Vadim Mozyrsky (00:00):
Over time we've lost that sort of culture of invigoration of public transportation as well as biking in Portland. And we need to bring that back.

Jonathan Maus (00:11):
Welcome to the BikePortland Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. In this episode, we hear from the Vadim Mozyrsky. Mozyrsky recently announced his candidacy for Portland City council. He wants a seat currently occupied by incumbent commissioner, Jo Ann Hardesty. Now, since I interviewed Hardesty in our last episode, I thought it'd be fun to follow that up by getting to know one of her challengers.

Jonathan Maus (00:32):
Mozyrsky is an administrative law judge who specializes in disability law. He lives in the Goose Hollow neighborhood. And while he's a newcomer to local politics, he's already well known in civic circles because he serves on a number of advisory committees including the Portland Public Safety Action Coalition, the Portland Charter Commission, that's the group that's considering a possible change to our city's form of government. Mozyrsky also sits on the Portland Committee on Community Engaged Policing or PCCEP. He's on the Citizen Review Committee and he was a former member of the Portland Commission on Disability.

Jonathan Maus (01:05):
Before last week, I didn't know much about Mozyrsky at all. He actually contacted me out of the blue when a mutual friend of ours suggested I might be able to help him learn a little bit more about transportation issues in Portland. That's something I've done for years with new candidates and other folks that are new to this issue just to kind of give them my lay of the land and see if I can help out. So I agreed to meet him for an informal chat. And after we had what I thought was a really productive and interesting conversation over coffee on Northwest 23rd Street last week, I invited him into our studio to record something on the record.

Jonathan Maus (01:36):
We talked about a lot of different things, including his personal story as a childhood immigrant from Kyiv, Ukraine and how he more recently escaped Houston's terrible traffic for the walkable streets of Portland. Mozyrsky also shared with me his ideas on how to boost bicycling, how to reduce driving, how to improve policing and law enforcement in Portland, how to tackle our homelessness crisis, his general style of leadership, and much more. This episode was recorded on December 4th, just five days after he filed his paperwork with the City Election's office. Here's our conversation.

Jonathan Maus (02:15):
Vadim Mozyrsky, thanks for coming on the BikePortland Podcast. It's good to have you here.

Vadim Mozyrsky (02:20):
Well, thank you very much for inviting me. I appreciate being here.

Jonathan Maus (02:22):
One reason I wanted to chat with you a little bit is because, and don't take this the wrong way, but I didn't see much about you online. I don't think people... A lot of people in Portland haven't really heard
about you that much and they don't know about you yet. You're sort of a relative newcomer in terms of elected office here in Portland. So I wanted to flesh out for folks a little bit more about your background. So I read that you were born in Kyiv, Ukraine. When did you come to the United States?

Vadim Mozyrsky (02:46):
I came to the United States in 1979. At that point in time, it was still the Soviet Union. And one of the few reasons where you could not leave the country was if your family was Jewish. There was a lot of antisemitism there. So my family, without having any internet back then, without knowing too much about what the rest of the world was like, wanted to come to the United States because they heard through the grapevine that life was much better here. So they applied to leave. We initially went to Austria and then they told us to go to Italy. And then we stayed in Italy for a few months, kind of selling off what little goods we had to pay for an apartment with a couple other families until we got permission to come to United States.

Vadim Mozyrsky (03:26):
And so I arrived in the United States seven years old at the time. My family didn't know any English. And started school, sat down in class, looked around me, tried to memorize the faces because I wasn't too sure what class would be like without being able to speak the language. It's a quintessential American immigrant story. We started off... My family had part-time jobs. My father, who's an engineer, worked as a coach checker for some time until his English improved and he was able to get better jobs. We ended up moving around the country quite a bit as the jobs progressed. So I always had a kind of a nomad spirit in myself I think because of that, because my family moved around so much. And then when I came to Portland, I just fell in love with the city and decided to settle down and put down roots here and stay here rather than move around anymore. It's a wonderful place, and I decided this was going to be my home.

Jonathan Maus (04:23):
Right. Because you did your schooling, both your undergraduate and graduate school stuff in Austin, Texas, right?

Vadim Mozyrsky (04:29):
That's right.

Jonathan Maus (04:29):
And then you decided to come over to Portland. Was there something specific about Portland that caught your eye?

Vadim Mozyrsky (04:33):
Well, so many things actually. I initially came here and stayed Downtown. I walked around lot. I noticed that there was musicians playing at Pioneer Square. It was the MarchFourth Marching Band. Just the vibrancy was amazing and how many people were out and about. The people here were great. You could try having a conversation with almost anybody. And I remember just walking down the street and people would say hi to me. You don't get that in so many places around the United States where you felt like people were friendly and nice. And of course, nature. I'm an avid hiker, an avid camper and
backpacker. And being so close to a lot of beautiful scenic areas, I fell in love with that as well. So it's the whole package. There's so much stuff that I loved about here.

Jonathan Maus (05:19):
And that was like 2014 or so?

Vadim Mozyrsky (05:22):
About there. Yeah.

Jonathan Maus (05:23):
So you've always been sort of in the central city or kind of Downtown in terms of where you've lived and worked and played most of the time?

Vadim Mozyrsky (05:28):
Exactly. My office used to be Downtown, so I try to be pretty close to that so I could commute or make it there easily.

Jonathan Maus (05:34):
And then you mentioned your office. I read some stuff about you being an administrative law judge. It was all stuff that I personally don't have direct relatable experience to, like really understanding what the heck that is. So do you mind explaining what exactly type of legal work you do?

Vadim Mozyrsky (05:47):
Yeah. Yeah. So I went to public schools in the United States, public high school, public college, public university. I graduated from the University of Texas School of Law. I practiced litigation for a while and really didn't enjoy that so I went to go work for the US government where I feel you could actually benefit people in the jobs you did. So I worked for a long time for Medicare for the health and human services. And when the Affordable Care Act came out, I worked on that as well when Obama introduced that. And then I got a job with Social Security as an administrative law judge. So I hold hearings with people applying for disability. My job is to talk with a lot of people about their needs. Some people have physical impairments, some people have mental health impairments and they're seeking disability benefits. And it's talking to individuals on many days about their needs and trying to understand them and trying to see if the federal government can help them with disability payments or other ways.

Jonathan Maus (06:48):
That's interesting. Just to kind of go back a little bit. I wonder if you can sort of help me set a context for how you see cities in places in terms of mobility, right? So this is kind of a question I love to ask people. What is your relationship to transportation?

Vadim Mozyrsky (07:05):
As I mentioned, when I came to Portland, one of the things that I really liked about it was how easy it was to get around Portland, whether it's walking in the area or riding bikes. That was certainly one of the forefront issues when I moved anywhere, is that ability to easily get around. Coming from Houston, Texas where my family settled down for a while, everybody drove in cars. Traffic was horrendous.
People would go to work and they would sit in traffic for an hour, sometimes more. Pollution was terrible.

Vadim Mozyrsky (07:34):
One of the things that I really enjoyed about this city was the fact that people wanted to live in a green city where pollution was kept minimal, where people were once again commuting wherever they could. So I settled down to a place very close to where I worked so I wouldn't have to drive day in and day out and I wouldn't have to be stuck in traffic. I was basically a mile away from my office. And I would walk some days. Some days I would ride a bike. Some days I would take Metro depending on the weather. That's what I really enjoyed about the city so much. It's a very compact city. It's easy to get around. And people... That's a point of pride I think for the city is the ability to take that public transportation and have that infrastructure in place as well as commute and walk to places. It's so easy to do here.

Jonathan Maus (08:22):
Okay. You mentioned biking around, so I'd like to tease that out a little bit.

Vadim Mozyrsky (08:27):
Yeah.

Jonathan Maus (08:28):
Tell me more about that. What kind of bike do you have? What are some of the routes you've taken? You live in Goose Hollow, right? So whenever I think of that, I think of the fact that there are train tracks and I'm thinking of getting caught in those. So what's your biking experience been like in Portland?

Vadim Mozyrsky (08:41):
I have three different bikes. I bought them all used from Craigslist, but one of them is a road bike. It's an old Litespeed Titanium, so pretty light. I have a steel bike that I used to kind of commute around the city. I don't like to take the Litespeed out all that much if I'm not going long distance. And then I have a mountain bike, a giant mountain bike which is pretty old. It's pretty heavy, but it does the job pretty well.

Vadim Mozyrsky (09:10):
Like I said, getting from Goose Hollow to Downtown, yeah, you have some train tracks over there. You have to go through the MAX stop or through the MAX lines, but it's not so bad. Going up the hill is certainly a little more difficult, but I'm not too far up on the hill side so it's not too bad. But yeah, you can go down Jefferson, you can go through the neighborhood. So it really doesn't matter. But certainly, I like the streets that actually have the bike lanes present because usually the drivers are pretty good here in Portland, but not always. And that is a scary part in areas where I've lived. And so you really have to be cognizant about having the lights on, making sure that you're very visible, but also be defensive when you're riding a bike especially in high traffic areas.

Jonathan Maus (09:55):
You mentioned Goose Hollow again. One thing I always think about too about that part of town is the Providence Park.
Vadim Mozyrsky (10:02):
Yes.

Jonathan Maus (10:02):
And the massive amount of bike riders that come to the Timbers games.

Vadim Mozyrsky (10:06):
Right.

Jonathan Maus (10:07):
Whenever there's... Or sorry, that come to the Timbers matches. I want to get this soccer jargon. The football jar... Nevermind.

Vadim Mozyrsky (10:12):
Yeah.

Jonathan Maus (10:12):
Get that right. So there's so many people bike to these matches which is great. I'm sure you'll agree it's just everything that's good about sort of a compact city in Portland I think is sort of exemplified by those full bike racks at the Timbers matches.

Vadim Mozyrsky (10:24):
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jonathan Maus (10:24):
I'm curious what you think sort of more broadly. Do you think that kind of scene, that kind of number of bikers, is that something that you think is possible in other parts of the city as well?

Vadim Mozyrsky (10:36):
I think we should encourage it in every part of the city. No matter where you live in the city, a lot of areas are very accessible by bike. I know that there's differences in certain parts of the city that have not had the resources over time in order to provide biking areas, in order to provide green spaces for people to bike to and enjoy, in order to provide a spectrum of areas where people can live and bike and work and play at. And so we need to address those equity issues that we have in the city. But once again, there's so many places around the country that are huge sprawling cities.

Vadim Mozyrsky (11:11):
And the benefit of Portland is generally how compact it is and how dense it is. It'll get denser. More people are still moving to Portland. I talk to so many people every day and what I'm hearing is there's still a lot of people moving to Portland. People talk about the reputation of Portland nationally because of some of the things that have happened recently. But people are still moving here. And so the denseness will increase. The choice we have to make is, do we want that denseness to increase the number of people we have driving and parking? Or do we want that increase the amount of public transportation that we use, the biking and the walkability of the city?
Vadim Mozyrsky (11:46):
I think there's definitely improvements we can make to the biking and walkability in different parts of the city, making sure that we reduce the injuries. There are some parts that because of the way the streets are formed and because of the parking situation, there's a lot of injuries that occur more so than in other areas. And we have to address that. Making sure that there's, once again, that equity lens is used so we have a safe culture in Portland no matter where you live.

Jonathan Maus (12:11):
Speaking of that, Portland has a goal that was adopted in 2010 to have 25% bike mode share by 2030. Current commissioner in charge of transportation, Jo Ann Hardesty, the person you're looking to unseat in Position 3 there on council, she was at a Bike Advisory Committee meeting recently, relatively recently. She sort of either wasn't aware of the plan or just sort of dismissed that as a goal, saying that she didn't necessarily think that would be possible, but there's other [inaudible 00:12:39]. So I'm just curious. We're probably around 5% now if you look at like an official number. So with that goal of 25% of coming up within less than a decade now, I mean, do you think that's possible in Portland?

Vadim Mozyrsky (12:51):
Well, I think what we have here is a failure in government in some sort, because we need to encourage more biking. We need to encourage more public transportation. We need to encourage those things in order to keep Portland green. And part of that is not so much governing by policy, it's governing by culture. Culture dictates policy. So over time, there's been a culture of biking in Portland. And I know a lot of people move to Portland for that very culture and enjoy it because of that very culture. Certainly, in your space here, you have the Pedalpalooza Posters. That's something that people enjoy. The Bridge Pedals, the Naked Bike Rides. All those things are part of what makes Portland a great place for people to live and also a great place for people to come to because they want to be part of that kind of culture.

Vadim Mozyrsky (13:38):
Over the last few years, that culture has unfortunately fallen by the wayside. We've had politicians in the past, Blumauer, Sam Adams, that have sort of raised that culture and made it a focal point of policy making. That's what we need to reinvigorate, because if Portland is known for a place where people can bike around for green spaces, for bike lanes, places where people can go and bike and have a meal, go and go shopping at a farmer's market and do all those things that they enjoy but not have to get into a vehicle and not have to pay prices for a garage or find parking every day, people would embrace that. It's just over time, we've lost that sort of culture of invigoration, of public transportation as well as biking in Portland. And we need to bring that back. I think people are willing. I think people are looking forward to that. We're just not hearing a whole lot about it right now.

Jonathan Maus (14:32):
Yeah. The numbers really bear that out. The amount of people in the last 10 years that have jumped in a car when they moved here instead of jumped in a bike has just skyrocketed I think to the detriment of the city. And I think everybody would agree with you that we need to make it so that more people can bike. But I mean, how would you actually do that? How would you turn those lines in the other directions so the driving goes down and biking goes up?

Vadim Mozyrsky (14:58):
Okay. Well, you incentivize it. You get what you incentivize. Part of that is making sure that you create spaces where people can bike without fearing for their safety on a road bike. Part of that is reducing the accidents. People hear a lot about the fatalities that we're having on our roadways. And that certainly increased. I believe this year it's at a 30 year high, the amount of people that have been unfortunately killed whether pedestrians or bicyclists or people driving from place to place. So we need to ensure that we create a culture of safety where people are able to be on their bikes or get around Portland in general without concern for their safety. We need to also make it fun. What Portlanders love are the fun atmosphere that we've had in Portland in the past for a wide variety of reasons.

Vadim Mozyrsky (15:48):
And so, we need to spotlight and embrace and encourage that culture of bike riding, of getting together with your friends. We've had two years of a hard time in Portland of so many difficulties, of so many crises that our city government is jumping around from trying to solve and not doing a great job. We need to embrace the fun aspect of living here in Portland, the culture here that people gravitate toward and fell in love with, and nurture the people that have been here for a long time that grew that culture.

Vadim Mozyrsky (16:21):
And so I think it's incumbent on city hall to incentivize that, whether that be some sort of tax breaks or putting money into corridors like the Green Loop and those sort of things. Let's accelerate those things that we have a vision. That vision was created by Portlanders a long time ago, but it's slow in the making. Let's speed that up. Let's talk to the neighborhood associations. Let's have a grassroots movement about what people actually want and make that happen instead of letting things idle at city hall without any growth, any transformation for long periods of time.

Jonathan Maus (16:57):
Yeah. And you mentioned a culture of safety. I mean, I would certainly agree with that. I think the discussions really are about how to define that and sort of obviously how to achieve it. When it comes to culture of safety, what does that really mean to you? People could say we need to enforce laws more and have more traffic police or whatever on the street to enforce the culture of safety. But some people would really want to focus on, "Let's focus on more street design to make safety culture happen" Or any number of other things. Education, it's another big one that people talk about is really important, right? So in your mind personally, what is to the top in terms of actually implementing a culture of safety on our streets?

Vadim Mozyrsky (17:38):
Well, I don't think it's an either-or scenario here. You need to address all those issues that you discussed. So let's take the infrastructure. There's a law in Oregon where you have daylight curbs I believe it's called, where within 20 feet of an intersection you're not supposed to park. That's a law in Oregon which cities can or might not implement. Well, two years ago, our city was sued because of a motorcyclist death because the driver was not able to see the motorcyclist coming in at an intersection. Two years ago, there was a lawsuit. And just now, PBOT is working on creating more of those safe zone areas, those daylight areas where you have a 20-foot no parking area next to an intersection to allow people to see it. So yes, we need to be quicker in responding to the needs of people quicker. So it's not always a law suit that's causing the city to respond, but actually focusing in on the needs of the community and their safety needs.
Vadim Mozyrsky (18:35):
And then to take your question about the legal aspect of it, the policing aspect of it, I mean there's no question that in the past when drinking and driving was made illegal and there was police on the freeways looking for erratic drivers, that drove down the number of deaths due to drinking and driving. It kept people from drinking and driving because they knew there was a consequence. And so right now, we have, according to many people, low in the number of police officers. We have under 800 officers right now. I think the latest figure is somewhere around 790, which is one of the lowest staffing levels in the history of Portland, at least in the last 30 years I believe. Portland has grown a lot, but the number of police we have is shrinking.

Vadim Mozyrsky (19:25):
So when you talk to people in the police office and the police bureau, they're saying that there's just not enough police to do all the investigations, to go out to the shootings they're experiencing and all the crimes that have been escalating over the last couple years, and also be proactive in addressing some of the safety issues such as drunk driving. And the result of that, for instance, this last week there was a driver that was leaving the freeway and careened into a person living on the streets, into a tent on the side of the freeway. I read that that individual was intoxicated.

Vadim Mozyrsky (20:03):
Now, if there were more police on the streets... And I'm not saying it has to be a police officer with a gun, but someone out there that's watching, making sure that there's not drunk drivers late at night, early in the morning, after a Friday or a Saturday as we've done in the past. Can we reduce those incidents of deaths resulting from intoxication or otherwise? I think a lot of people would say yes. I mean, that's definitely the conversation we need to have. What do we do about making sure that some of our laws are enforced and those laws are the ones that we need to be enforced in order for people to feel safe out there.

Jonathan Maus (20:40):
I know that you definitely do support more armed police. I want to ask you that in a bit. But you mentioned sort of that when it comes to these traffic crimes let's say, or traffic violations or traffic infractions, however you want to define them, that it's not necessary to have a sworn police officer. And I mentioned it in an interview recently with current PBOT Commissioner, Jo Ann Hardesty. She used this term civilian traffic force. So I was referring to it as like Portland Street Response, right? But for rotation. How does that sound to you as somebody who's looking to be on council?

Vadim Mozyrsky (21:11):
Yeah. This is something I've actually been working on for quite some time. You mentioned I've been on city commissions, and that's the case. I've been on the Portland Commission on Disability, volunteered with that organization for a couple years. I've been on the Citizen Review Committee which hears complaints against the police bureau and actually participates in the investigations when there's a deadly use of force. And I've also been on the Portland Committee on Community Engaged Policing, which tries to bridge that gap between the community needs and police policies and raise the voice of the community and have it be heard by people in the police that can actually effectuate the changes that are needed by the community and address how the community wants to be policed or different communities want to be policed because it's not homogeneous.
Vadim Mozyrsky (21:55):
And so part of that is I had a recommendation, probably less than a year ago at this point in time, but on increasing what's called the Public Safety Support Specialists. And these are individuals who are not sworn officers, who are not armed, who are not dressed in the blue uniform that you typically see, but individuals who nonetheless respond to certain types of calls. So if there's perhaps a break in somewhere and there's a report that needs to be taken, you don't need to have an armed officer arrive at that and use those resources to take a report. Likewise, for traffic incidents, the recommendation that I had was to actually increase the number of Public Safety Support Specialists that we have to take away that sort of confrontational aspect that a lot of people see with policing when an armed officer comes to an event that doesn't really need to have an armed individual over that law enforcement presence there.

Vadim Mozyrsky (22:51):
We worked on a recommendation to the mayor who's the commissioner for the police to increase the number of Public Safety Support Specialists and also look at the different kinds of duties that they could be doing in the future to take away some of the response calls that our police officers will go to. And part of that is responding to traffic incidents as you mentioned. So in that time, since that recommendation that I authored came out, Mayor Wheeler has increased the number of Public Safety Support Specialists twice once in this last budget, doubling it to I think about 17 people. And then this last budget cycle that we had in the fall, the proposal was to hire 100 additional Public Safety Support Specialists. And I think that's instrumental.

Vadim Mozyrsky (23:41):
What I'm hearing a lot from people who live in Portland, people who come to Portland, is that they want to know if they call 911, if they need help, somebody will arrive. But they also want to make sure that the response is appropriate to the situation. And that's a holistic way of looking at policing. I think that's in line with president Obama's 21st century pillars of policing where you have community policing that's responsive to the needs of the community. And so, you have Public Safety Support Specialists that would maybe respond to such things as traffic incidents rather than armed police.

Vadim Mozyrsky (24:14):
And also one of the things that I voted on when I was on PCCEP, the community engagement piece, was Portland Street Response. Street Roots proposed Portland Response. Street Roots did a lot of legwork on Portland Street Response. They asked the city for funding for that. And at that point in time, Mayor Wheeler had proposed $500,000. This was in November of 2019. And they received that funding. When the defunding conversation started happening in last year, we lobbied for the city to actually put some of that money toward Portland Street Response. Once again, that was with Street Roots. And then later on, it became part of the Fire Bureau, but that's another integral piece of how Portlanders want a compassionate response and also perhaps leveraging some other resources than police officers to respond to the needs.

Jonathan Maus (25:09):
I think at the end of the day though, this conversation for a lot of Portlanders sort of comes down to trust in the police bureau. Portland Police Bureau as an entity has a lot of detractors in this town. And I think for good reason, given the track record, given all the various lawsuits again into them. They've gotten in trouble with department of justice. There's been some officers that have gotten in trouble for
a variety of things over time. And I think certainly, the 2020 protests weigh very heavily on people's minds. They do mind in terms of the response that happened to those, a really heavily militarized response.

Jonathan Maus (25:43):
I know that you support Portland Street Response and you're talking about the Public Safety Specialists positions, which I think the problem with those is that they are still attached to the police bureau which kind of gets to my question here is that, you're very publicly calling for more police in the Portland Police Bureau. And so I just wonder in terms of going forward, going against somebody in council who's kind of done the opposite in a lot of ways. Even though Commissioner Hardesty recently voted for a budget adjustment that did include funding for police, I think most people see this as a race between someone who wants fewer resources and more accountability at the police bureau and folks who just say, "We need to really bulk up the police bureau." So I wonder if that's a concern for you in terms of how people perceive you and your campaign. Do you think of yourself as someone who is sort of pro-police? And then what does that mean to you when you hear that?

Vadim Mozyrsky (26:40):
I wouldn't say I'm a pro-police. I'm a pro victim's rights. Individuals want to know that if something happens badly in their lives, if they need help, that they can pick up the phone and somebody answers that. And that's where we're seeing a breakdown in the system right now. We're seeing two things. One is if you call 911, the wait times are long and the response times are long. And that's two different areas that you need to make sure we have enough staffing on the people that answer 911 calls, but also we have to have enough people actually respond to that. People who are in danger, people who have needs, we need to make sure that those needs are addressed. And if a crime is taking place, we need to make sure that someone arrives there and helps those individuals out.

Vadim Mozyrsky (27:21):
The second thing is we need to have community policing. What I think has lost a lot here including on my opponent is that what police do is they're out there making sure that in instances that crimes did not occur, so when you look at the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force which has recently been restarted in a different way with community oversight which it should have. But those individuals know the neighborhoods, those individuals know who's involved in some of these gun violence and they're able to meet with people and deescalate things before more violence occurs. We need more of that.

Vadim Mozyrsky (28:01):
I talk to so many people and I get a lot of individuals that ask for more of a police presence in their neighborhoods, in the streets, and where they work because they don't feel safe. Now, who am I to say, "No, you're wrong about that. You don't need more police presence"? You have to listen to the people that are out there living their lives who need some sort of semblance of safety. And if that's policing, then they have the right to ask their government to do that.

Jonathan Maus (28:30):
So that concern about crime that you hear from people or about that concern about policing you hear from people a lot is really it seems to me like it's because our entire culture is sort of soaked with this narrative that more police equals less crime. And there's no real data that supports that. There's recently been data that I've seen a lot of people reading. And I've read myself [inaudible 00:28:53] here
in Portland that shows that if you look over time at the police bureau budget, that's actually not the case. So as their budget's gone up and if they've added officers, it hasn't really had a big impact on crime.

Jonathan Maus (29:04):
And it kind of brings me to this observation that you said... I think it was like a year ago you said at a Fall Budget Monitoring Process hearing you testified about this issue. There was some police bureau cuts on the table. This was I think when it was Jo Ann Hardesty's second attempt to cut money out the police bureau. But I just want to read what you said. This is in 2020, you said, "This vote puts lives at stake. You will not cut the firefighter budget in the middle of a raging inferno." So you're trying to make the point that the gun violence and the crime that we're experiencing is this direct result.

Jonathan Maus (29:39):
That really struck me as like a really simplistic way to put the problem. I mean, a fire is basically fuel and a match, right? I mean, I could throw a match on a bunch of dry wood and have an inferno. It's over simplifying a very complicated problem, which I think a lot of the calls in this narrative that more police are going to fix everything is overly simplistic. So are we worried that push to maintain and add a bunch more staff to the police bureau is sort of like a shortcut to the old ways, instead of doing something different and something that really addresses the complexity and the root causes of what we're dealing with?

Vadim Mozyrsky (30:15):
Well, once again, my view is not one or the other. It's more nuanced than that. You have to have an improvement in the culture of policing in Portland, and really everywhere. You make sure that the police are accountable. You need to make sure that you have community involvement in making sure that the police are accountable. And yes, you need to make sure that if a police officer does something that is wrong, that is out of policy, that hurts people, that individual is removed. And more than that, we need to ensure that that culture, that we promote people that are actually proactive and involved in their neighborhoods and are out there helping people rather than just arresting and doing that. So we need to change the culture of the police. We need to make sure it's more responsive. We need to make sure that there's oversight. And I've been working on all those areas.

Vadim Mozyrsky (31:03):
So on the Citizen Review Committee, I hear complaints against the police bureau and try to ascertain that. Three years ago, we were trying to create a policy for body-worn cameras as part of that accountability because that captures what the interaction between an officer and a community member is. And it gives us hard evidence to know if the police acted inappropriately. Unfortunately, my opponent decided that body-worn cameras were not needed, and that budget was cut for those body-worn cameras. So I ask, imagine if during all those protests, the peaceful protests that we had Downtown as well as what erupted in the evenings there where there was a lot of recrimination back and forth about what actually occurred, if we had body-worn cameras over this past year, how much more we would've been able to hold the police accountable?

Vadim Mozyrsky (31:50):
And so finally, yes, our city council has decided, including Joe Ann Hardesty, that body-worn cameras are needed. Unfortunately, it's taken longer than was necessary. All the police bureaus around Portland do
have body-worn cameras. And there's a lot of evidence that it's bringing down complaints against the police bureau, that it's actually preventing use of force. So we need to have that oversight.

Vadim Mozyrsky (32:14):
Similarly, when I made that statement that you read, the writing was already on the wall. The murder rate was going up in Portland. People say that their actions are evidence-based. And I firmly believe that my actions are evidence-based. So I did a lot of research before making that statement. It could be said it's simplistic, but I did a lot of research. I saw what happened in places like Camden where they defunded the police but then ended up funding the Sheriff's office way more than they ever defunded the police because the crime went up. And there was that pendulum effect where at first there was a defunding and then the crime goes up, the murder rate goes up, and all of a sudden a lot more money goes into the police. That's why I made that statement because places where that had been happening, and this was already after a $26 million cut in the police budget, and there was murders.

Vadim Mozyrsky (33:05):
You got to put something in place to quell the crisis that we were having. And what I saw was more defunding, but nothing in place to place something to prevent the murders that were happening in our streets. And that's what I was saying that needed to change.

Jonathan Maus (33:20):
There was a recent Op Ed by Candace Avalos, someone who I believe has served on some of the same commissions, the Police Commissions as you have.

Vadim Mozyrsky (33:28):
Yes.

Jonathan Maus (33:28):
She's also a nonprofit leader in town, also previously a city council candidate. She was sort of pushing back against that idea, that just increasing the police force at this time is the right thing to do. She was making the case that it's going to take a long term commitment and we just really need to buckle down and do the hard work. And I think there is some validity in that in sort of just understanding that this is going to be really messy and nuanced to get through this phase we're in of increased violence, both gun violence and traffic violence. All those things are happening and the sense that we need to just accept the fact that it's going to take a long time to fix these things, right?

Jonathan Maus (34:09):
And even Commissioner Mapps, who I know is someone that you see as a potential colleague on city council. I've seen him call you a friend in some meetings. Commissioner Mapps has said that it could be up to four years before we can do these things like changing police culture and getting more officers. So it seems to me that you would have to acknowledge that this is a long term problem. And I just feel like the way that you're framing some of your positions around policing are sort of giving people the quick sugar fix and it doesn't really do justice to the fact that there are these short term things or the fact that it's going to take a while before it gets better.

Vadim Mozyrsky (34:47):
Yeah. And you have to have that long term vision. There’s no question about it that none of these are easy fixes, even if they decided to hire the 200 additional police officers, which my opponent voted for even though she was against it. Even if that were to happen, it takes a long time to hire those individuals, train those individuals. These are the conversations we should have been having years ago. If you ask about the quick fixes, the quick fixes was eliminating the Gun Violence Reduction Task Force without putting something else in place.

Vadim Mozyrsky (35:18):
Now we’re putting something else in place. And we have a community oversight. So we have Kimberley Dixon and Pastor Ed, BIPOC leaders who are in charge of an organization that’s going to be making sure that the new iteration of the Gun Violence Reduction Task Force, what’s called the FiT now, is actually doing a job that’s good for the community. That’s what we need, but that’s what we needed a year ago. So we didn’t have that time during which people were not making outreach to the communities, making sure that there was a presence, making sure that individuals that might be prone to violence knew that there would be a reaction if that were to occur.

Vadim Mozyrsky (35:56):
And so when you talk to individuals that are very familiar about what’s happening in the streets, individuals that are working with current and former gang members, individuals that are working with impoverished and marginalized communities, they know that a lot of our violence here is retaliation. When you have 100 shots fired at a location, that is not just someone that’s mad at somebody else. That is premeditated. And so we need to make sure that we have a plan in place before we take away something. So we put something in place as we do it. And so, yes, I do not offer quick fixes at all. I’m just saying that the fixes that are put in place right now should have been something that were discussed a long time ago. The quick fixes that are not working are what happened a year ago or more.

Jonathan Maus (36:38):
Well, the Gun Violence Task Force was something that was more of a political thing that was taken out by council. But then there’s another similar thing sort of that’s really more connected to my world of transportation which was the traffic division. The traffic division was dismantled through a decision about how to deal with not having as much budget. That was a decision made by the police bureau to say, "We are not going to at least call these officers traffic officers first because we need them in other parts of the bureau." It seemed like it was more of a triage move.

Jonathan Maus (37:07):
So I should say that dismantling the traffic division actually in a way reflects some of the things that a lot of advocacy groups around the country and some cities are actually pursuing, which is having again fewer armed police officers involved with traffic enforcement. And there’s an issue where that is sort of perfectly illustrated in Portland where we’re looking at having automated traffic enforcement cameras. We actually have eight of them already. We would probably have dozens of them if it were not for vendor delays and other sort of legal issues. Are you for automated enforcement cameras? How do you see that program going forward?

Vadim Mozyrsky (37:37):
Yeah, I’m for them. I think the evidence is there that when you have those programs in place, people stop speeding. That certainly is one aspect of the casualties that we have in the streets. I don’t know
honestly how much the automated cameras prevent things like drunk driving or intoxicated driving, which is also a big factor. But yeah, from the evidence I've seen so far, they do work.

Jonathan Maus (38:03):
One of the reasons why we're really lagging and using more of those is because there's this state law that requires a sworn police officer to review every citation, which creates a bottleneck. And for other reasons, it just creates a big slowdown in the system. There have been a few attempts to change that to make it a non-sworn position. So just essentially, a civilian could do that. I think like the Portland Police Bureau and the Portland Police Association, who haven't really wanted to support that for various reasons. I'm curious. They're going to go after it again in a short session. I think there's a lot of momentum to finally get that police officer position out of that review capacity so that we could open up this bottleneck and get more of these automated enforcement cameras going. Would you support that?

Vadim Mozyrsky (38:45):
Oh, yes, I would definitely support it. We need to work together on a lot of these issues. This is not an us versus them scenario. There's an ability to work across various lines to make things happen. And you're actually either building trust in the institutions that we have or you're working to sow distrust. My whole goal here is to create the broadest possible tent of individuals. So I will reach out to the Portland Police Association. I will reach out to the neighborhoods. I will reach out to marginalized communities. I will reach out. I will listen. That's what we're missing in city hall right now, is people listening. There's a lot of ideology behind some of the actions that are being taken and too little listening and understanding what people's needs are.

Vadim Mozyrsky (39:26):
So when it comes to things like that, yes, we need to work with PPA to make sure that they accept these necessary changes. We need to make sure that we lobby the state to change the laws because it's not necessary to have a sworn police officer reviewing the videos. It doesn't really make much sense, but I know that it is something in place. I know that people have been lobbying on at least two different occasions prior to this to change that. So we need to ensure that we put resources into things that we as a community want to be a part of and also change the things that we feel need to be changed. And that's working across different lines and bringing people together. Unfortunately, I think our city hall is not very good right now at working together on things.

Jonathan Maus (40:09):
So kind of on that note, I'm pretty familiar with the issues that you're sort of fighting against or that you say you're against, right? You're against the current form of government. You want to change that. You think a lot of Portland's problems could be solved by a different form of government. You think that the way we're going on policing is not right and we need to do a little bit different things there and add more police. So I wonder if there are issues that really animate and inspire you. So are there some issues that you're excited to work on to make better that aren't sort of inspired by what someone else is doing the wrong way?

Vadim Mozyrsky (40:45):
Yeah. So I wouldn't characterize it, first of all, as being against stuff. It's trying to improve things. It's listening to people and trying to make their voices heard. You can say it's against something else, but it's
really about improving the system in a way that's holistic and evidence-based and practical. But to answer your question, oh yeah, I want to further champion disability rights here in Oregon. Once again, it's one of those things that our city hall has been lagging on. Employing people with disabilities is very low compared to the general population. Having a disability is one of those things that unfortunately anybody can become a member of that community due to an illness or an accident or anything else. There's so many people that are either related or have a disability. Something like 17% of the Portland population self-identify with a disability. Our homeless community, almost 50% of people that are living in the streets self-identify with a disability.

Vadim Mozyrsky (41:47):
Unfortunately, our city council has not been very proactive in addressing those needs. There used to be what was called the Portland Commission on Disability about a couple years ago that was disbanded and that was never restarted. So we live in an environment where our city hall is saying, "We want to lift up voices of marginalized communities. We want to hear from people and meet their needs." But at the same time, one of the major voices that the disability community had in our city politics has been eliminated and never reintroduced. So in the past, when I was in the Portland Commission on Disability, I brought people together. October is the National Disability Employment Awareness Month. I brought various nonprofits, people experiencing disabilities, city officials, city commissioners at that point in time. Brought them together there in city hall and had a frank discussion about the needs of the community so that people could break down those barriers, those silos that you hear so much about.

Vadim Mozyrsky (42:41):
I'm very proud of those kind of initiatives, but that has not occurred since then. And so we need to make sure that we not only talk about elevating marginalized voices or people that have not been participating government to the same extent. Hiring people. Project SEARCH is something that I've worked on before to help people get jobs with our city government that have disability issues. And so, those are the things that we need to keep on working at. And unfortunately, we haven't. And those things I think are very integral to a wide breadth of our society. Certainly, we're seeing it in our homeless population right now. So many people with disabilities, but unfortunately, we're not dealing with that in a holistic way and giving those people the resources that they need and making sure that those resources are available.

Jonathan Maus (43:29):
Right. And on that note, how do we deal with that? We mentioned before a little bit about the recent crash on Southeast Powell Boulevard off-ramp where a drunk driver ran over someone who was sleeping in a tent and that person died. That's not the first one of those by far. We've seen a really concerning uptick in the amount of homeless people that are being hit by these... Basically, victims of traffic violence is how I look at this. How would you address that? It's a great combination of sort of the traffic violence and the homelessness stuff really coming together. I'm just curious if you have any solutions or thoughts about that.

Vadim Mozyrsky (44:01):
Yeah. And you have an excellent point. These things are intertwined in many ways and we need to address it in a holistic way, in a practical way. These issues that we're facing here in Portland are not new. They're not just endemic to Portland. There are other areas around the country that have had great success. And we need to model those on successes. I mean, one is just understanding the problem
and making sure we're addressing the issues. So, lately, a report came out that the Joint Office of Homeless Services overestimated by at least 20% the number of people that they're helping find housing. The county auditor ran an audit and said basically... We're not even sure what the numbers are, but at least 20% because their record keeping is not good. We don't know how many shelter beds are available.

Vadim Mozyrsky (44:45):
If you go to Joint Office of Homeless Services, you can't tell where the shelter beds are. I know individuals that are out on the streets trying to lick people to services, but if somebody wants a shelter bed, there's no way of knowing where to send the individual. So we need to make sure that we are keeping track of what people's needs are. And also making sure that those services are available, which is going out into the population that are living in our streets, and also people that are in and out of housing and making sure that they're constantly being touched by those services so when they're ready to get mental health services or drug addiction services or rent assistance or any of those things, they're always in contact with someone that can give them a hand, because it's not in a daily thing but we need to break through to the cycle of drug addiction and mental health crises that we're currently experiencing. We're not doing that in a holistic way and we need to address it better.

Vadim Mozyrsky (45:38):
We need to address the things that are working. There is quite a few successes here in Portland organizations that are having great amount of success, but we also need to know where our failures are. There's no question that there are going to be failures when you're addressing such a huge problem, but we don't even know where those are. We'll need to work better with the county. We need to work better with the state. The county has a long term view for housing. So by about 2030, they want to build more housing. The city needs more immediate help. The people on the streets definitely need a more immediate help. I mean, they're out there suffering. The overdose deaths are some of the highest we've experienced. People are living and dying in our streets.

Vadim Mozyrsky (46:16):
And to those, I would say we can't wait until 2030 to put them in some sort of housing. We need to be able to help them out quicker. And so let's do an evidence-based approach. Let's look at what's happened in other cities that's been working. Let's provide those services. Let's know what our needs are. And let's be more pro active rather than reactive and expect people to help themselves.

Jonathan Maus (46:36):
It's obviously a problem that there are people living close to dangerous streets. But do you think that the streets themselves and managing streets and a transportation bureau can actually play an active role in helping some of those problems not be as bad? And sort of how do you see those things being intertwined?

Vadim Mozyrsky (46:55):
So, yeah, I mean I do think that that's necessary. We can't fix this through individual bureaus. PBOT is in charge of the roads. To some extent, the sidewalks. And that bureau, if you have an RV parked in an area and that individual needs some assistance with housing or somebody on a street or on a sidewalk, yeah, PBOT needs to be involved, but so does the Joint Office of Homeless Services. We need to break down those barriers. And that's part of how we need to reform and improve our city government. Also,
my opponent put park benches out so people can't camp near parks. Well, that's not really a long term solution. That's certainly a bandaid. We need to have long term solutions. And to that, I say we need to improve... And this might lead to a question that you have later on, but we need to improve our form of government.

Vadim Mozyrsky (47:41):
The fact that we have commissioners in charge of different bureaus, some of them are a huge entities. So basically, a city commissioner can and be the CEO of three or four different, very large bureaus plus their legislative duties. We need to modernize our government. There's no other city in the country, no other major city that has a commission form of government. So we need either a strong mayor which is probably not going to be the recommendation. Or a city manager, someone whose whole job it is to year in, year out manage the bureaus and making sure that they're going toward the goal set by city council. So the city council will do the legislative stuff. And then the city manager would do the actual executive duties of enacting that legislation.

Vadim Mozyrsky (48:23):
And so, speaking to all the city commissioners and the auditor and the mayor, almost all of them are for change in the city government. They've told me horror stories about how there's a siloing effect and resources aren't used adequately and there's problems in governing because of that. There's not enough time to govern. The only person that's for our current form of government is my opponent. And I think that's not forward looking. That's backwards looking.

Jonathan Maus (48:45):
Sort of on that note, one of the things that I think I might have read it on your website, but you said you're running because you want to stop this “flurry of bad decisions.” What are some of those bad decisions that you think have been made in city hall that you'd like to go and stop making?

Vadim Mozyrsky (48:59):
So we've discussed at some link today the public safety issue. So I'll touch upon that a little bit here. There was an effort by a Pastor Hennessee and the Inter-Faith Peace & Action Coalition to improve public safety. There was a shooting in front of his church, and he's very much part of his community, and reached out to the city and asked for some additional funding for police to actually address those issues. Kind of what has happened since then in the FIT team that we have that is going to be at some point in time, maybe next year, addressing the gun violence. And he came and he asked for some additional staff, which is happening now but not back then. He brought forth a coalition. He's working with a lot of BIPOC community members, faith-based leaders, individuals that are very much informed about what's happening in the community and then their neighborhoods. And their plan was to address this crisis head on.

Vadim Mozyrsky (49:59):
Instead, our city council took that request which was for $2 million additional to address the needs of the community. They instead hired additional park rangers to the tune of about $2 million. Now, only 3% of shootings actually occur in and around parks. So the reason why there would be park rangers to address a gun violence issue is certainly up for a debate. But then they also had an emergency session. So there was no public input. And where they had the $2 million ask, instead they had a $6 million
budget. 2 million going for additional park rangers, 4 million to some other unnamed entities to be
determined at a later point in time.

Vadim Mozyrsky (50:44):
Once again, we need transparency in our city government so people know what they're getting. We
need to have a plan and we need to have a transparency as to what the outcome for that plan would
look like. Instead, we had an emergency session where there was no public input, there was no
discussion about what that plan would look like. There was a lot of money set aside without any
knowledge about where that money would go or who would receive it or what the outcomes would be
to know if we're spending our money wisely. And this is in the midst of a crisis. No matter how you're
looking at it, whether we need more police, less police, or some amalgamation of those two, the highest
murder rate in the history of Portland, those are people dying on the streets. Half of them are BIPOC
community members, way larger than their percentage of the population.

Vadim Mozyrsky (51:32):
And so you need to address that in a way that's community-based. And here we had somebody from the
community and an individual that is a church pastor that has been involved for a long time in finding
ways to help his community. He proposed something, and we got something totally different that was
not discussed, that has absolutely no plan, that has no end result, that has no metrics as to what success
would look like. That is not what our city government should be doing. We should be transparent about
where money is going. We should have a plan and we should have a knowledge as to whether the plan
is successful and what success would look like. And to that I say we need to do better.

Jonathan Maus (52:09):
One of the concerns I have right now is that every everybody's so fractured that we just keep arguing
with each other, and so it makes it even harder to make progress on some of these issues. I think in
order for us to really tackle some of these big, complicated questions and issues, we're going to have to
sort of really tap into the potential of a broad swath, the community. And I think there are going to be a
lot of people who are not going to support you and are not going to be super excited about the direction
you think we should go on some of these issues. So I just wonder. Say you get elected, what would you
do to reach out to people who don't vote for you?

Vadim Mozyrsky (52:41):
Right now, I'm speaking to a broad swath of the community. I'm in east Portland, I'm in central Portland,
west Portland, north, south, everywhere. I'm traveling around a lot, having a lot of coffees, possibly the
detriment of my kidneys, but I'm listening to everybody. I'm not telling them what the answer is. I'm
listening to what their needs are and trying to understand. And what I'm hearing a lot is there's more
commonality than there's differences between us. People on east and west Portland want safe streets
where their kids can play without worrying about violence or otherwise. People who are business
owners and employees want clean streets where they can walk and not see litter. And everybody,
eybody wants a government that's more responsive.

Vadim Mozyrsky (53:22):
It's amazing that how many people I talk to that say, "I have a need, I contacted a commissioner based
on that need, and I never heard a response." That will not occur with me. So yeah, there's always going
to be people that may disagree, but I want to hear from those people. So I know today you asked me a
lot of questions about public safety and to what extent I support, or whatever, the police. There's nuance there. But in the midst of the protests that were happening in Downtown Portland and in east Portland, I spoke with hundreds of individuals at that point in time that were out in the streets protesting. I asked them, "What do you need?" A lot of the responses were abolished the police. But what does that look like? What are your needs? How can we improve that communication, that trust between the community and the police? There's lots of crime out there. Abolishing the police is certainly one aspect of what the philosophical way to handle that would be. But absent that, what do you need?

Vadim Mozyrsky (54:22):
And so, I listen to those individuals trying to understand their needs. And that's what I will continue to do in city hall. Instead of governing by an ideology, I will govern by listening, which means going out to the neighborhood associations, which means going out to where individuals live and work. We need to do more listening and less talking. And then when we listen and we understand the problem, then we need to have solutions that work for everybody. And I think once again, there's way more commonality than people give Portlanders credit for. There's a lot of divisiveness there, and it does work to some extent. But let's be more inclusive. We need that. It's been a hard couple years. Let's bring people together and fix the problems that we have.

Jonathan Maus (54:58):
I'm glad you mentioned going around to neighborhoods. So as you go around these neighborhoods... And I know we've talked about a lot of heavier topics today, but just take a deep breath. Think to yourself. As you've moved around the city, is there a street or is there a neighborhood, is there an environment... And this is a transportation podcast for the most part. So thinking in those terms, is there a place in Portland that you just feel happy being in, that you feel really represents a perfect street or a perfect sort of corridor or a perfect neighborhood environment on the street?

Vadim Mozyrsky (55:33):
Now, it's interesting that you asked that because I think the beauty of Portland is the individuality of the different neighborhoods. There's a character that people are drawn toward. Some people love living in Northwest because it's close to Forest Park. Some people love being close to Mount Tabor. Some people like the nightlife scene on Mississippi or Alberta or the character of their individual areas. That's what makes Portland so special. That's one of the things that drew me as well, is you don't have to choose one or the other or one's better. I think there's a character of the different neighborhoods that should be retained and encouraged in many ways. But the fun aspect of being here is traveling to the different neighborhood, seeing what's there, going to the farmer's markets, seeing the vibrancy, listening to music on Mississippi. Those are the things that people once, hopefully soon, this COVID is over, we'll be drawn back to. And so let's encourage that spirit of enjoying Portland, of enjoying our diversity, and living together in peace and love and respect for everybody.

Jonathan Maus (56:34):
And so maybe folks listening to this will see you at one of those events in the next several months on the campaign trail. Vadim Mozyrsky, thank you very much for coming in.

Vadim Mozyrsky (56:43):
Yeah. Thank you very much. Everybody go to www.votevadim.com. Sign up. Get some letters from me and you'll learn more about me. Thank you so much everybody. And thank you for your time, Jonathan.

Jonathan Maus (56:58):
That was Vadim Mozyrsky, a candidate for Portland City Council Position 3. Make sure to check out our show notes for links and a transcript to this interview. The BikePortland Podcast is a production of Pedaltown Media, Inc., and is made possible by listeners just like you. If you're not a subscriber yet, please become one today at bikeportland.org/support. You can listen to more episodes and find out how to subscribe at bikeportland.org/podcast. Our theme music is by Kevin Hartnell. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. Until next time, thanks for listening and I'll see you in the streets.