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### CLASSIFIEDS

- Jobs
- Real Estate
- Rentals
- Services
- Health & Wellness
- Community
- Buy, Sell, Trade
- Musicians

### FINDER

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### NEWS

- Cover Story
- News Stories
- Politics
- Endorsement Videos
- 2010
- Aaron Campbell
- Rogue of the Week
- Willamette Week on KATU
- Willamette Week on KPOJ (mp3)
- Dr. Know
- Murmurs
- Inbox
- Ask the Editor
- WWire [Blog](#)

### CULTURE

- Scoop
- Feature Stories
- Hot Seat Q&A
- Headout
- Cheap Skate
- Comics
- Special Sections
- Retail Therapist

### MUSIC

- Show Previews
- Album Reviews
- Live Reviews
- Club Spotlight
- Live Music Calendar
- On the Radar
- Cut of the Day
- Tour Diaries
- Local Cut [Blog](#)

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## City Council Candidate Debate: If Everybody Loves the Portland Beavers, How Come Nobody Watches Them?

5:10 PM April 23rd, 2010 by [Nigel Jaquiss](#)

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At today's City Club debate with **city Commissioner Dan Saltzman** and candidates **Jesse Cornett and Mary Volm**, the two challengers went after Saltzman for being the third (and therefore decisive) vote approving **Merritt Paulson's proposal to bring Major League Soccer to Portland.**

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Restaurant Guide 2009  
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Live Reviews  
Stage Calendar  
Classical/Opera  
Calendar  
Dance Calendar

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Gallery Calendar

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Words Event Calendar

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The underlying theme of the campaign is that Saltzman, who is seeking his fourth term, has outlived his usefulness. The challengers today repeated their standard criticism of Saltzman’s oversight of the police bureau (a task dumped on him by Mayor Sam Adams) and tried to tie him to various of City Hall’s “pet projects.”

**Both Volm and Cornett slammed Saltzman less for betting on MLS’ long-term future — or the wisdom of subsidizing Hank Paulson’s son — than for the impact of revamping PGE Park on the Triple-A Portland Beavers. The Beavers, the San Diego Padres’ top minor league affiliate, appear destined to become homeless because of MLS’ preference that its franchises’ stadia serve soccer only, and because of how hard it’s proved to site and finance a new minor-league baseball stadium in the metro area.**

**“When Dan provided the crucial third vote, he should have ensured the Beavers would be kept here,” Cornett says. “Cutting them loose for the next shiny thing is emblematic of what’s happening in City Hall.”**

**The Beavers are a (relatively) low-cost entertainment option as Volm noted. But what nobody acknowledged despite the team’s long history (they’ve played in Portland on and off since 1903) is that Portlanders seem to appreciate them more than they watch them.**

**A check of the Pacific Coast League attendance shows that the Beavers, beloved though they may be, are dead last** so far in attendance in the 16-team PCL. Granted, Portland spring weather is usually horrible for watching baseball. But the minor-league Portland Timbers drew more than 15,000 fans for their home opener last week, while the Beavers have drawn a total of 20,453 fans through eight games, an average of 2556 per contest.

**The Beavers’ number will increase as the weather warms up and dries off. But if the past is any guide, the Beavers will still struggle to fill seats.**

**Last season, the team averaged 5,171 fans, 12th in the PCL even though Portland is the league’s largest city.**



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