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City readies plan to boost sagging local economy

Goal to help Portlanders cope with recession

BY JIM REDDEN

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The Portland City Council will unveil a local economic stimulus plan on Tuesday morning.

The plan — to be presented at a 10:30 a.m. City Hall press conference — is intended to help city businesses and residents deal with the worsening economy.

"This will be the city's first stimulus plan," Mayor Sam Adams told the Portland Tribune. "in previous recessions, the City Council has pulled back and looked inward, dealing with cutting budgets and things like that. I want the council to be more aggressive in helping businesses and residents."

Although Adams did not reveal details of the plan, he said it involved fast-tracking contracts with the private sector that would create jobs and stimulate the economy. Some funding will come from the \$900 million in reserves, bond funds and other financial holding the city has on hand.

The plan to be announced Tuesday is just one of several efforts Adams has proposed to stimulate the economy. He discussed some of them during his Jan. 5 swearing-in ceremony at Parkrose High School. They included promoting local businesses, increasing home ownership opportunities and providing more affordable housing.

Commissioner Randy Leonard said every council member will have a role to play in the plan. At Adams direction, he is already working to consolidate all city agencies that issue commercial and residential permits into a "one-stop" center. The goal is to stimulate the economy by speeding up the city's permitting process.

"People have demanding this for years," said Leonard, explaining that permitting functions are spread among seven city agencies, including: the Bureau of Development Services; the Water Bureau; the Planning Bureau; the Urban Forestry Commission; the Bureau of Environmental Services; Portland Parks & Recreation; and the Bureau of Transportation.

The council is hoping to receive hundreds of millions for dollars for infrastructure projects from the new Congress. Last October the council sent a letter to the Oregon Congressional delegation listing \$1.3 billion worth of projects that could be started quickly if the money was available. The projects range from the \$150 million inner eastside portion of the Portland Streetcar loop to the \$101 million Access Resource Center in Old Town.

According to Leonard, the council is determined to find the funds to start some of these projects soon, even if federal funds are not forthcoming. They include installing a second 500 million-gallon reservoir at Powell Butte, a projects expected to cost around \$150 million.

"We already have a list of projects that are shovel-ready, and now we've got to figure out how to do them," said Leonard. "These are the kinds of projects that create good-paying, family wage jobs."

Leonard also said the plan includes the construction of more affordable housing. He noted that Adams has already reformed the city's housing programs. As one of his first official acts, Adams moved the Portland Development Commission's housing programs into the Bureau of Housing and Community Development, which has a longer track record of helping create affordable housing projects.

At his swearing-in ceremony, Adams said Portland's economic stimulus plan would include the following additional initiatives:

• Creating a new "Portland is Better Together" business-support and family support Web site.

- Using the city's allocation of federal Neighborhood Stabilization Funds to buy foreclosed properties.
- Creating partnerships to fund additional pre-foreclosure counseling by proven community-based homeownership organizations.
 - Encouraging new development with a city property tax investment program.
- Pursuing a Locally Based Enterprise program (LBE) to ensure that Portland's construction firms get preference for subcontracting opportunities on large-scale city projects.
- Promoting and partnering with a "Chose Local" campaign to increase the sale of local goods and services.
 - Reconstituting the former Fair Contracting and Employment forum.
- Holding a New-Opportunity Fair that would make it easier for people with business ideas to connect with funding partners.
 - Increasing financial support within the Portland Development Commission for small businesses.
- Providing scholarship opportunities for basic skills remediation, high school completion and tradespecific training.
- "All of our efforts need to be aimed towards helping Portland businesses and people cope with the recession," said Adams.

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