee Cuti says that federal funds often have strings attached and money from urban renewal areas restricts where housing can be built. However, this fund, she says, could be used to make capital investments in affordable housing virtually anywhere in the city, particularly near jobs, schools or natural areas.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the PHB, says that the money, if approved, will be used to create or rehabilitate housing for people making 60 percent of the region's median income or lower. He says that the bureau would prioritize the rehabilitation of existing housing. The funds will also likely target neighborhoods in Northeast and Southeast Portland, he says.

"I don't have a specific neighborhood or two in mind, but it's a huge need throughout the city," says Saltzman.

John Miller, the executive director of the Oregon Opportunity Network, supports the PHB's funding package, which he says is particularly welcome after years of budget cuts ushered in by the recession. His organization will be advocating for the PHB's funding package during the budget process, he says. While he supports the request for more money for affordable housing, he is concerned that it might be used in expensive areas, which could eat up the funds more quickly.

As part of the package, the PHB is asking for \$100,000 in one-time funds to support a series of clinics to be held in North, Northeast and East Portland operated by renters' rights.

The PHB is also asking for \$1 million in ongoing funding for housing-placement services and rent assistance to help homeless individuals move from the street and shelters into permanent housing. In total, the bureau hopes that the funding will help 250 individuals. Additionally, the PHB is asking for \$350,000 in ongoing funding to increase capacity at homeless shelters, particularly those that need more capacity in the winter. Part of this money would go to 211Info system, which refers individuals to social services and would help coordinate response in the event of a natural disaster — to expand its capacity.

The requested funding package from the PHB also includes an ask for \$500,000 in ongoing funding to reinstate programs to transition homeless youth to housing programs. The PHB expects that 70 youths will be served per year with case management and support. It expects 80 percent of served youths to move to permanent housing.

However, these are still just requests and could easily be modified or dropped during the budget process.

"I would be pleasantly surprised if we got the whole package through in tact," says Saltzman.