

**Charter Commission Meeting
March 10, 2022, 6:00 p.m.
Minutes**

Attendance

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

Staff Present			
Julia Meier	Allison Brown (JLA)	Diana Shiplet	Sofia Alvarez-Castro
Maja Haium			

Welcome

Allison welcomed the group and provided meeting logistics, including announcing that Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin), Russian, Somali, Vietnamese, and American Sign Language interpretation are available for attendees. Co-Chair Kitchin welcomed the group, thanked commissioners for their work and members of the public for attending to give input. Co-Chair Castaneda expressed additional thanks, particularly for the amount of time away from work, family, and friends the commissioners have given.

Approval of Minutes

Group gave thumbs up on approval of minutes from February 17, 2022.

Areas of Agreement

Co-Chair Kitchin provided an overview of the commission’s current timeline. Co-Chair Castaneda provided a history of the work to date and an overview of current areas of agreement. He outlined the discussions being held by small groups of commissioners and questions which will be discussed at the Commission’s upcoming work session.

Public Comment

Michelle Bird – Is interested in reforming government, both at the federal and the local levels. Stated commissioners should not be in charge of bureaus because elected commissioners are unlikely to have the expertise necessary to understand bureau needs. Stated that Portland needs neighborhood representation and encouraged the Commission to consider STAR voting, as this could increase the number of people voting and give more options regarding the types of candidates running for office.

Cynthia Le Chester – Is a representative of SEIU 49. Stated they count on the City or Portland to fight for fairness for working class people, such as those represented by SEIU 49. Stated we need a system with checks and balances. Provided an example of how SEIU uses a union-wide President with a regionally elected board. This would be the equivalent of a city-wide Mayor and district-based council members. Supports district-based elections, a mayor who is responsible for day-to-day functions of government, and a voting system which allows people to hold elected officials accountable.

Artemis Wanderlust – Thanked the group for considering how voting is handled. Stated elections without preference voting lead to voting for the “lesser of two evils” and polarity. Recommended that the Commission consider STAR voting.

Felisa Hagins – Is SEIU 49’s political director. Stated many of their members have been on the frontlines during COVID and other crises facing Portland. They want a responsive and accountable government that works for everyone. Encouraged the Commission to focus on being visionary in their decisions. They support Mayor-Council form of government, combined with district-based representation and expansion of the size of Council, as well as a clear division between operations and policy making. They recognize that there are concerns with giving one person too much power but truthfully, that’s what we have now with so few elected representatives having all the power without accountability.

JJ Collier – expressed frustration with current Mayor and stated that this system of government does not work and needs to be changed.

Byron Vaughn – is a PCEP member. Stated that no matter how good rules are, if you don’t have the right person in an elected position, you can’t make any changes. Encouraged the Commission to help bring back the black communities to Mississippi Avenue and the Albina areas. Stated that any person running for election should be required to spend at least two years for the community to get to know them before they are able to run for office. Encouraged the Commission to figure out ways for Portland to be more influential in Salem so State laws can be changed.

Kevin Machiz – Encouraged the Commission to change the funding mechanisms for the Police and Fire Disability and Retirement program. The current unfunded liability is higher than any other retirement program and Portlanders are on the hook for these costs.

Milly Guitron – provided information on their experience with Portland’s City government. Stated currently commissioners are spread too thin between legislative and administrative duties. This could be improved if commissioners no longer manage bureaus. Supports district representation so representatives understand the needs of their district and communities know who to turn to. Also supports only having one election, with some sort of proportional voting, whether that’s ranked choice voting or another similar form. Stated they still struggle to understand who provides what services – this could be helped with more civic engagement from the City, such as workshops or community meetings, at more diverse times of the day and week.

Walter Weyler – representing the Downtown Neighborhood Association. Supports district-based representatives with two representatives per district and a City Manager form of government. Encouraged the Commission to provide date-certain timelines for any proposed changes. The proposals should include budget and oversight responsibilities for implementing any changes.

Natalia Ochmanek – Agrees with the Commission’s current areas of agreement. Stated that districts should be represented by at least two members. City management should be done by multiple City Managers, each specializing in their particular areas. All hiring and firing should be approved by both the Mayor and Council. They also support preferential voting. Only if preferential voting is approved would they also support having representatives elected in only one election.

Fillard Spring-Rhyne – advocated for the use of ranked choice voting. It’s been proven successful for 23 years. Stated they are thrilled with the commission’s discussions so far. The next challenge is education of voters. Stated having multiple representatives elected using ranked choice voting may make voter education easier.

Nieson Abeel – Provided some history of his time in Portland. Stated that the form of government we have here is outdated. Portland needs district representation, with 10 – 12 districts. Stated we need to go to all areas of Portland to help them understand how this change would help them gain representation. Portland’s current system leaves too many people unrepresented. Encouraged the Commission to move to a City Manager form of government, as most commissioners do not have the expertise necessary to manage city operations.

Will Hollingsworth – Encouraged the Commission to move to multi-member district representation, without elections only occurring on same ballot as Presidential elections. Stated that the Commission is thinking too small when considering size of council. Many large cities around the world have significantly larger councils and increasing the size of council increases representation for all Portlanders. The mayor should be elected at-large. A City Manager should run day-to-day operations.

Ron Buel – Provided some background on his history of activism. Stated he was excited to read the progress report and believes that the Commission is on the right track with their agreements. Encouraged the Commission to find a balance between a strong mayor form of government and City Manager form. Key officials should be appointed by the Council, the Mayor should run meetings and only vote on ties. Stated that the Commission needs to get more specific with districting and the number of representatives in order for that to be approved by voters.

Stephanie Fredrick – Thanked the Commission for their work. Supports geographically based district elections, with one representative for each. Raised concerns than multi-member districts may cause jealousy and unnecessary competitiveness between representatives and community members may not know who to contact for assistance.

Steve Smith – Thanked group for looking into alternative voting methods. Stated that while Ranked choice voting is better than our current plurality system, it comes with some issues such as exhausted ballots or complexity in determining and reporting results. He is most concerned with its lack of monotonicity and believes that ballot ranking should translate directly to support for a candidate. He encouraged the Commission to instead choose the STAR voting method.

Babs Vanelli – Supports all of the current areas of agreement. Stated she supports having a City Manager rather than commissioners running bureau operations. She also supports ranked choice voting and is concerned with STAR voting’s lack of track record. Thanked group for their work.

Terry Harris – Agrees with most of the current agreements, with the exception of multi-member districts. Strongly encourages the Commission to only have single-member districts where those

representatives know all the schools, issues, neighborhoods and can hold frequent neighborhood meetings. Multi-member districts would require that districts be too large for these things to occur. He encouraged the Commission to consider what requirements need to be added to the Charter in order to handle recall efforts.

Annie Kallen – representing the Equal Vote Coalition. Stated that they believe ranked choice voting would be illegal under current Oregon state law, while STAR voting would be legal. Encouraged the Commission to confirm this with the County elections offices.

Demetria [no last name given] – Stated that voting and budget control should be given to Portland’s Black community members. Police presence should be removed from Black neighborhoods. She stated that the Mayor should be fired.

Kate Mura – Supports a more representative government. She stated that it makes no sense that she has smaller district representation in Salem than in City Hall. She supports a City Manager form of government, and thinks multiple city managers may be worth considering, though any city manager should be as diverse as the community they represent. Stated that she is in favor of staggered elections because it is important to have some institutional knowledge so government continues to function while newly elected officials come on board.

Jake Antles – Supports multi-member districts, so that the charter is not restricting the diversity of representation. Stated that the average council in the top 25 US cities is 16 members, with many more than that. It makes sense to have many small, multi-member districts. Encouraged the Commission to minimize the influence of corporations in any elections and to not have the mayor be overly powerful. He supports a council-manager form of government.

Sol Mora – representing Building Power for Communities of Color. They have been evaluating which voting method gives Portlanders of color the most significant opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice. To do so appropriately, the Commission should understand the history of Portland, particularly the displacement of communities of color. Geography is not the only identity that influences voting and it’s clear that areas such as East Portland are more politically diverse than most people acknowledge. Research done shows that single – member districts do not provide the opportunities for voters of color to elect a candidate of their choice. She stated that multiple member districts elected by ranked choice voting, in one election is the only way to help achieve these opportunities.

Clay Shentrup – Currently there is campaigned in Seattle for approval voting, which is expected to have enough signatures for a ballot soon. Encouraged the Commission to consider moving to this model as well. He provided examples of other cities using this voting method. However, if this method is not used then the Commission should use STAR voting as it is the next easiest for community members to understand. Suggested that the commission do a mock election to see how each system works firsthand.

Eric Wilhelm – Thanked the Commission for their time and effort. Stated that there should be a much larger council, closer to 50 if we model on European cities. The Council needs to represent and be accountable to Portlanders. In order to do that, he encouraged Council to put STAR voting or ranked star in place. Ranked choice, instant run off voting method gives fanatical supporters of candidates more voice than those who only mildly support several candidates. Also, broadly supported second choice candidates can be rejected in the first round. Also concerned about vote counting being done across multiple counties. STAR voting is simpler to calculate and to report-out results.

Sara Wolk – Representing the Equal Vote Coalition. Encouraged the Commission to support STAR voting method. Believes that ranked choice voting would not function as well as advertised. Stated that in large competition fields, ranked choice voting does not fully count all voter preferences. According to some studies wasted, spoiled and discarded ballots in ranked choice voting are more likely to occur with low income and historically underrepresented communities. Stated that there is no reason to accept this with there are good alternatives such as STAR voting available.

Michael Anderson – Supports multi-member districts, ideally with proportional representation and at least three to four representatives in each. Geography is an important form of identification, but it isn't the only form of identity. Single-member districts prioritize geography over every other identity. Stated he is in favor of the mayor having some authority in the legislative process but not full authority.

Lindy Delf – Stated we need to change how Portland votes. She supports STAR voting as it is easier to administer, costs less, and is easier to understand. Stated that full election reporting does not always occur with ranked choice voting but does in STAR. Encouraged the Commission to eliminate the primary, as it reduces the cost both for candidates to run and for the City to hold the election. Stated that in STAR voting you can give equal support to two candidates but cannot with ranked choice voting.

Isabela Villarreal – Representing Next Up Action Fund. Portland needs proportional, ranked choice voting to stop the exclusion of underrepresented groups. Encouraged the Commission to use Proportional Ranked Choice Voting as well as multi-member districts. Stated that Proportional Ranked Choice Voting proven, tested, used around the world, and works. It is imperative that the Commission take this opportunity to choose a system which allows voters to express their preferences.

Mike Alfoni – Runs an organization working to facilitate a more robust and equitable democracy and is here to encourage the Commission to select the Ranked Choice Voting method. Stated that he shared the last progress report with experts in democracy and they all agree that the Commission is on the right track with their work. Eliminating primaries, switching to a proven, but modern voting method like Ranked Choice Voting, increasing city council size, adding multi-member districts, and examining the form of government are all necessary. Stated he fully supports the work of the Commission.

James Zehran – Provided history of working on a charter review process in Minnesota. Hopes that the Commission spends as much time working to get the ballot issues passed as they spend developing the suggestions. We cannot afford to wait another ten years for another opportunity. Encouraged the Commission to tackle relationships with neighboring communities and counties to improve our whole region. Stated that having a City Manager form of government is a terrible idea because they cannot be held accountable the way an elected official can.

Mont Chris Hubbard – Thanked the Commission for their work. Stated they have been a supporter of STAR voting but is really only concerned with the process of tabulating ballots, not necessarily with how the ballot looks. They want to make sure that every ballot is counted and that every choice on those ballots is counted.

Richard Swartz – Thanked the Commission for their work. Stated he came from cities with a “strong mayor” form of government. In those cities deputies ran the day-to-day work but were managed by the mayor and it worked well. Encouraged the Commission to increase the size of council to more than nine members. Stated that multiple representatives in a district is not a good idea as the community will not

know who is accountable and if two members disagree their votes would cancel each other out, achieving nothing. Stated that Council should be a true legislative-only body and that he does not agree with alternative voting options being considered.

Next Steps

Co-Chairs Castaneda and Kitchin thanked all the members of the public who provided testimony.

On March 15, 2022, at 5:30 p.m. will be a commission work session to discuss current areas of agreement. There will be no public testimony taken at the work session.

Meeting adjourned, 8:19 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Diana Shippet, Executive Assistant to the CAO and CFO

Meeting Chat

18:13:42 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Hosts and panelists:



18:13:49 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:
I wasn't here but I approve?

18:13:58 From Hanna Osman to Everyone:
Thumbs up

18:14:10 From Gloria Cruz to Everyone:
Thumbs up

18:30:42 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Starting with Michelle, Cynthia, Betsy and Crystalyn

18:35:12 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue with Lindy Delf, Raymond Bernal and Stephen Brooks

18:36:34 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Artemis, Paul Gronke, Bryce Butler

18:37:12 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Felisa, JJ and Mar McNamara up next

18:39:52 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Next up, JJ, Byron, Kevin and Milly

18:45:20 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Walter, Natalie and Fillard up next

18:49:27 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:
Is my internet slow or are the slides not moving for others?

18:49:41 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:
slides aren't moving for me either

18:49:46 From Melanie Billings-Yun to Everyone:
not moving

18:49:48 From Bryan William Lewis to Hosts and panelists:
Not moving

18:50:08 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:
whew, okay, my internet is fickle so I was worried. Thanks

18:50:41 From sofia Alvarez-Castro, Charter Staff to Everyone:

Kevin please email them to CHarterReview@portlandoregon.gov

18:55:25 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Fillard, Neilson and Will H up next

18:58:38 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:
I am standing up and stretching :)

18:58:46 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:
thanks!

18:59:08 From Brenda Ketah to Everyone:
I'm standing as well 😊

19:02:25 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue to Ronald, Stephenie and Steve S.

19:12:35 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue with Steve S., Babs, Terry and Annie K

19:13:03 From Anthony Castaneda, he/him to Everyone:
Reminder: please submit your written testimony if you run out of time. We read all testimony submitted.

19:18:47 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:
Yes, it's a public meeting, although we won't have public testimony

19:18:56 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:
thanks, Bab

19:19:34 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue with Annie K, Kay and Demetria

19:22:46 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:
our cousin charter review committee!

19:23:52 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue with Kate, Jake, James and Sol

19:24:05 From Kate Mura (she/her) to Hosts and panelists:
Thank you.

19:33:07 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:
Yay Cully!

19:33:23 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Next up, Sol, Clay and Eric

19:40:33 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
We'll continue with Sara, Michael and Taffy

19:44:46 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Everyone:
Once we hear from this and the next two comments, we'll take a break

19:46:31 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:
yay Cully!

19:46:37 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:
Michael! :)

19:48:12 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:
Thank you everyone!

19:49:53 From Russian Interpreter to Hosts and panelists:
interpreters only until 8pm

19:54:05 From Allison Brown, facilitator (she/her) to Hosts and panelists:
Thank you, interpreters!

19:58:17 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:
I'm here 😊

20:11:52 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:



20:12:17 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:

you been here with us Chris!

20:18:03 From Brenda Ketah to Everyone:

Thank you to everyone who shared tonight!

20:18:54 From Commissioner Robin Ye to Everyone:

We've got an engaged public with many comments, thanks to all who came!

20:19:32 From Comm. Chimuku (She/Her) to Everyone:

thank you so much everyone!

20:19:34 From Comm. Candace Avalos (she/her) to Everyone:

Thanks so much to everyone who showed up and cares so much about our city! We appreciate you!

20:19:41 From Gloria Cruz to Everyone:

Thanks all!

20:20:02 From Victor (interpreter) to Hosts and panelists:

Our pleasure thanks for having us tonight