

**City of Portland Street Renaming Process**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**Updated August 5, 2008**

*These are answers to questions that often have asked about the City of Portland's process to rename city streets. It has been prepared by the Office of Commissioner Sam Adams in consultation with the Portland Office of Transportation and the Portland City Attorney.*

**1. Does the City of Portland have any pending street renaming requests?**

The City has no "complete application" to rename a street. As of August 7, 2008, the Portland Office of Transportation has received two street renaming "initial applications." One "initial application" received July 24, 2008 seeks to rename a street to be announced for labor activist Cesar E. Chavez. Another "initial application" received August 4, 2008 seeks to renamed NE 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue for author Douglas Adams, who wrote the book, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. In addition, businesses owners along East 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue have inquired about changing the name of that street to "82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue of Roses."

**2. What is the difference between an "initial application" and "complete application"?**

An "initial application" to rename a street means that the sponsor has simply provided a notice of their intent to collect the required signatures within 180 days to qualify as a "complete application." In addition to a letter of support from the honoree's family and a biography, a "complete application" must include signed petitions of support from either 2500 Portland residents or 75% of property owners abutting the proposed street to be renamed. The Portland Office of the Auditor verifies the residency. Only one complete application may be processed at any one time and only one street can be "resigned" in any one year. Additional "completed applications" shall be placed on waiting list and processed in order of submission. Only when a street renaming application is deemed a "complete application" by the Portland City Engineer does it advance for further official consideration.

**3. Who can sign a petition to rename a street?**

The Portland City Attorney has determined that any Portland resident 16 years of age or older can sign the petition to rename a city street. The City Code does not include an age limit. Because there will be a process for verifying residency, setting the age at 16 allows use of DMV records for verification.

**4. What is the definition of "Portland resident"?**

According to the City Attorney, a resident is someone who lives within the city of Portland and intends to make Portland their home.

**5. Who has the authority to rename city streets?**

Only the Portland City Council has the authority to rename city streets.

**6. Who is in charge of managing the street renaming process?**

The Portland Office of Transportation is the city bureau in charge of managing the street renaming process.

**7. Can the Portland City Council initiate a street renaming?**

The renaming process is outlined in Portland City Code Chapter 17.93, which was established by the Portland City Council on June 4, 1989, prohibits the Portland City Council as a group from initiating the renaming of a street after a person. Each street renaming application must come from an individual or organization other than the Portland City Council. The Council may rename a street to correct errors or eliminate confusion. City Code Section 17.93.050.

**8. Has the street renaming process outlined in the Portland City Code ever been used?**

No. Portland City Code Chapter 17.93 has never been used to rename a city street. The Portland City Council has the legal right to waive many provisions of the Portland City Code. Two Portland streets have been renamed without using the street renaming process outlined in Portland City Code Chapter 17.93. West Front Avenue was renamed Naito Parkway in honor of the Naito family soon after civic leader Bill Naito died. North Portland Boulevard was renamed Rosa Parks Way in the months following the death of national civil rights leader Rosa Parks. North Interstate Avenue was proposed for renaming to Cesar E, Chavez Boulevard in October, 2007 but was denied by the Portland City Council. In recent memory, Union Avenue was renamed to honor Reverend Martin Luther King prior to enactment of the current code provisions.

**9. Why has the Portland City Council ignored the street renaming process on the books?**

Various reasons have been given over the years for why the Portland City Council has not followed the street renaming process defined by the Portland City Code Chapter 17.93. One reason given for both the Naito Parkway and Rosa Parks Way street renamings was that the Portland City Council wanted to act more quickly than allowed by the Portland City Code after the death of each honoree. Another reason given is that the Portland City Code Chapter 17.93 is too cumbersome. Regardless, Mayor Tom Potter and City Commissioners Sam Adams, Nick Fish, Randy Leonard and Dan Saltzman have publicly committed to follow the street renaming processed outline in the Portland City Code Chapter 17.93

**10. Some have asked, “Why is the Portland City Council wasting time on this?” and, “With all the challenges currently facing the city, is now really the best time to consider a street renaming?”**

The Portland City Code provides a public process that allows people to apply for and requires the Council to consider street renaming requests if the Code requirements are met. Most cities in the U.S. provide a process for considering street renamings.

**11. I read in the Oregonian that City is going to spend \$150,000 on consultants to, “...to hire a consultant who will be in charge of a campaign to educate the public on why Chavez, who visited Portland once or twice, deserves this honor...,” why not use existing city staff -- this seems like waste of money!**

The City proposes to spend \$35,000 on independent consultant staff to manage all street renaming application processes in a given year including the public hearings for the Historian Panel, the Portland Planning Commission and City Council. Depending on how many “complete applications” for street renamings each year, the cost of printing and postage of meeting notices might cost more or less. The code section related to street renaming and arguably has its flaws. A key task of the consultant is to report back to council on any changes to the current process. Council will review the findings of the consultant and the process as outlined in the code to determine if any refinements are necessary.

**12. Can a single application provide a choice among streets for possible renaming?**

Yes. The Portland City Attorney states, “There is nothing in the City Code that prohibits a petition from including more than a single street for renaming,” but only one street can be chosen for the actual street renaming.

**13. Can a street be renamed for just anyone or anything?**

No. The Portland City Code Section 17.93.010 states that a street may be renamed for , “a person [who] has achieved prominence as result of his or her significant positive contribution to the United States and/or the local community.” The City Code also requires that the honoree be a real person and deceased for five years.

**14. Who decides if a person has made “significant contributions”?**

Portland City Code Section 17.93.040.(I) states that it is solely up to the Portland City Council whether to approve or deny each street renaming application based on, “...the best interest of the city...”after considering the recommendations of the Portland Historian Panel and the Portland Planning Commission.

**15. Are their restrictions on which streets can be considered for renaming?**

Yes. Portland City Code 17.93.020 states, “a street proposed for renaming shall not be changed if the existing name is of historical significance, or the street is significant in its own right. The street proposed for renaming must start and terminate entirely within City boundaries.” Also, renaming only a portion of a street is not permitted.

**16. Who decides if an existing street name has “historical significance,” or is “significance in its own right”?**

Portland City Code states that it is solely up to the Portland City Council whether to approve or deny each street renaming application based on, “...the best interest of the city...” after considering the recommendations of the Portland Historian Panel and the Portland Planning Commission.

**17. How do I voice my opinion about a proposed street renaming?**

Portland City Code Section 17.93.040.D requires that the Auditor mail postcards to each legal owner at each legal address abutting the street(s) proposed for renaming to notify them of scheduled hearings of the Portland Planning Commissions and Portland City Council on the proposed street renaming. Hearing notices and agendas are required to be published in the newspaper.

**18. Who pays for a street to be renamed?**

City taxpayers; It is estimated to cost approximately \$40 per street sign.

**19. Will the City pay to change my business letterhead, menus, websites or other marketing materials?**

To date the City has not paid neighbors or businesses to underwrite the cost of change printed material or websites. The street renaming process takes five years to give residents and businesses time to use their existing stock of stationary and other materials using the old address. Both the old and new street signs will remain in street poles for five years.

**20. Who may apply to rename a street?**

Portland City Code 17.93.010 states that, “Any individual or organization may apply to the city to rename a city street.”

**21. Who can serve on the Historian Panel?**

Portland City Code 17.93.040.A states that the Commissioner in Charge of Transportation appoints a Historian Panel. The Panel is made up of three historians or persons with the appropriate expertise as determined by the Commissioner in Charge of the Office of Transportation. City Transportation Commissioner has submitted his

nominees for the Historian Panel to the Portland City Council for their concurrence on August 6, 2008.

**22. How were the members of the Historian Panel chosen?**

Gilbert Paul Carrasco, J.D., Oregon National Guard Brigadier General Michael Caldwell and Kathy Fuerstenau, President of the Cully Neighborhood Association were chosen by the City Commissioner Sam Adams based on the following criteria:

- Not involved in any prior effort to rename a city street
- Willing to serve for 12 months
- Hold community or professional leadership positions
- Expertise with public processes; neighborhood and community outreach
- Portland resident

The panel will be advised by a group of professional historians,

**23. Is a street renaming subject to referendum of initiative petition referral?**

The Portland City Attorney states that, "If the City Council renames the street following the process already established by Portland City Code 17.93.010 et seq., that action is considered "administrative" as opposed to "legislative" and not subject to the initiative and referendum process."

**24. Is North Interstate being considered again for renaming?**

The Portland Office of Transportation has not received any recent inquiries or requests to rename North Interstate Avenue.

**25. Some U.S. cities allow for a single street to have more than one name, the "Avenue of the Americas" in New York City is also legally called "Sixth Avenue." Why doesn't the City of Portland do the same thing?**

Both state statute and the City Code require that when a street is renamed it is recorded with the County. The County has indicated that they accept only one name for a street.

**26. Why not rename a park or a school or a library --- a facility that will have less disruption to the community?**

There are many ways to honor people of significance to the community. Streets are one opportunity to recognize people who have contributed to our county and local community. Street names are especially valued as honorarium because our addresses are used on correspondence throughout the world. They convey a community's values and identity. Naming schools or libraries accomplish this goal in differing degrees. It is up to the agency which has jurisdiction to name the facilities under its control. Multnomah

County is responsible for naming libraries and county facilities, while Portland Public Schools names its own buildings.

**27. If a street ends within the City limits, but a street with the same name begins after a separation in another jurisdiction, may the street be considered for renaming?**

Yes, Portland City Code Section 17.93.020.B. says the street “must start and terminate entirely within City boundaries.” According to the City Attorney, if the street terminates in the City, it satisfies the Code requirement, even if a street with the same name exists in another adjacent jurisdiction.

**28. Is the Applicant required to pay for any part of the renaming process?**

Yes, in addition to any costs associated with collecting signatures in support of the renaming application, under the Portland City Code section 17.93.030(D) (1) “the applicant shall make a fee deposit to cover the full cost of printing and mailing postcards and public notices as determine by the City Auditor. The Minimum fee deposit shall be \$500.”