

City of Portland Street Renaming Process
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated February 23, 2009

1. What governs the street renaming process in Portland?

Portland City Code Chapter 17.93 governs the street renaming process. In addition, City Auditor's memo to City Council, dated September 22, 2008, outlines the process for verifying signatures collected in the application process, and *Foster v. Clark*, 309 Or 464 (1990) establishes that a street renaming process is considered "administrative" as opposed to "legislative" and therefore not subject to the initiative and referendum process.

2. Has this street renaming process 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 City Code, and it has renamed two streets without using this process. A portion of Front Avenue was renamed Naito Parkway after civic leader Bill Naito died. Portland Boulevard was renamed Rosa Parks Way following the death of national civil rights leader Rosa Parks. In 1989, prior to the enactment of the current code provisions, Union Avenue was renamed to honor Martin Luther King, Jr.

3. Who may apply to rename a street?

Any individual or organization may apply to the City to rename a city street.

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

Yes. The City of Portland has received one completed application to rename a street after César E. Chavez (1927-1993), a Latino civil rights and labor leader. The final signatures were received on January 23, 2009, and verified by the City Auditor on February 20, 2009. Only one complete application may be processed at any one time.

5. Who can sign a petition to rename a street?

Any Portland resident 16 years of age or older can sign the petition to rename a city street. To check the validity of signatures, the City Auditor compares a random sample of signatures against public records kept through the Department of Motor Vehicles, Portland Public Schools, David Douglas Public Schools, voter registration, and property tax rolls through PortlandMaps.com.

6. 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.

7. Which streets are being considered for renaming?

The application specifies Broadway, 39th Avenue, and Grand Avenue. No more than one street will be chosen for renaming.

8. How can a single application provide a choice among streets for possible renaming?

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.

9. What happens next?

The City Auditor has 30 days from the date of submission to determine whether an application includes at least 2,500 valid signatures from legal residents of the city. To be complete, the application must also include supporting biographical information about the honoree and the application fee of \$1000 per street proposed for renaming to cover the City’s costs of postage and copying during the process. Any fees not spent during the process will be returned to the applicant. If there are not enough valid signatures, the application will lapse because the applicants had a six-month time limit that ended on February 4, 2009.

If the Auditor determines that the application has enough valid signatures, the City Engineer has 14 calendar days to refer the application to a panel of three historians. The Historian Panel’s role is to provide a recommendation to the Planning Commission regarding the “appropriateness” of the proposed name and the “historical significance” of the proposed street(s) to be renamed. They have 45 days to take public comment and deliver recommendations to the Planning Commission. (One 14-day extension is allowed.)

During the same 45-day period, the Auditor conducts a mail survey of property owners and occupants and the City Engineer solicits statements of support or opposition from all neighborhood and business associations encompassing the proposed streets.

The Planning Commission’s role is to provide recommendations to City Council regarding the financial and community considerations related to renaming a street. City Council makes a final determination in the best interests of the City for which street, if any, will be renamed in honor of the proposed honoree.

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

No. Portland City Code Section 17.93.010 provides 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.

11. 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.

12. Are there 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.

13. Who are the members of the Historian Panel?

The Commissioner in Charge of Transportation appoints a Historian Panel. Mayor Sam Adams, the Commissioner in charge of Transportation, appointed Professor Gilbert Paul Carrasco, Oregon Nation Guard Brigadier General Michael Caldwell and Kathy Fuerstenau, Chairwoman of the Cully Association of Neighbors to serve on the Historian Panel. They were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) Not involved in any prior effort to rename a city street; (b) Willing to serve for 12 months; (c) Hold community or professional leadership positions; (d) Expertise with public processes, neighborhood and community outreach; (e) Portland resident.

The panel is advised by a group of professional historians who are not members of the Historian Panel, and is assisted by a team of independent third-party consultants.

14. With all the challenges currently facing the city, is now really the best time to consider a street renaming?

The City responds to street renaming applications as they are submitted. The Portland City Code provides a public process that allows people to apply for changes in city street names, 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 re-naming.

15. How much will this process cost the City?

The City has budgeted \$150,000 to cover the entire cost of renaming a city street, including new street signs, public notices, and independent consultant staff to facilitate the application process and make recommendations to City Council regarding any changes to the current process.

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

Community members have multiple opportunities to voice opinions about a proposed street renaming. Historian Panel, Planning Commission and City Council hearings are open to the public, and will be structured to accept public input. If the renaming application is found to be complete, all three bodies will hold public hearings on the matter. The City Auditor will also conduct a postcard survey to the legal owners at each legal address abutting the street(s) proposed for renaming. Notices of Historian Panel, Planning Commission, and City Council hearings and meetings will be published through local media, as well as on the City's main website, www.portlandonline.com. To get to the Street Renaming page, go to "Government", then "Special Projects," then "Cesar Chavez Street Renaming Process."

Members of the community will be able to submit written comments to the Historian Panel and the City. Comments to the Historian Panel must be related to the "appropriateness of the proposed name" and the "historical significance of the street proposed for renaming", and may be no longer than 250 words, or 1 typewritten page.

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

In the past, the City has not paid neighbors or businesses to underwrite the cost of changing 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 names remain on street signs for five years.

18. Why not adopt twin names for a street, such as New York City's "Avenue of the Americas / Sixth Avenue"?

Both state statute and the City Code require that when a street is renamed, the new name must be recorded with Multnomah County. The County has indicated that it will accept only one name for a street.

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

The process outlined in the Code applies only to street renaming and not to other "public spaces." Other public spaces may be renamed through a separate process.