

Charter Commission Public Hearing

May 22, 2022, 12p.m.

Minutes

Attendance

Commissioners					
Name	Present	Absent	Name	Present	Absent
Amira Streeter	Y		Debbie Kitchin	Y	
Andrew Speer	Y		Debra Porta	Y	
Anthony Castaneda	Y		Gloria Cruz	Y	
Becca Uherbelau	Y		Hanna Osman		Y
Brenda Ketah		Y	Melanie Billings-Yun	Y	
Bryan Williams Lewis	Y		Raahi Reddy		Y
Candace Avalos	Y		Robin Ye		Y
Dave Galat		Y	Salome Chimuku	Y	
David Chen	Y		Vadim Mozyrsky	Y	
David Knowles		Y	Yasmin Ibarra		Y

Staff Present			
Julia Meier	Allison Brown (JLA)	Diana Shilet	Sofia Alvarez-Castro
Diana Nunez	Travis (JLA)	Shoshanah Oppenheimer	

Welcome

Allison welcomed the group and provided meeting logistics.

Commissioner Cruz welcomed participants, opening remarks and provided an overview of the Charter Commission Process.

Commissioner Speer gave a presentation of the currently proposed reforms.

Public Comment

Alex Riedlinger, IRCO -Resident of Portland for the last 26 years. Policy advocacy coordinator for the IRCO. IRCO's constituents are racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally, religiously diverse. Many migrant and immigrant communities have fled or left countries where civic participation is undermined by corruption and hypocrisy. Our communities joined our listening sessions and workshops to help shape the Portland constitution even though many are not able to vote. Through this process they found that many of their constituents faced a number of impediments to participating to city elections and government. Timing of elections and accountability to our constituents and their needs. Participants shared concern about the politization of city bureaus, need for distinct geographic constituencies, lack of representation in council and executive positions. Our constituents shared support for RCV, geographic districts with multiple city council members and a mayor council system with a city administrator.

Terry Harris, SW – Multimember districts are a bad idea for Portland, why smaller single districts are better for representations, accountability and responsive. Risk of MMD should be clear to you, it's never been done in the US at the scale that you are proposing and good luck, you will need Clackamas County to implement this. I hope there would be clear acknowledgement of the tradeoffs that you are making MMD, any benefits which might limited would come at the expense of accountability, responsiveness and constituent services and local representation. Baltimore, MD where multi-member districts were a failure for governance and single member districts turned out to be superior. Thank you for ridding the commission form of government.

Marcus Mundy, ED Coalition of Communities of Color – Representing CCC. What would this comprehensive package of reforms would for do for East PDX, communities of color and our entire city. PRCV will reduce financial barriers to candidates running for office and allow more voters of color to build coalitions, to support their preferred candidates. Districts with multiple council members representing each district will ensure geographic representation for East PDX and all residents. Portland is facing complex challenges and we must make sure our government has the tools to strategically plan long term and create a unified vision. Mayor - Council government structure our elected will have more capacity to focus on community needs and setting policy. A City Administrator will allow for increase efficiency and responsiveness to the delivery of city services. Modification to the current proposal – future mayors should be able to introduce legislation and have a tie breaking vote to reduce political gridlock.

Maddie Sauter – 27-year resident of the city and 3-year employee of the City – She runs the division of assets management which includes fleet services, municipal facilities. It is hard to do her job because of the confusing managerial system and she either needs a charismatic CAO to pass a compelling budget ask, or all the bureau directors to be in alignment. The fleet infrastructure is inadequate and unacceptable but there is not funding I welcome a professional city manager, to depoliticize the operational processes in the city, bring efficiency, hold people accountable, and administer funds and effectuating our strategic priorities.

Heather Eickler – Portlander – I experienced the heat dome last year and questions Portland's long-term livability. I realized that we are not prepared for the realities of the changing climate. We are facing great challenges because of the effects of climate change and the government needs to be addressing this emergency in the present and needs to be planning for future resiliency and mitigation. We need to reform in our government so that it's functional and more democratic. Portland Communities are most impacted by climate disruption, poor folks, BIPOC, vulnerable populations need to be more integrated into our electoral system and better represented. The Charter must make environmental justice their priority in Phase II. To establish subcommittee to develop and advance environmental reform and justice, enact reforms for open government, create an office of climate resiliency and sustainability, environmental rights and responsibility amendment in leadership, reforms for open government.

Cou Xiong – APANO Advocacy Civic Engagement Director – APANO participated in listening sessions and community engagement – Folks don't know who is leading the city or who will hear their concerns. No center to finding solutions to community centered issues. Community was concerned about non-English speaking communities voter outreach and education. Folks want to know that their vote carries the same power as other more represented Portland voters. APANO supports the full package of Charter reforms. RCV is a voting method that has been tested and proven to result in city leadership that is more representative of the people as well as ensure underrepresented people votes count.

Terry Parker – Portlander – 4th Generation. He thinks the Commission is on the right track but wants to make some additional suggestions for the proposal. In support of 12 City Commissioners but the districts are too large for district representation and should be made smaller. Used the NE Portland as an example. Ranked Choice voting could a coalition of candidates who represent only one segment of the population within a district that support each other with the same views and mindset – they could be ranked one, two and three. This would leave other voices in the district without representation. The city wide mayor needs to be more than a figure head. They would have a vote. He agrees with city administrator position.

Jim Labbe – Participatory Budgeting – Wants to thank commission and staff for the work they have done thus far. He wants to express general support for the draft Phase I charter amendments. He supports the direction with RCV, for the mayor and multi member districts. Shared the importance to specify this is proportional rank-choice vote willing. Not sure if it's clear. We support multi member districts representation and support expanding the size of the city council. We would like for you to consider is appointing a commission through a demographic lottery. There is already expertise in the state with the Citizen Initiative Review. Milwaukee is using it. The charter should go beyond leaving oversight and accountability to the city council. This was designed to be a check on strong mayor form of government as well as a way of giving ordinary residents more voice.

Tony Greiner -- 30 year resident of Portland. He likes the proposal that the commission has put forward. He thinks that pairing rank choice voting and multi member districts together are a disaster in the making. Starting with the 25% of the vote and incumbents will be able to pull 25% off when they come for reelection. The candidates with the most votes could end up having less power than other candidates. Even if they got the most votes they only get one vote in council. So, the majority of public would be outvoted when it comes to council decisions. There is also a problem with surplus votes. There is no provision on who decides who is a surplus ballot. Lastly, there is concern about staggered elections. Two in non-presidential years and two on the off year but the turnout is higher in presidential elections. So, less people voting, and half the city council will be chosen by half of the city. This is unbalanced. Go to single member voting.

Zhou Fang - Resident of Portland for 9 years. Thanked everyone for all the work thus far on Phase I. They would like to focus on Phase II and voting rights, for non-citizens. She is an immigrant from China and a permanent resident of the US. WE know that noncitizens including permanent residents, refugee, asylum seekers and undocumented residents are affected by the decisions government make but they do not have a say in policies and laws that directly impact our day-to-day lives. Please prioritize voting rights for noncitizens like her.

Dani Dawes Cox – Portland resident of Montevilla neighborhood. Thank everyone for all the work they are doing. She has concerns when it comes to confusion and understanding of how the system is going to work. She hopes that there will be funding to proceed with the changes. She also feels its important that we also don't discourage people from voting because they are confused. From the second proposed change, she agrees with the setting of districts but has concerns about the voices of representation begin diluted with that multi member district. District sizes should be smaller. She also supports the structural changes to the government

Kim Norris – 16-year resident of Portland. She wants to commend the work of the commission. She believes we need this change. She believes we could be giving the mayor voting authority with the tie-

breaking votes is essential to attract strong mayor candidates. She has a concern about multi member districts. There was an experiment with MMD, and it went poorly, so go back to single member districts. Also, it would be better to create more than four districts and have as many members as possible for better representation.

Annie Kallen – Portland resident. By dismantling the form of the government and city counselors the changes will lead to improved representation. She also doesn't believe that rank choice voting is viable since it required essential authority. To tabulate the multiple votes would be too expensive for Portlanders. She has a concern around rank choice voting as it doesn't prevent vote splitting. It gets worse the more candidates are in a race. It depends if you are going to restrict number of rankings. If you don't restrict, how are you going to fit the bubbles? There are better methods for accuracy. So, it can become very inequitable. Rank choice voting is very poor as far as transparency. It's difficult to present the results in a way that you can see the full support of all candidates received.

Kevin Matches – Parent – He came to discuss intergeneration equity and the Portland Fire, Police, Disability and Retirement Bureau in Phase II. The charter puts FPDR on a pay as you basis. Pay as you go means the city does not set aside any money by spending money from the budget to fund pension benefits as they are accrued by employees. Property tax is only collected after the member retires and starts receiving a benefit payment from the pension. The only pay as you go pension is Puerto Rico. He recommends that Charter require a comprehensive funding policy and future cost of living adjustments would only be considered if the plan is funded. Transparency, cost savings and risk management. In the current system the burden is passed down to generations who are not actually being served that is inequity and unfair practice. Please pass a comprehensive funding policy.

Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval – **Unite Oregon** -- Part of her work is to education about voting, government roles and social change. There were a number of questions and frustrations received regarding Portland's government structure. It made it clear that change was needed. She looks forward to being able to teach about this new structure. Our communities have struggles to see themselves represented on the city council. Our communities have elevated the desire to have more meaningful choices to elect candidates by using Rank Choice Voting. RCV will allow all of us to have a seat at the table. They also emphasized the importance of geographic districts with multiple council members. Portlanders will have multiple pathways to make themselves heard. Geographic districts will help to reduce financial barriers and open doors. Under the new government structures City Council will have more time to focus on constituent engagement, increase understanding of what residents from every part of city need.

David Lawrence Joling -- Retired attorney – In agreement about removing the duties of supervising the bureaus from the commissioners. Has concerns about adding council members to the city council. He thinks there is a first step to remove the functions from council and see how it works and the results. He believes it will much improve council. He has concerned that the addition of city councilmember will on increase the cost of the administration of the city at the expense of the services the city provides. 2.7 to 10.2 million per year which might translate anywhere from 20 to 100 million. He foresees budgets will be cut from various bureaus because of the shift to 12 councilmembers and their staff. He shared some population size data from a few cities around the US and the size of their police officers. He ran out of time and will submit the rest in writing.

Susan Mottet – **Director of Portland's Small Donor Program**- The Small Donor Program offers a 9 to 1 match of small contribution from residents. The goal is to ensure all have a voice and elected officials

are accountable to all of us, not to just big donors. She is asking the Commission to consider moving to Phase I to make the Portland Election's Commission independent and permanent home for the program. People agree it doesn't look good for a program that gives candidates money, to have an elected official be in charge of the program. They were charged with finding a home for the program and she has suggested this be an independent commission but currently everything must sit under an elected official and would need council to recommend to the voters to be independent. If this is not something the Commission wants to recommend in Phase I then we would like a formal blessing to make the commission independent and have council recommend to the ballot for voters to decide. There is still also the option of the Commission taking this up in Phase II.

Pablo Martos – Portland resident for 13 years. Thank you to the Commission for the work that you are doing. They want to share that we should have a much larger city council than we have currently. 12 city councilmembers may not be enough. Four districts many not be enough. Different neighborhoods community very different things. Back in the early days of the city, we had 15 members and things have not gotten any less complicated since then. An increase is long overdue and a step in the right direction. He appreciates the way the charter commission is built and ongoing efforts to reach out Portland Communities. Thank you for recognizing the value and need for the separation of powers. The manager's role is important to keep the city turning without somebody thing about elections the whole time. Rank Choice Voting – thank you for stepping away from the current voting system. The savings in running a single election will be worth it.

Commission Closing Remarks

Commissioner Streeter thanked everyone who participated in the meeting and gave input. She gave an overview up comments that were heard throughout the evening. She reminded everyone that the system the Commission is proposing is not perfect but the structure they are proposing is progress an moving the city forward. She also reminded everyone about the May 30th public comment period deadline. Commissioner Porta thanked all the testifiers for sharing their experience and expertise and she shared a recap of public comment that she heard. She reiterated how public comment could be submitted, thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.

Next Steps

Next Charter Commission meeting May 31st 2022, 6pm

Meeting adjourned, 2:18 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Diana Nunez, Charter Team Staff – OMF SPOT

No chat available as this was held in-person at Rosewood Initiative