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Chloe Eudaly Commissioner **Chris Warner** Director

Memorandum

To: Chloe Eudaly, Commissioner of Transportation
Chris Warner, Director of Transportation

From: Hannah Schafer, Communications
Zef Wagner, Transportation Planning

Date: 11/15/19

Subject: Flanders Bridge Naming Proposal

Background

We are now in the final stages of design for the new Flanders Crossing, a pedestrian/bicycle-only bridge spanning Interstate 405 and connecting the Pearl District to the Northwest District with a low-stress option for crossing the freeway. This is an achievement that deserves to be celebrated, and one of the traditional ways to celebrate a new bridge is to give it a name. Recent and upcoming examples include the Tilikum Crossing, the Congresswoman Darlene Hooley Bridge at Gibbs St, the Barbara Walker Crossing, and the Congressman Earl Blumenauer Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge. Because of this recent history of naming bridges, members of the public and staff at PBOT have started to ask what we should name this new bridge that has long been known as the Flanders Bridge or Flanders Crossing. Some ideas have been circulated, but we believe there are many good arguments for keeping the historic Flanders name, but updating it to honor one of the most beloved characters in our modern cultural history, someone with a clear connection to Northwest Portland and who embodies the values of good neighborliness that we strive for: Ned Flanders.

Proposal

We propose that PBOT officially name the new bridge after Ned Flanders, a beloved cartoon character created by Portland native Matt Groening and featured on the ground-breaking *The Simpsons* TV show since its premiere in 1989. We recommend that we honor Ned Flanders in a simple and subtle way, with a small plaque on one or both ends of the bridge, in the style of our usual plaques listing the name and construction year of the bridge, but with an added image of Ned Flanders and perhaps a quotation (see mock-up at the end of this memo). This will be a suitable memorial and will not be overly distracting to users of the bridge compared to a statue or mural. Instead it will become one of the many small, interesting attractions that dot our great City and inspire curiosity. If there is a desire to also honor Captain George Flanders, the original namesake of Flanders Street, an alternative proposal would be to officially name it after both George and Ned and have a plaque for each one located at either end of the bridge.

Arguments in Favor



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Ned Flanders' trademark catchphrase "hi-diddly-ho, neighborino" is indicative of the value that he places on being a good neighbor, and what better way to represent this new connection between two neighborhoods cut off from one another by the I-405 freeway? Naming the bridge after Ned Flanders would also honor a character with a clear connection with the street we are reconnecting, since he was named after NW Flanders Street, and would serve to celebrate Portland's thriving comics and animation scene by highlighting one of the most important cultural forces to emerge from this city. In addition to the arguments for naming the bridge after Ned Flanders in particular, there are also many good reasons to keep the Flanders name in general, as a way to celebrate the Alphabet District's east-west street grid and ease wayfinding around the district. I will lay out each argument in favor in more detail below.

Reconnecting the Historic Street Grid

One of the main purposes of the Flanders Crossing is to reconnect the historic street grid in Northwest Portland that was severed by the construction of Interstate 405. Many streets that originally connected the Pearl District and Northwest District were removed in 1969 during freeway construction. Burnside, Couch, Everett, and Glisan still exist on freeway overpasses, but they each only have sidewalks on one side and are dominated by freeway ramps and high volumes of traffic. The Flanders Bridge is meant to reconnect the grid and make the freeway less of a barrier to people walking and biking, and it would be fitting to celebrate this first step in reconnecting the grid by keeping the historic Flanders name. Practically speaking, it also keeps a name that people are already familiar with and are using already to refer to the upcoming bridge, aiding in wayfinding for people getting around Northwest Portland.

Honoring Northwest Portland

This bridge has been in plans for Northwest Portland for decades. While it has clear citywide benefit, it is also a connection between two neighborhoods and ideally should have a name that reflects the neighborhoods surrounding it. Ned Flanders has a strong connection to the neighborhood and to the street this bridge is reconnecting because his name was inspired by this very street. Matt Groening grew up in Portland and went to Lincoln High School, and when he created the Simpsons, he was inspired by the Alphabet District street names as sources for his character names. In addition to Flanders, he named characters after Kearney, Lovejoy, and Quimby Streets. Surprisingly, there is currently no monument to celebrate this connection between Northwest Portland and The Simpsons. Another way this name would honor Northwest Portland is by tying together historical eras, celebrating Northwest Portland's history while also celebrating the recent past and the future. Flanders *Street* would still be named after Captain George Flanders, one of the early prominent Portland residents who lived over 100 years ago on what was then known as "F" Street. The Flanders *Bridge* would in turn be named after Ned Flanders, a Portland-inspired cartoon character named after Flanders Street who has been entertaining Portlanders and so many others for 30 years and running.

Celebrating Creativity

Portland has had a thriving comics and animation scene for decades, and this may have both contributed to and been influenced by the Simpsons, created by a Portland artist and strongly associated with Portland. Since then, Portland and the surrounding region have become home to comic book companies like Dark Horse Comics, Oni Press, Image Comics, and Microcosm Publishing, as well as animation studios like Will Vinton Studios, Laika, Hinge, and Shadowmachine. Some of these companies are even located in Northwest Portland. Nearby Pacific Northwest College of the Arts offers a robust Animation Arts program, and Portland State University also has comic art and animation programs available. Many well-known comic books have been created by Portland writers and artists, and some have been turned into movies or TV shows that celebrate Portland, most recently the *Stumptown* show adapted from the comic book series by Portland resident Greg Rucka. In addition to creating great works of animation and comic art, Portland loves to celebrate this work through its many well-curated comic book stores, multiple annual conventions, and animation film festivals at its many local movie theaters. By naming the Flanders Bridge after Ned Flanders, we will not only be honoring the cultural phenomenon that is *The Simpsons*, but also the creative spirit that has animated Portlanders for so long and will continue to do so long into the future.

Promoting Good Neighborliness

Ned Flanders has been a quintessential emblem of good neighborliness for over 30 years, keeping his cool and trying his best to be a good neighbor even when confronted with his rather difficult neighbors, the Simpsons. He is always willing to give a warm "hi-diddly-ho" to his "neighborinos" and is more likely than not to respond to a request with a hearty "okily-dokily!". He is willing to do this even for the Simpson family, with whom he shares little in common in terms of political philosophy, religious belief, or overall temperament. In these difficult times, when people seem

more divided than ever along political or cultural lines, and less and less willing to even talk to their neighbors with whom they may disagree, we believe Ned Flanders is a symbol of the kind of neighborly connection we should strive for in Portland. Just as this new bridge will connect two neighborhoods together across a physical divide, we should promote the idea of this bridge connecting actual neighbors together across whatever divides them.

Keeping Portland Weird

Portland's unofficial motto has long been "Keep Portland Weird." While this attitude is not loved by all Portland residents, we see it as a statement that we want to keep some elements of our unique character alive even as the city grows and changes over time. We don't want to lose what makes Portland seem like Portland, and keeping things "weird" is one way to serve that purpose. For this reason, we are proud of things like having the smallest city park (Mill Ends Park), the strangest donuts (Voodoo), the craziest bike ride (Zoobomb), the most whimsical sidewalk amenities (tiny toy horses attached to historic rings), and our very own flamethrowing Unipiper. Naming the Flanders Bridge after Ned Flanders and including an official plaque at the end of the bridge featuring his name and image will continue this tradition of keeping Portland weird. Like many weird things in Portland, it will appeal to locals and visitors alike, attracting people to see the bridge. And there is already evidence that people from around the world enjoy visiting Simpsons-related Portland locations, despite the lack of any official monument. Many people like to visit the sidewalk sketch of Bart Simpson near Lincoln High School and take photos next to the street signs in the Alphabet District corresponding to character names. And for years, people have been altering the street signs along NE Flanders St by adding a "D" to make it "NED" Flanders St. It is time we officially honor Ned Flanders, as so many have unofficially done over the years.

Building Awareness

As one of PBOT's signature projects to promote walking and bicycling as healthy and sustainable transportation choices, this bridge deserves to receive a great deal of attention from the public and the media. While the bridge is sure to get plenty of attention right when it is constructed no matter what name we give it, we believe naming it after Ned Flanders will bring more awareness on an ongoing basis than if we were to name it after a political or historical figure. We already have many bridges that honor such people from our history or present day, but we do not yet have a single bridge named in honor of a beloved cartoon character. This will inspire curiosity and interest from residents and visitors year-in and year-out. New Portlanders will be more likely to hear about the bridge and want to try it out because of its association with Ned Flanders. This will provide ongoing benefit to the City by inspiring interest in the bridge and helping people find it and enjoy for decades to come.

Next Steps

If this proposal is supported in concept by Director Warner and Commissioner Eudaly, the next step would be to inquire with Matt Groening and 20th Century Fox TV regarding the feasibility of such a bridge naming and associated plaque. Once the feasibility is determined and permission is obtained to proceed, PBOT could develop a final plaque design and produce other materials to assist in further vetting of the idea before making a final decision prior to the bridge opening in late 2020 or early 2021.

Plaque Concept

NED FLANDERS BRIDGE



2021

"Hi-diddly-ho,
neighborino"

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