City of Portland

Future of Engagement

Civic Life + the Neighborhood Program

SEPTEMBER 2026

City of Portland

What's On Tap Today

1. History and Opportunity
2. What Portlanders Say
3. Core Team and Bureau Engagement
4. Neighborhood Program
5. Policy Questions and Discussion

Laura Oppenheimer
INTERIM CHIEF ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

Harmonee Dashiell
SENIOR ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

Adam Lyons
NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM LEAD

City of Portland

An Inflection Point for Civic Life

INSTABILITY + **CHARTER REFORM** + **CENTRALIZATION**

Leadership turnover, controversy, reduced staff and resources

Mandate for responsive city government where Portlanders have a voice

Core services are realigned with cohesive structures and systems

OPPORTUNITY

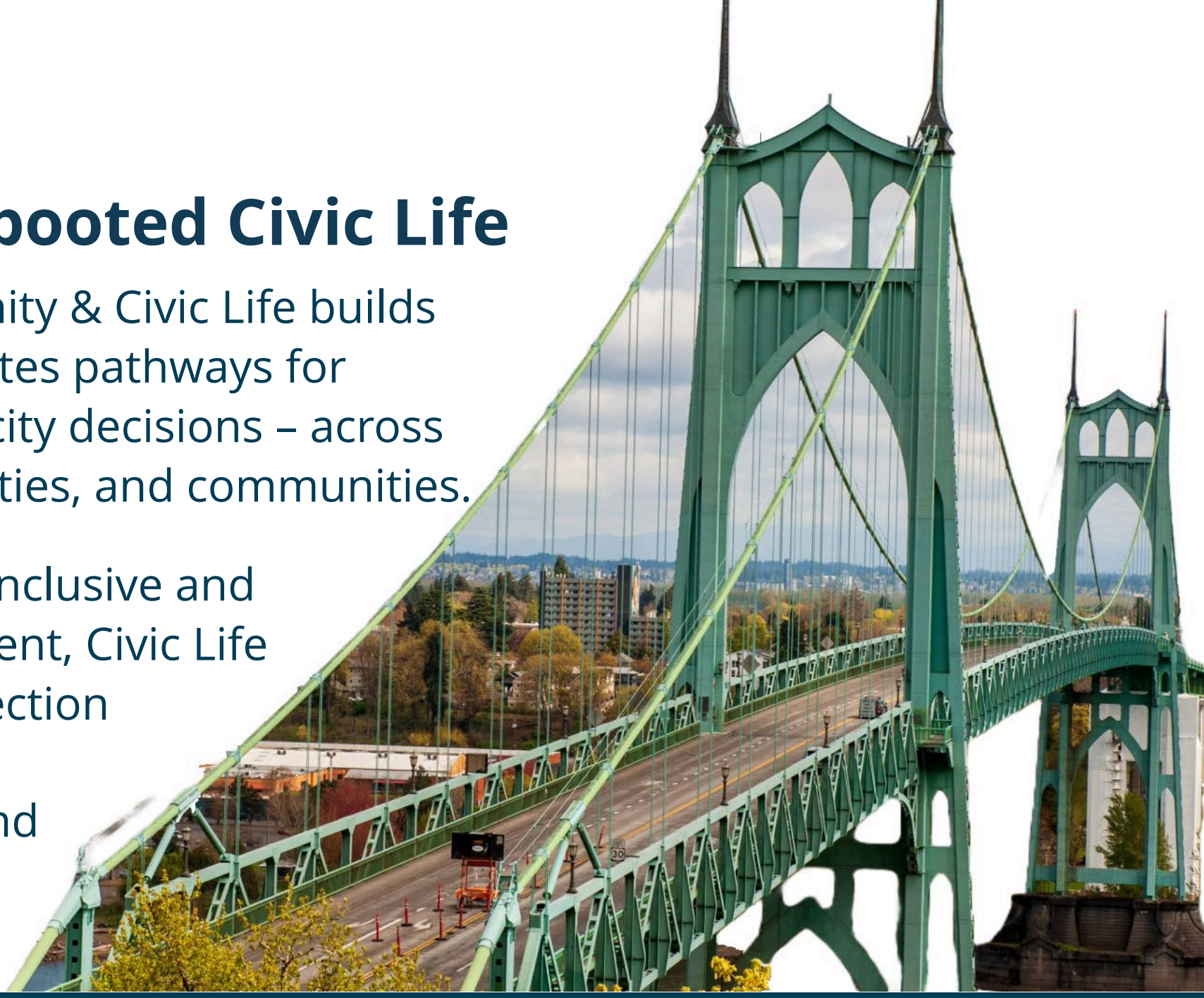
Define the mission, scope, and policy direction for Civic Life and citywide engagement, making the most of Portland's new form of government.

City of Portland

Vision for a Rebooted Civic Life

The Office of Community & Civic Life builds relationships and creates pathways for Portlanders to shape city decisions – across neighborhoods, identities, and communities.

As Portland's hub for inclusive and coordinated engagement, Civic Life strengthens the connection between community voices, city services, and City Council priorities.



City of Portland

Foundations as a Neighborhood Program

1960s	**Community Organizing** Model Cities Initiative and Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods launch a movement.
1974-1976	**City Foundations** City creates Office of Neighborhood Associations, giving neighborhoods a voice.
Early 2000s	**Inclusion, Capacity-Building, and Culture Shift** Community input shapes expansion of enaegment beyond the neighborhood system.
2005	**Major Modern Revision** City Council adopts community-led recommendations – anchoring modern standards.

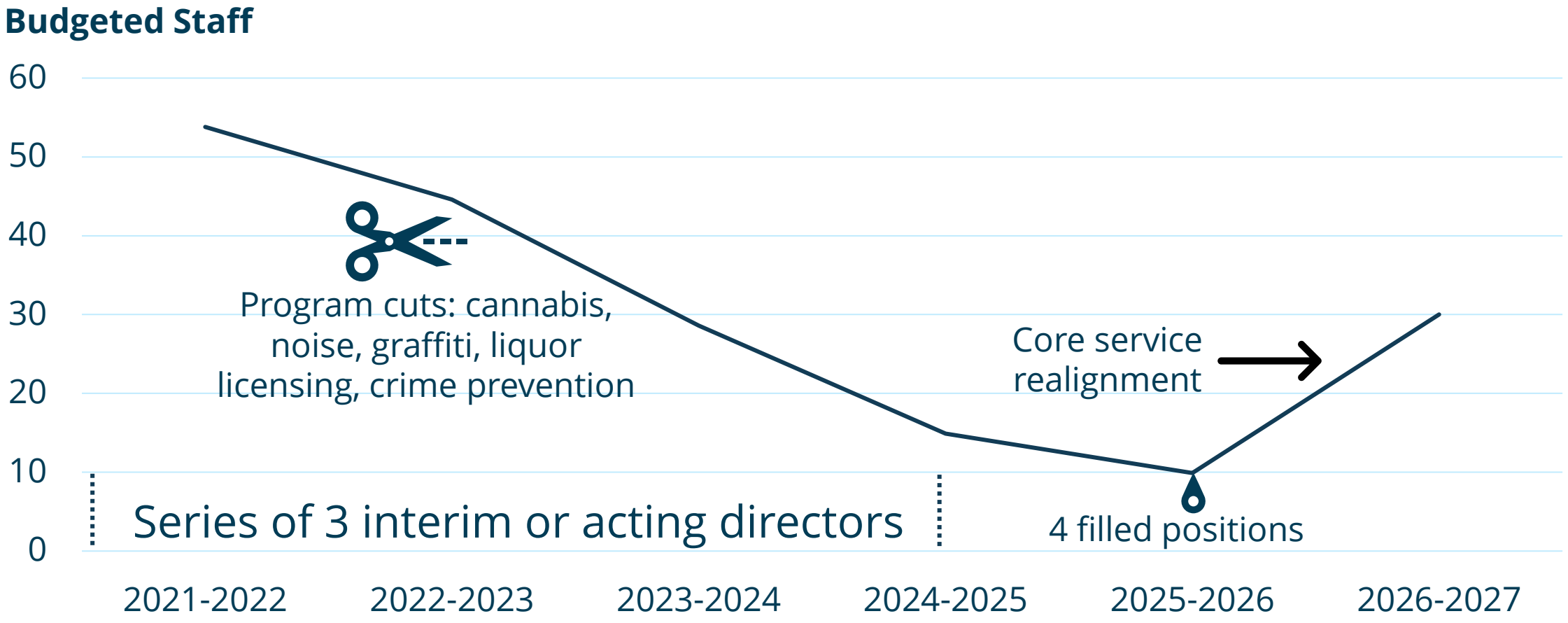
City of Portland

Journey to Geographic Representation

2018	**New Scope, New Name** Community and Civic Life charged with connecting Portlanders with city government.
Since 2021	**Turnover and Downsizing** Leadership transitions and budget reductions erode stability at Civic Life.
2022	**Charter Reform** Voters approve community-led proposal, creating 4 geographic City Council districts.
2025	**Geographic Representation** 12 city councilors take office; district coalitions adapt to new boundaries.

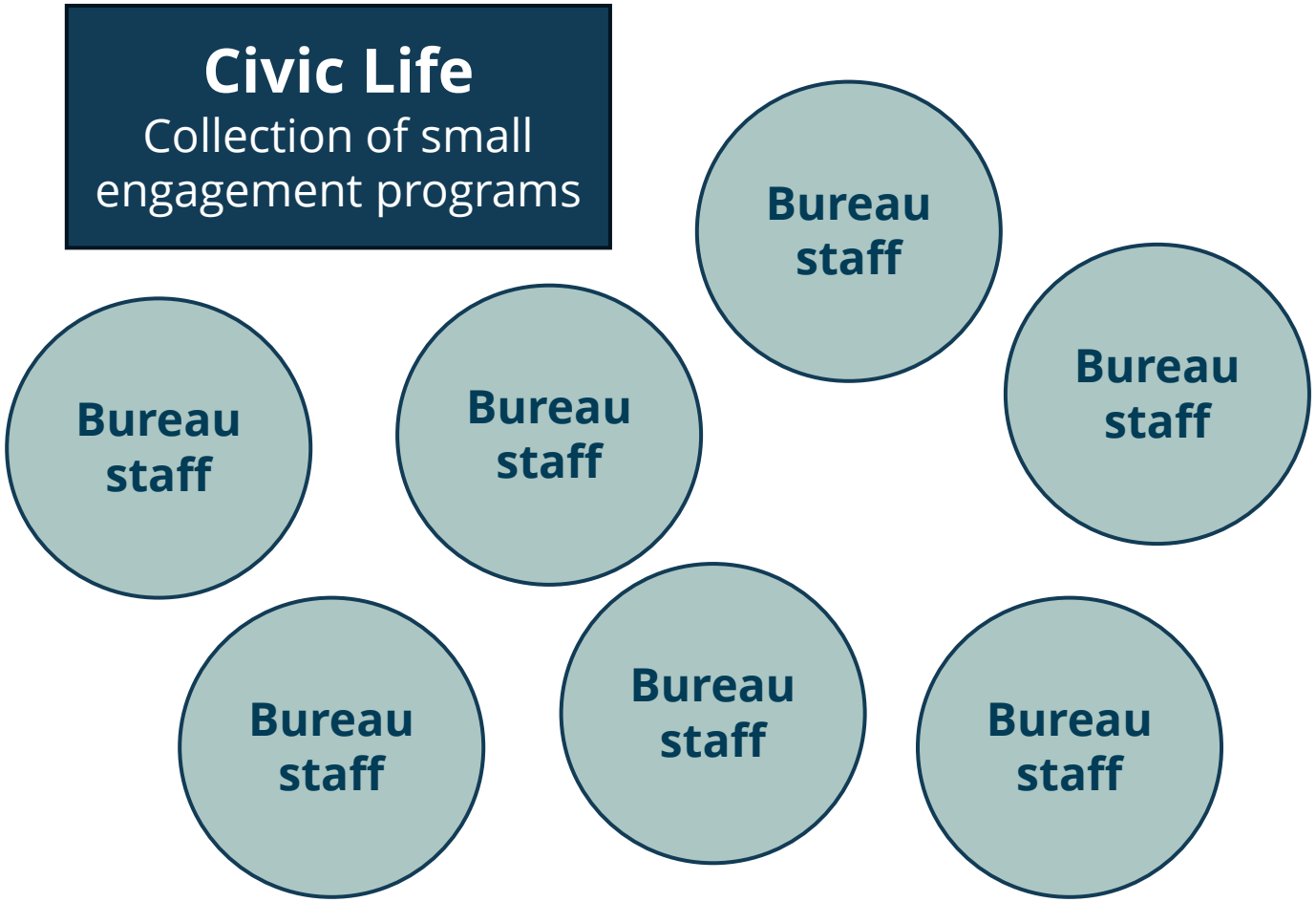
City of Portland

Downsizing of Civic Life



City of Portland

Historical Engagement Ecosystem



- Civic Life functions independently.
- Lots of quality engagement happens.
- Each bureau does engagement differently.
- Portlanders have uneven experiences with the City.

City of Portland

Engagement Ecosystem of the Future

Community & Civic Life

CORE TEAM
Citywide strategy, resources, and programs

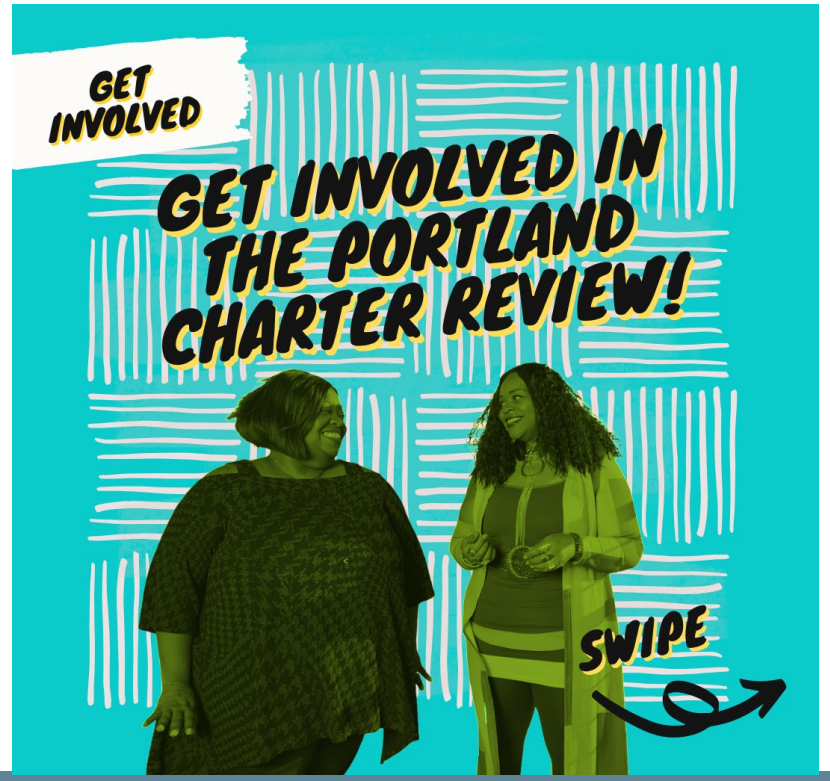
EMBEDDED TEAMS
Service area and bureau engagement

Community & Economic Development

Public Safety | Public Works

- Citywide strategies and resources provide a framework.
- Portlanders can expect a common experience.
- Engagement meaningfully informs decision-making.

City of Portland



What Portlanders Say

We’re not starting from scratch.

City of Portland

The Portland Engagement Project

40 Community partners mobilized their networks.

677 People participated in listening sessions, pop-up events, and an online survey.

1,000 Ideas generated by Portlanders.

1 **COMMON GOAL:** Better city engagement.

City of Portland

Portland Engagement Project

START WITH US.
Proactively engage before decisions are made.

"Don't underestimate the expertise and creativity of Portlanders to inform good governmental decisions."

"I'd be more motivated if I didn't feel like the results were already predetermined."

VARY OPTIONS.
Make it easier to engage by providing options.

"Understand it's difficult for most folks to go to City Hall. I'd like to have opportunities to share ideas electronically."

"More surveys like these, but with follow up that shows us how you are using our input to create change."

CENTRALIZE.
Centralize opportunities so they're easier to find.

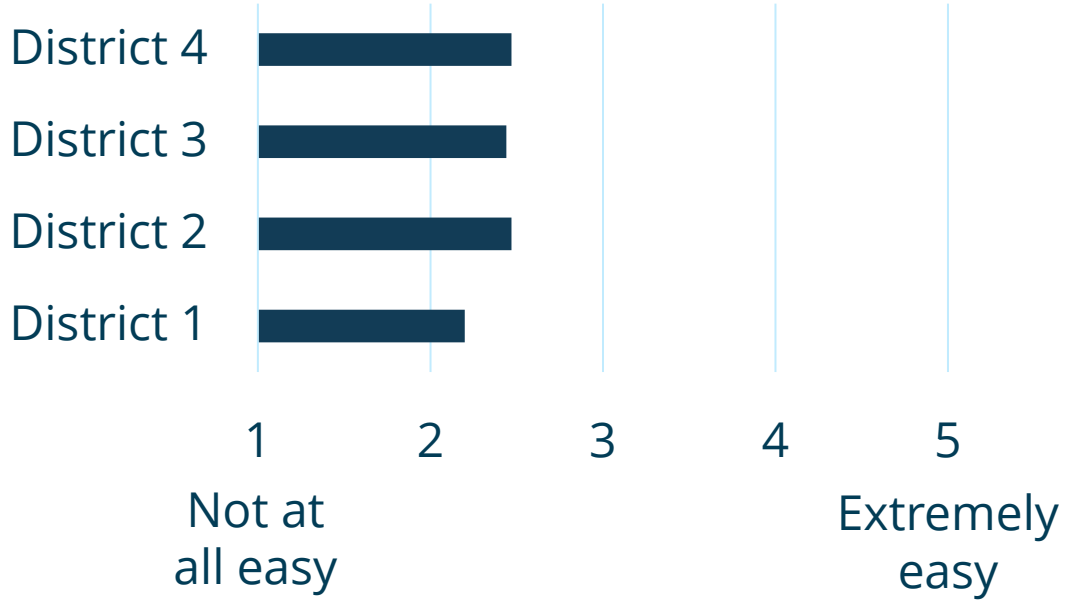
"Break down the silos – one-stop-shopping of what all the bureaus are doing and how to be involved in the process."

"I want places that I can hear other people's viewpoints and advance them up the chain."

City of Portland

2024 Portland Insights Survey

Ease of contacting city on important issues



"What's the point. City government does not truly listen. They may hold public hearings, but ultimately they do what they want."

"Hoping the new city government structure will give Portland residents an actual representative to contact about problems in their neighborhoods."

City of Portland

Charter Commission Recommendation

> The Charter Commission led a one-of-a-kind community engagement process that is being used as a model for engagement at the City. The Charter Commission's work and success in engaging Portlanders should be seen as a strength to carry forward in all City efforts. The City needs to … continue to engage with the communities historically left out of City Hall decision-making and our community partners.

City of Portland

Civic Life: Core and Embedded Teams

Overview and Recommendations

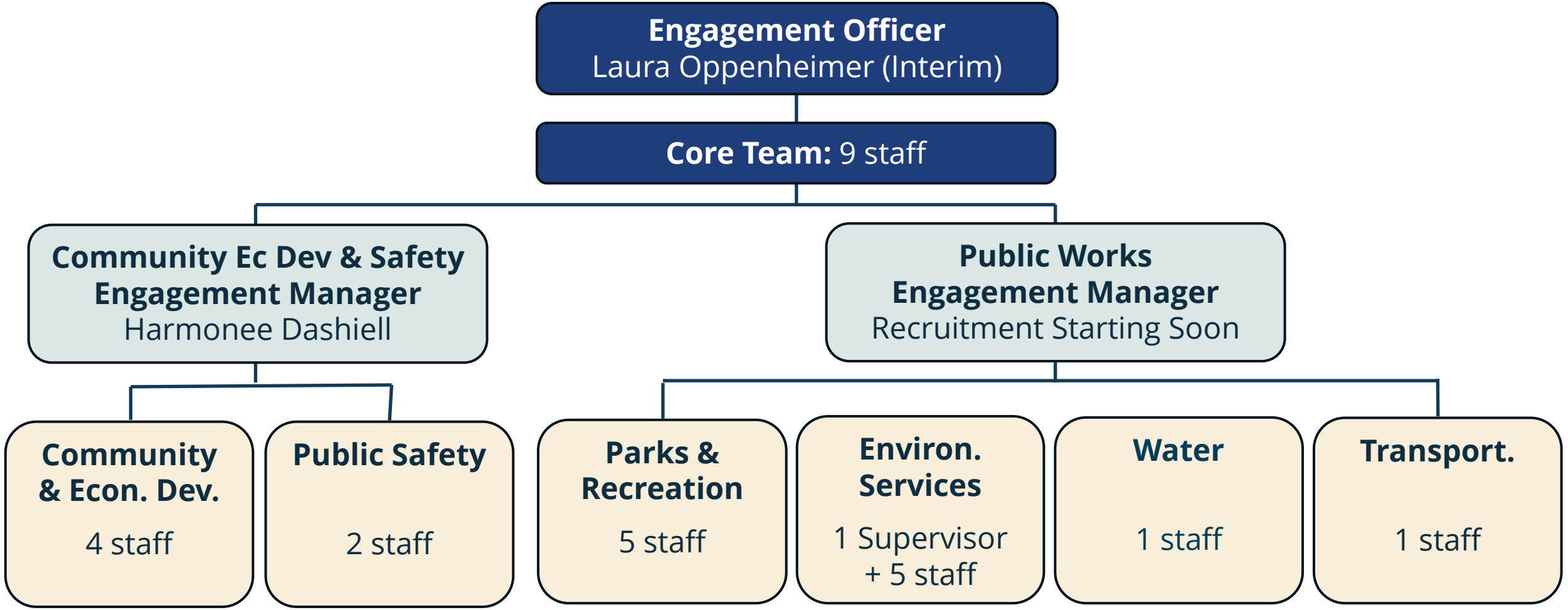
City of Portland

Current State

- Engagement Realignment went live August 4, with embedded bureau engagement staff moving under the Civic Life umbrella
- Core team: 9 positions, including 2 that moved from other bureaus
- Embedded teams: 21 positions covering 3 service areas
- Bureaus have designed and implemented their own engagement staffing, strategies, and prioritization – varying widely across the city.
- Many engagement teams have been in flux for 5-10 years, with inconsistent funding, supervisor structures, and leadership.

City of Portland

Current State



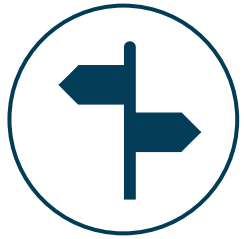
City of Portland

Core Team: Citywide Programs and Practices

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS Direct engagement with Portlanders	CITYWIDE FUNCTIONS Infrastructure to support city teams
Partnerships: We Are Better Together	Advisory Bodies
Immigrant and Refugee Engagement	Engagement Resources and Systems
Youth Engagement	Insights Survey + Opinion Research
Neighborhood Program	Administrative Support Specialist
Urban Native Engagement	

City of Portland

Bureau and Service Area Engagement Functions



DECISION INPUT

Invite Portlanders to help shape city decisions, such as planning parks, investing in neighborhoods, or informing city code and policy changes.

PARTNERSHIPS

Develop and sustain partnerships with community organizations to understand their needs and priorities.

OUTREACH

Share information about city projects and programs, working through community networks and channels.

City of Portland

Priorities and Action Plan

- Create shared standards, expectations and structures for engagement across bureaus and service areas
- Integrate one-person programs into a coordinated engagement system
- Provide clear direction, framework and communication on the vision
- Fill vacant positions: Native engagement coordinator, admin specialist, Public Works engagement manager
- Complete advisory body program improvements
- Stabilize neighborhood program
- Develop engagement performance metrics

City of Portland

Challenges and Gaps

- No dedicated positions for citywide initiatives or employee engagement
- No dedicated support for City Ops, City Admin portfolio, several bureaus
- Engagement staff also hold significant non-engagement responsibility
- Lack of flexibility to pivot to special events or citywide needs
- Funding constraints and uncertainty
- Varying understandings or definitions of engagement and outreach
- Civic Life reputation, internally and externally

City of Portland

Recommendations

- Establish a 5-year stability plan in collaboration with bureaus, service area leadership, city administration, and City Council.
- Recommend staffing and funding adjustments for Fiscal Year 2027-28 to work toward a complete system
- Develop a structure and funding model that provides flexibility to respond to large or unique projects

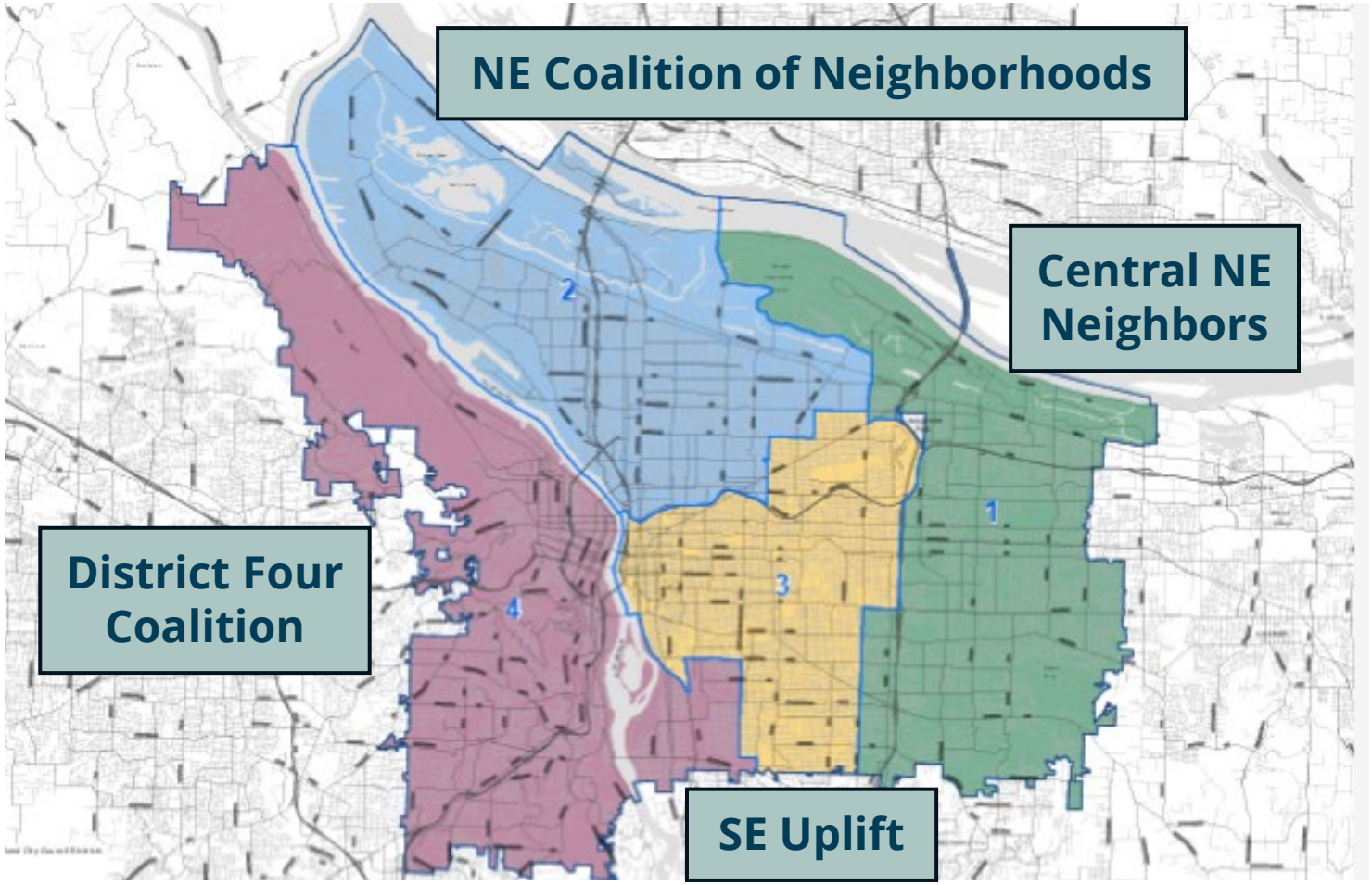
City of Portland

Neighborhood Program

Overview and Recommendations

City of Portland

Neighborhood Program Overview



4 District Coalitions

- Contracts and scope of work with the City
- 2-3 staff

94 Neighborhoods

- All volunteer nonprofits

City of Portland

Roles and Responsibilities

City	District Coalition Offices
Provide district coalitions with: • Grant contracts • Scope of work • City notifications and communications • Community contact database and resources	**Provide neighborhoods with:** • Insurance • Fiscal sponsorship • Small grants • Communications support • Technical assistance

City of Portland

Current State

- 1 funded staff position; 1 additional temporary position
- City leadership turnover
- Inconsistent contracting with district coalition offices
- Breakdown of trust and relationships
- A need for vision for the program's future
- Renewed interest and enthusiasm for partnership

City of Portland

Priorities and Action Plan

- Contract and reimbursement stability
- Information flow between city, district coalition offices, and neighborhood associations
- Reestablishment of trust and relationship building

City of Portland

RECOMMENDATION

Modernize and diversify neighborhood program.

- Solidify the city's staffing and financial commitments .
- Integrate neighborhood engagement with the full Civic Life portfolio, including culturally specific and bureau-based engagement.
- Develop training, resources, and capacity for increasing diversity and expanding participation.
- Capture opportunities and pathways for City Council engagement with district coalitions and neighborhoods.

City of Portland

RECOMMENDATION

Update ONI standards with community process.

- Standards were last updated in 2005
- Updates paused earlier this year
- Still need to align with Portland's new form of government
- Launch community-driven process in 2027
- Set clear goals and guideposts from the City
- Community-led proposal comes to the City for consideration

STANDARDS GUIDE…

- ✓ Conflict resolution
- ✓ Open meetings and public records rules
- ✓ Spending
- ✓ District coalition responsibilities
- ✓ City responsibilities
- ✓ And more

City of Portland

Questions for Council

What principles should guide the rebuild and integration of Portland's engagement system to ensure it is responsive, coordinated, and inclusive?

How should community input inform council decision-making – and how can we design an engagement system that reliably meets those expectations?

How can Portland's neighborhood program make the most of our transition to district-based council seats, fostering connections between neighborhoods and elected leaders?

Thank you

Questions and Discussion

City of Portland