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Details and membership of the steering committee that's forming to further plan the Foster shelter committee are still being determined, but it will begin meeting within the month.

Commissioner Vega Pederson announced during the Jan. 25 vote that she will chair it. The committee's purpose will be to "talk through areas of concern that the community has" and "get to a place where the community is supportive of us opening a shelter in the fall of 2018," she said.

"I do hope that we can build some trust with neighbors through this steering committee," Kafoury said.

The committee and process could end up being similar to the process that led to the creation of Kenton Women's Village in North Portland.

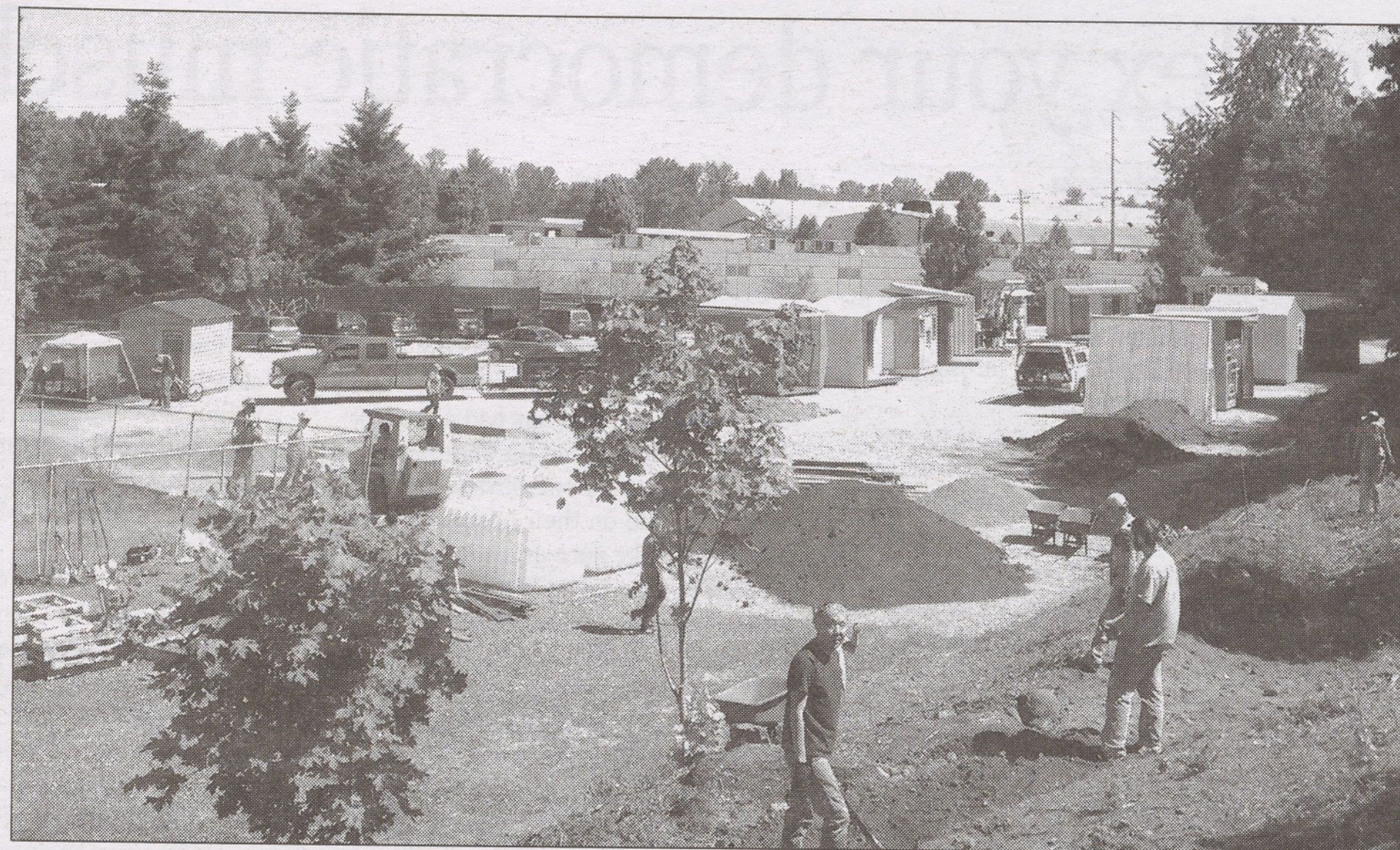
When the village was proposed to the neighborhood association in December 2016, the association and attendees had serious concerns, which were listed in a letter the neighborhood association sent to then-Mayor Charlie Hales.

That letter sparked the creation of a committee, which included residents from the Kenton neighborhood, staff from the Joint Office of Homeless Services and the Village Coalition, a nonprofit group that advocates for the creation of homeless villages in Portland.

In addition to hashing out details about lighting, safety and security, the committee also hosted two open houses for Kenton residents to learn about the proposed village and ask questions of those who advocated for it.

There was even a vote to approve the village, an unprecedented step taken to garner support. The vote was held in early March, and neighbors overwhelmingly voted in favor of the village, 178 to 75.

Throughout the process, numerous Kenton residents who were originally opposed to the village changed their minds, often after having their questions and concerns answered and after learning more details about how the village would operate and about homelessness in Portland.



The Kenton Women's Village in North Portland was created as a result of a neighborhood engagement process that could serve as a model for homeless programs in other neighborhoods.

PHOTO BY AMANDA WALDROUPE

"When there's a lack of information and knowing and data, I think people end up reacting with fear," Balla said. "That's human nature."

The Kenton process, as well as the committee now working on the Foster shelter, could become a blueprint for addressing neighborhood and resident concerns, so often referred to as NIMBYism, or "not in my backyard."

Eric Norberg, the secretary of the Sellwood-Moreland Improvement League (SMILE) and the editor of the Sellwood Bee, said he doesn't understand why there is such a "tide of fear in Foster." "It's nuts," he said, given how similar the Foster shelter is in design to the Willamette Center, a homeless shelter also operated by Transition Projects. It's located across the street from Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge on Southeast Milwaukie Blvd., four blocks from where Norberg lives.

"The shelter has posed no problem,"

Norberg said. "The neighborhood has accepted it. I have not heard any negative comments from anybody."

Like the Foster neighborhood, the SMILE community first found out about the shelter during a community meeting in which the Joint Office and other parties told the community that a shelter would be opening. Norberg said it was a bit like a bomb going off and that there was apprehension and many questions from neighbors.

Joint Office staff, Transition Projects and other stakeholders came to the neighborhood association for a second meeting and answered questions from residents. Beyond that, the SMILE association had no involvement with the shelter's creation.

Norberg said a bit more collaboration with neighborhood associations and other groups would have been nice, but "it became pretty clear that if they followed what they said they were going to do, the shelter would be fine."

But it might take work to relieve concerns

of some neighborhoods, such as Overlook.

Last August, during the same meeting where the Overlook Neighborhood Association chair referred to Eudaly as a "bully," the association and the 100 residents in attendance discussed a resolution that would have required the removal of Hazelnut Grove from the Northeast Portland neighborhood by the end of 2017.

Homeless people and housed Overlook residents argued for and against the resolution for an hour in a discussion accompanied by booing, cheering and shaking heads.

In the end, Overlook residents defeated the resolution, holding up pink and orange slips to cast their vote.

An elderly woman, who identified herself as Caroline, garnered the loudest applause that evening.

"We need to acknowledge that they are our neighbors," she said. "I do not want people to be disenfranchised. We've got too much of that happening in our country right now."



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