

The author of this article lives and works on unceded territory of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other Tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River.

Streets: Portland Boulevard

Jan de Leeuw

Version 02-14-2019

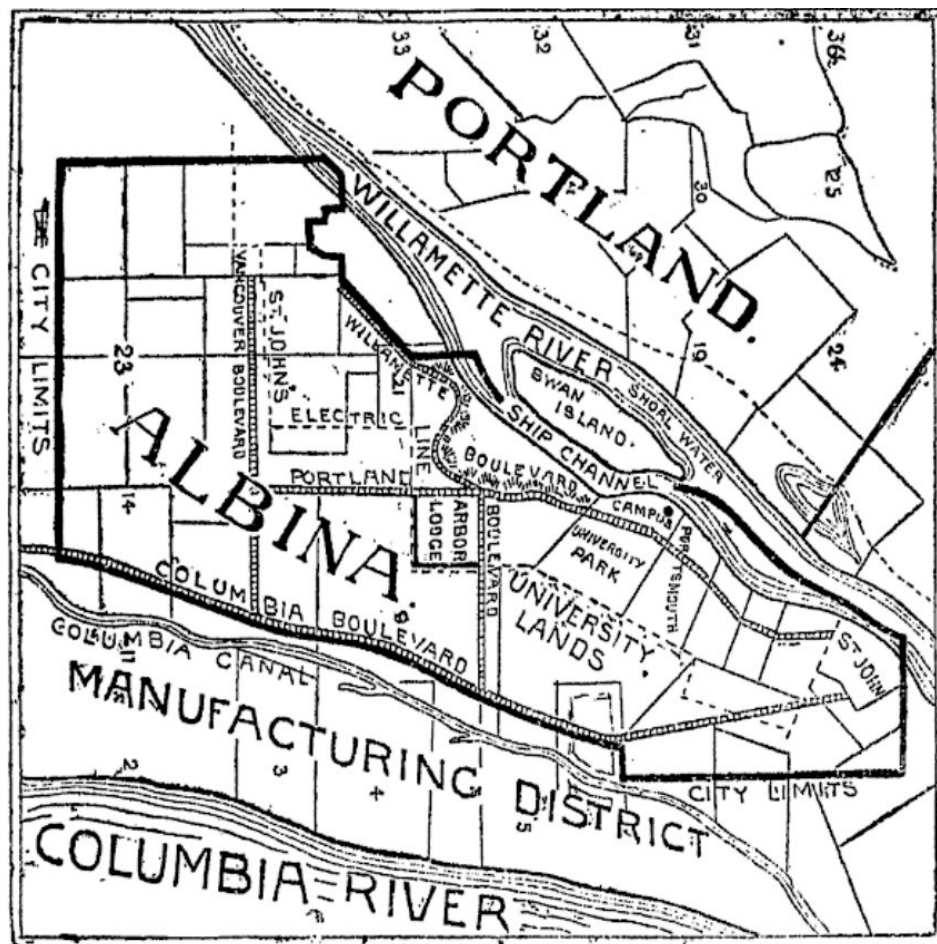


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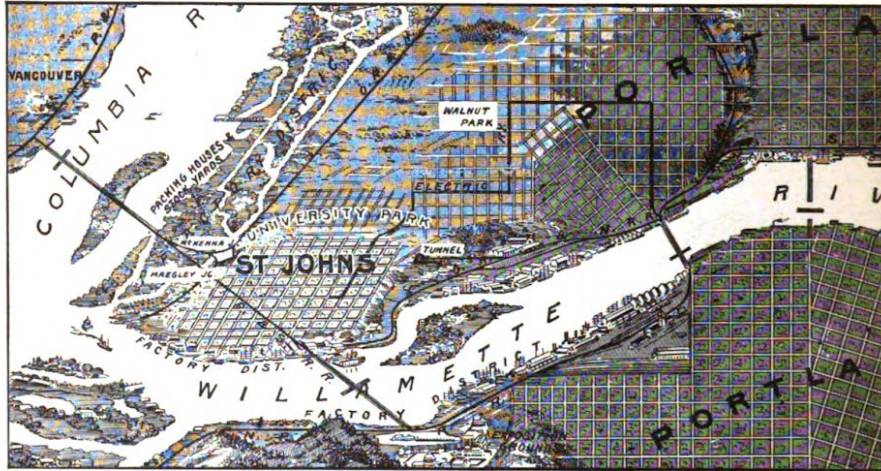
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The New York of the Pacific

Portland Boulevard (now Rosa Parks Way) originally was part of Francis I. McKenna's boulevard system for the Peninsula. The Boulevard System, which has its own [separate chapter](#) in this book, can be best understood as one of the ways to make the Peninsula accessible and attractive to people who wanted to buy land and/or homes. It consequently was boosted mightily by the developers who had bought the original pioneer homesteads and who had used them to plat subdivisions. Francis McKenna, who platted and owned University Park and had exclusive rights to sell the lots of Portsmouth and Arbor Lodge, and William Killingsworth, who platted and owned Walnut Park, went out of their way to promote the Peninsula as the "New York of the Pacific". Of course that name is not very original. It was used earlier for San Francisco and Seattle, but the Peninsula had the advantage that its shape was a bit like Manhattan. Using the "New York of the Pacific" moniker, and realizing its value for real estate sales, is just another example of the peculiar relationship between the west and east coast of the US, and of the inferiority complex of the west that was still very much in play around 1900.

Albina and East Portland were starting to develop fast after the bridges over the Willamette were built, the streets were graded, and the streetcar lines were coming to the east side. So it made sense to extend, widen, and grade the streets to the Peninsula and extend the streetcar lines. The map that starts this chapter shows the city of Albina in 1891 (not exactly to scale). The developers leaned heavily on the city council of Albina, in the full knowledge that the pending consolidation with Portland would make their job more difficult. They managed to get their major permits and bonds approved just before the consolidation happened in 1891. The [boulevard chapter](#) has some additional information about the influence peddling and the graft.

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[illegible]

Unfortunately carrying out the grandiose plans of 1891 would take a long time. The Albina City Council approved the grading of Portland Boulevard and Willamette Boulevard just before consolidation, and both boulevards were never graveled or otherwise paved until well into the 1900's. In order to expedite the project both boulevards were made into county roads in 1899. As we shall see, Portland Boulevard only ran from Vancouver Avenue to Willamette Boulevard and never really became the central boulevard of the Peninsula. From this point on the chapter will concentrate on the extension, the grading, and the paving of Portland Boulevard.

The Ordinances

Here is a list of ordinances passed by the Portland City Council between 1890 and 1915 relevant for laying out, grading, and improving Portland Boulevard. In each item I give the number, date, and title of the ordinance, with a short summary followed by a link to the actual document.

The section illustrates how street establishment and improvement moves through the city bureaucracy. First the City Surveyor and the City Engineer have their say, then a committee of Viewers is appointed and files their report, then the Auditor gets involved, and finally the Council votes and the Mayor signs. It also illustrates, by the way, my compulsive hoarding of even marginally relevant documents in the name of having a “complete record”, which is an illusory goal anyway.

Ordinance 7059 (October 17, 1891): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the City Surveyor in the matter of opening a Boulevard or Street one hundred (100) feet in width, extending from where the line passing through the center of Sections fifteen (15) and sixteen (16) Township one (1) North Range one (1) East intersects Vancouver Avenue; thence west along said line to where said line intersects the central line of Willamette Boulevard as shown on the plat of Arbor Lodge; thence northwesterly along said central line of said Willamette Boulevard to the line between Sections sixteen (16) and seventeen (17) and also eight (8) and nine (9) in said Township; thence north along said line between said sections to the central line of First Street in Peninsular Addition No.2; thence west along said last named street to the west line of Glenwood Park; all in the City of Portland, and to be known as Portland Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Viz5iYqtkE-1Hx8GVqWiriTXTiOhzFgD>

Ordinance 7541 (April 25, 1892): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the City Surveyor in the matter of the proposed extension of Portland Boulevard from the west line of Vancouver Avenue to the Willamette Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zRhgpCtrb0Z4jj215NR-5pttrfarmMXG>

Ordinance 7730 (July 21, 1892): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the Viewers in the matter of the proposed extension of Portland Boulevard from the west line of Vancouver Avenue to the Willamette Boulevard making an assessment of the benefits and damages set forth in said report and directing an entry of such assessment in the Pocket of City Liens.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ZGlzC8TTbsdLm9bjh8XSTd_v9-jEib7c

Ordinance 7781 (August 25, 1892): *An Ordinance making an appropriation out of the Fund for the Extension of Portland Boulevard.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1q3WQ_gp6uje44osCNevsxdAvIMNCIOB7

Ordinance 7807 (September 12, 1892): *An Ordinance authorizing the Committee on Judiciary and Elections to enter into contract with Peter Lynch for improving Portland Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ArtRUpvRW8190UHwWL8W60w-Qsbbrhgi>

Ordinance 16603 (May 14, 1907): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the City Engineer in the matter of the proposed extension of Portland Boulevard, from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the west line of Union Avenue.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ePB_5hvmcydJBKOLUZJJVpIDfGYKlzk6

Ordinance 18703 (December 31, 1908): *An Ordinance authorizing the Mayor and Auditor to draw warrants to provide for the refund of amounts paid on account of assessments levied for the opening, laying out, and establishing of Portland Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1t961mNvUzT5BxI0Cy41927-Rve2BJgez>

Ordinance 19195 (March 18, 1909): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the City Engineer in the matter of the proposed opening, laying out and establishing of Portland Boulevard from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the center line of Rodney Avenue.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1il3YKqBK2T-ycN8xZNBrcxUgPAbKDA2h>

Ordinance 20037 (August 30, 1909): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the City Engineer in the matter of the proposed opening, laying out and establishing of Portland Boulevard from the west line of Vancouver Avenue to the east line of Willamette Boulevard.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1V9t9Gssad6b_bamyJHyoGVD99c4amVMD

Ordinance 20736 (February 11, 1910): *An Ordinance adopting the report of the Viewers in the matter of the proposed opening, laying out and establishing of Portland Boulevard from the west line of Vancouver Avenue to the east line of Willamette Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B94Uvj3OjM7BT3JTM3BmWXISSTg>

Ordinance 22575 (December 28, 1910): *An Ordinance providing for the time and manner of improving Portland Boulevard from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the west line of Union Avenue.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ziMfuyEcyPKWHtwsIOVMowCxRHlx0_4H

Ordinance 23282 (May 10, 1911): *An Ordinance providing for the time and manner of improving Portland Boulevard from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the easterly line of Willamette Boulevard.*

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WHXJyCIANCK1X-glcC5gTJROz7Dh-nXS>

Ordinance 24023 (September 13, 1911): *An Ordinance declaring the cost of improving Portland Boulevard from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the west line of Union Avenue.*

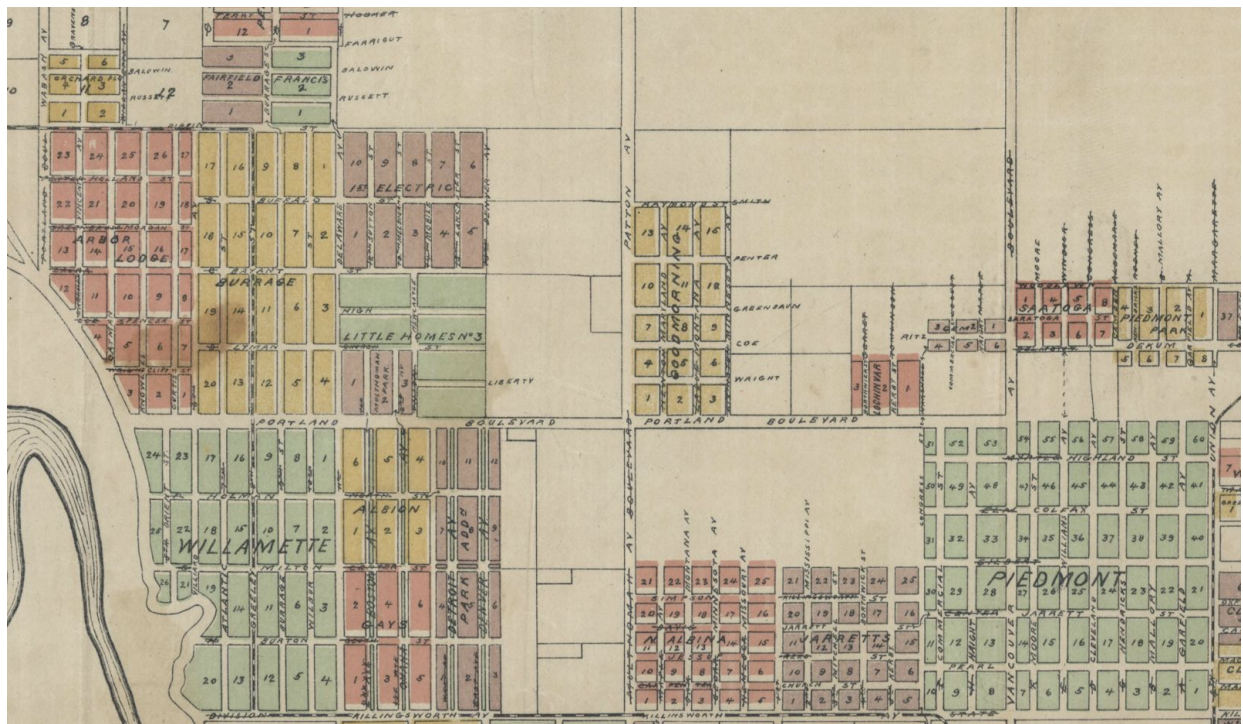
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ZzZmBCULG7_1bUi2vZur3bxFTVOT_mDA

Ordinance 24742 (January 24, 1912): *An Ordinance declaring the cost of improving Portland Boulevard from the east line of Vancouver Avenue to the easterly line of Willamette Boulevard.*

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1r82OnNftcN2EZh_WCGEMZ-eBtkNwrSTI

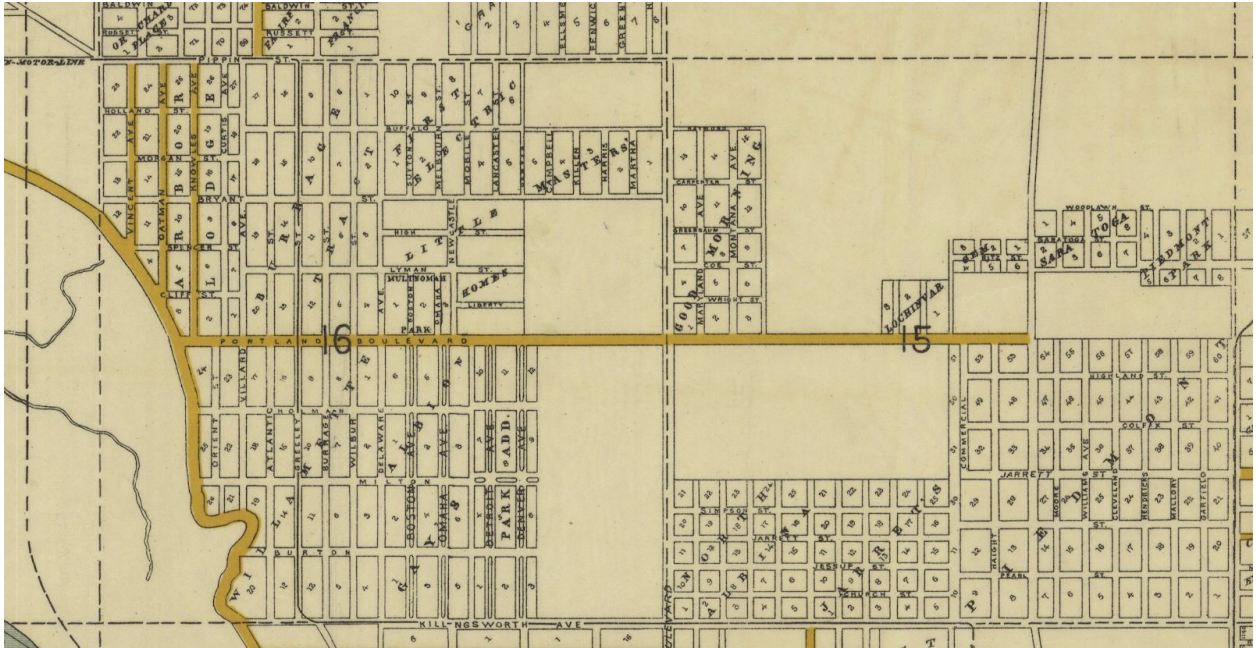
The Maps

I will now look at some old maps to see what they say about the location and extent of Portland Boulevard. I include cut-outs of the maps, and give the URL to the full map below the cut-out. I start in 1891, the year that Arbor Lodge was platted. Before 1891 there was no Portland Boulevard, the Albina city boundary was (what is now) Killingsworth, and what is now Willamette Boulevard was the St John's County Road. After the consolidation of Albina, East Portland, and Portland in 1891 there was the "great renaming" of the street names. This map, from 1892, shows Willamette and Portland Boulevards, both laid out, but not yet graded. It shows the stretch of the original Portland Boulevard on the west side of Arbor Lodge, renamed to Wabash Avenue. And it shows that Vancouver Boulevard (renamed to Vancouver Avenue) was the eastern endpoint of Portland Boulevard. The eastern half of the Piedmont subdivision was still bounded on the north by undeveloped land.



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zXd6yOBOZ26b7PTigSlxKPvkpj2tvcYT>

The next map is an 1894 paving map. It shows that both Willamette Boulevard and Portland Boulevard are graded (to Vancouver Avenue), but not graveled or otherwise paved. The southern part of Wabash Avenue, initially also named Portland Boulevard, from Willamette Boulevard to Pippin Street (now Lombard), does not really exist yet. Union (MLK), Patton (Interstate), Pippin (Lombard), and Killingsworth are not even graded yet.



https://drive.google.com/open?id=1w_-WAAR_ds4FFGzZoThHRnUt1pckPwii

The Names

Consolidation of Albina, East Portland, and Portland into the single City of Portland triggered the Great Street Renaming of January 12, 1892. Also, as my discussion of the early maps and ordinances show, there were some stretches of Portland Boulevard that were part of the original plan for the Boulevard System, but that were never laid out or graded. They lost their Boulevard status.

This table shows what streets were renamed to Portland Boulevard over the years.

| Old name | Subdivision | Ordinance | Date |
|------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------|
| E St | Willamette | 7263 | 01-12-1882 |
| La Sall St | Goodmorning Addition | 7263 | 01-12-1882 |
| Laselle St | Lochinvar Addition | 7263 | 01-12-1882 |
| Stewart St | Oak Park, Holbrook | St Johns 238 | 06-08-1909 |
| Unnamed St | Park Addition, Arbor Lodge | 7263 | 01-12-1882 |
| Hyde St | Woodlawn, Brush, Lankins | 63040 | 09-08-1932 |

And this table shows which parts of Portland Boulevard were renamed.

| New name | Subdivision | Ordinance | Date |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Wahbash Ave | Arbor Lodge | 7263 | 01-12-1882 |
| Willis Blvd | University Park | 8944 | 09-07-1894 |
| Smith Ave | Holbrooks Addition | St Johns 370 | 02-27-1912 |
| Rosa Parks Way | Entire Length | 180549 | 11-24-2006 |

Rosa Parks Way



From the Oregonian of February 24, 2006:

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman was at church a few weeks ago in Northeast Portland when he heard a voice from on high.

It wasn't God. It was the Rev. B.E. Johnson at Cornerstone Community Church of God in Christ on Killingsworth Street, who suggested to the congregation that the city consider renaming all or part of Portland Boulevard after civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks.

Eight months later all of Portland Boulevard was Rosa Parks Way. The speed with which Saltzman was able to ram through this resolution suggests that may after all have been God who was behind the proposal.

I would have been neither for or against the name change. It is easy to understand the arguments of the Albina Ministerial Alliance, which lobbied in favor of the proposal. Rosa Parks had died less than a year ago. Portland Boulevard intersected Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, and it also intersected Mississippi Avenue. From the Oregonian of October 19, 2006:

"It's the right location," said the Rev. Wilbert G. Hardy, pastor of Highland United Church of Christ on Northeast Glisan Street. "Rosa Parks Way would even cross that most racist of states, Mississippi, and cut through hate."

The arguments against renaming were much more diverse. Some were procedural, because there was not much opportunity for public input and if there was public input it was largely ignored, in the grand tradition of city government. Saltzman had convinced the City Council to waive the usual elaborate criteria and requirements in the city code for renaming city streets, drastically shortening the time span and the opportunity for discussion. This article from the Portland Mercury of August 2, 2007 gives a good overview.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qdYg9Q4J-YVpdWt4HUm7pt-uA0C51bZr>

The Piedmont Neighborhood Association board voted in May against the name change, partly because they considered it to be a hassle, partly because they said there were more appropriate and respectful ways to honor Rosa Parks. The Holy Redeemer Catholic Church was also against, mostly for historical reasons, because they had been on Portland Boulevard for more than 100 years. Stormfront was spewing up its usual racist bile, in the same way as it did in the 1989 renaming of Union Avenue.

Suggestions for a better way to honor Rosa Parks include using the longer and busier Lombard, Sandy, or Killingsworth Street, choosing a location downtown, not just renaming a street and adding commemorative art, not losing "the namesake of the city" boulevard. The Piedmont Neighborhood Association suggested to rename the downtown transit center, which seems appropriate given Rosa Parks' historic bus ride. Saltzman' argued that he did not want to rename a street already named after a historical figure, which of course Portland did already do many times. In September the Piedmont and Arbor Lodge Neighborhood Associations wrote a letter to the Mayor and Council supporting the name change, contingent on three markers along the boulevard to honor Rosa Parks. On October 18 the City Council passed resolution 36445, appended below. The [minutes of the public comment session](#) unfortunately only show the names of those speaking. One week later, one year after Rosa Parks' death, ordinance 180549, also appended below, was passed unanimously. Among the findings of the Council we see

Rosa Parks Way will intersect with Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, a befitting location to honor Mrs. Parks' contributions to our community and our nation.

And among the various directives

- *The provisions of Municipal Code chapter 17.93, renaming City Streets, shall be waived, except for section 17.93.060. Implementation.*
- *The Bureau of Maintenance shall install new street signs showing the new street name alongside the existing name signs and shall maintain both sets of signs for a period of three years at the level of maintenance approved for street name signs city-wide.*
- *At the end of three years the Bureau of Maintenance shall remove the Portland Boulevard signs.*

In December 2006 the street signs were changed to the dual signs, in July 2007 ODOT changed the freeway exit signs.

Mayor Potter indicated at the October 18 meeting that more street name changes were considered. The council must really have enjoyed racially-charged battles. The most prominent plan circulated at that time was to change Interstate Avenue to César E. Chávez Boulevard. Now dozens of businesses were strongly opposed and the proposal did not fly. The City briefly considered renaming SE 4th Street. Same story, same result. Eventually, after a three-year battle between neighborhoods and Latino groups, Portland did get a César E. Chávez Boulevard at NE 39th Street, in a more Chávez friendly neighborhood.

In the Oregonian of November 23, 2006 there was an even bolder proposal. I love it.

It may be the longest of long shots, but Kashea Kilson-Anderson is forging ahead anyway.

Kilson-Anderson wants to rename Killingsworth Street for Malcolm X, the controversial black nationalist who evolved from segregationist to international civil rights pioneer before his assassination in 1965.

Not surprisingly, that proposal did not go anywhere. In a city of bridges that was a bridge too far.

RESOLUTION No. 36445

Rename Portland Boulevard as Rosa Parks Way (Resolution)

WHEREAS, Rosa Parks's courage and exceptional commitment to Civil Rights struggles have bequeathed for a generation of Portland citizens what the power of one person's conduct and conviction can achieve; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Parks became a symbol and torch bearer in our Nation's quest for racial equality and clarified for people everywhere the cruelty and humiliation inherent in the laws and customs of segregation; and

WHEREAS, Portland has routinely demonstrated and displayed its concern for justice and equality for all; through its Council actions; and

WHEREAS, Portland has an opportunity to honor a national icon who fought for the cause of freedom, justice, equality and liberty for all; by directing the Bureau of Parks & Recreation and the Regional Art Council to expend appropriate or reasonable amount to install a quality work of Art at the Peninsula Park Bench to celebrate Rosa Parks; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Council declares Portland Boulevard as Rosa Parks Way; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Council, directs Portland Parks & Recreation, in collaboration with the Regional Arts and Culture Council, to use general fund discretionary dollars in the FY 2006 Fall BuMP not to exceed \$12,000, to fund an art project in honor of Rosa Parks at the bench at the NW corner of Peninsula Park; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City of Portland will fund a marker honoring Rosa Parks to be located on the new greenway trail near Willamette Blvd at Rosa Parks Way when the Willamette Greenway trail is near completion; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City of Portland supports the Albina Ministerial Alliance with its statue project at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and Rosa Parks Way.

Adopted by the Council: OCT 18 2006

GARY BLACKMER

Auditor of the City of Portland

By



Deputy

Commissioner Dan Saltzman
Prepared by: Promise King
October 18, 2006

ORDINANCE No. 180549

Authorize the renaming of Portland Boulevard within the City of Portland to Rosa Parks Way (Ordinance)

The City of Portland ordains:

Section 1. The Council Finds:

1. On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks changed the course of history and the civil rights movement by her courageous act of refusing to relinquish her seat to a white passenger on city bus in Montgomery, Alabama.
2. Because Rosa Parks asserted her rights as a human being and challenged the racial segregation she was arrested, prosecuted and convicted of a crime.
3. Through an act of civil disobedience Mrs. Parks became a reluctant symbol in our nation's quest for racial equality and elucidated the cruelty, inhumanity and humiliation inherent in the laws and customs of segregation.
4. Rosa Parks' refusal to accept an unfair and inhumane system of racial segregation sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, one of the largest and most successful movements against racial segregation in history.
5. Leading the boycott was Martin Luther King, Jr. a young preacher who would soon propel the civil rights movement in the United States.
6. The Montgomery Bus Boycott did not end until the United States Supreme Court declared that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional.
7. Rosa Parks single act forever change the course of our nation's history.
8. Mrs. Parks should be remembered for her courage in the face of adversity and her commitment to the cause of freedom, justice, equality and liberty for all.
9. By renaming Portland Boulevard in Rosa Parks honor, future generations will be reminded of the power that one person can achieve.
10. Rosa Parks Way will intersect with Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, a befitting location to honor Mrs. Parks' contributions to our community and our nation.

NOW THEREFORE, the Council directs:

- a. North and Northeast Portland Boulevard shall be renamed as the Rosa Parks Way.
- b. The provisions of Municipal Code chapter 17.93, renaming City Streets, shall be waived, except for section 17.93.060. Implementation.
- c. The Auditor shall notify owners and occupants of all property abutting the street being named, affected public agencies, the general public, US. Post Office, emergency services organizations of the name change through public notice, direct correspondence, and other appropriate means.
- d. Portland Parks & Recreation, in collaboration with Regional Arts and Culture Council, shall expand its repair of the bench in the Northwest corner of Peninsula Park at Albina and currently Portland Boulevard to include a public art project honoring Rosa Parks.
- e. The Bureau of Maintenance shall install new street signs showing the new street name alongside the existing name signs and shall maintain both sets of signs for a period of three years at the level of maintenance approved for street name signs city-wide
- f. At the end of three years the Bureau of Maintenance shall remove the Portland Boulevard signs.

Passed by the Council, October 25, 2006

Commissioner Dan Saltzman
Prepared by Promise King
October 12, 2006

GARY BLACKMER
Auditor of the City of Portland
By /s/Susan Parsons
Deputy

References