



City of Portland
Bureau of
**Planning and
Sustainability**

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June 1, 2009

Mayor Sam Adams
Commissioner Nick Fish
Commissioner Amanda Fritz
Commissioner Randy Leonard
Commissioner Dan Saltzman
1220 SW 4th Avenue
Portland, OR 97205

Dear Mayor Adams and City Commissioners:

The Planning Commission voted on May 12 to recommend to the City Council renaming 39th Avenue to César E. Chávez Boulevard.

The Planning Commission hearing, deliberations and discussions followed a series of hearings held by the Historian Panel appointed by then Commissioner Sam Adams. The Historian Panel was charged with determining the appropriateness of the proposed honoree and the historical significance of the streets proposed for renaming.

They found that César E. Chávez is an appropriate person after whom a street may be renamed, determined that the names "Broadway" and "Grand" have historical significance and therefore those streets should not be renamed, and determined that the name "39th Avenue" does not have historical significance and that street may be renamed.

The Planning Commission accepted the Historian Panel's report and recommendations and limited the hearing and discussion to consideration of renaming 39th Avenue.

Title 17 requires the Planning Commission to conduct a public hearing and make a recommendation to City Council as to the best interest of the City and the area within six miles of the City limits. The Commission heard several hours of oral testimony on April 28 and reviewed extensive written comments. We found that people from both sides of the issue were respectful and conducted themselves in a constructive manner at the hearing.

On May 12, the Commission discussed the matter at an open worksession and voted to recommend the renaming. The Commission agreed that César E. Chávez is worthy of being prominently honored in Portland. Commissioners cited his contributions to the labor movement, civil rights, and promotion of non-violent methods to advance worker's rights and social justice in Oregon and the nation. They discussed the importance of recognizing Chávez in a significant fashion which would provide this and future generations the opportunity to learn about his contributions and demonstrate Portland's commitment to being inclusive, progressive, and forward thinking.

The Commission voted to recommend renaming 39th Avenue after Chávez as being in the best interests of the City as a whole.

Streets provide a framework for the City and provide context and structure for all Portlanders. Many named streets in Portland are named for 19th century figures important to the City and country. As the City has grown in population and diversity, it's important to recognize the contributions of more recent historical figures. Renaming a street offers the

opportunity for a modern 20th century leader to become part of the inherent structure of the city, acknowledges equality for citizens both new and longtime, and creates a history of which everyone in the City can be proud.

The Commission was challenged by the provision in Title 17 that states that a street shall not be changed if “the street is significant in its own right”. Title 17 also includes language that indicates that “only one street name change shall be implemented per year for a major traffic or district collector street” implying that important streets may be renamed. The Commission determined that the intent was not to preclude renaming prominent streets. “Significant in its own right” must mean more than just being a major thoroughfare, otherwise no street of any import could ever be renamed. As part of our recommendations on process (transmitted to you separately), we specifically encourage the Council to clarify this ambiguous language.

The Commission heard concerns about the impacts to individual residents and businesses along 39th Avenue and about the timing of the change given the current economic crisis. The Commission decided however, that these impacts were outweighed by the greater good that would be achieved through the significant positive impact having a significant street named for César E. Chávez would bring to Portland. The Commission felt the Council could determine the timing of the change.

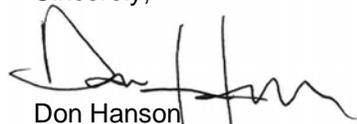
Several Commissioners cited the opportunity for the street renaming to catalyze activity on the street. They would like to see the City and the César E. Chávez Blvd. Committee find ways to work with residents and businesses along the street to promote the boulevard and build on the potential for César E. Chávez Blvd. to be a street that all Portlanders will be able to easily locate and will seek out as a desirable location to visit, patronize businesses, celebrate the diversity of Portland, and learn about the contributions of César E. Chávez to Portland, to Oregon, and to the nation. Commissioners believe that renaming the street will have a significant long-term positive impact on the businesses along the street.

The Planning Commission shared the frustration of the Historian Panel and many testifiers with the process. There are many lessons we can learn from our experiences. We strongly believe the process needs to be refined. We are sharing our recommendations on process refinements with you separately for consideration at a later date after the Council has made its decision.

This was a challenging issue and decision for the Planning Commission. It was unfortunate but not unusual that we encountered resistance to change. We heard and understood the arguments against renaming made by residents and businesses along 39th as well as the arguments for the renaming made by various supporters. On balance, we think renaming 39th Avenue to César E. Chávez Blvd. is the right thing to do for our city.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,



Don Hanson
President, Planning Commission

