

City Governance Change, PUB's Work, & PUB Recruitment

PUB Recruitment

PUB recruitment would normally open in early to mid-March. During this year's January and February planning conversations with the Commissioner's office and the Co-Chairs it became clear that we could not open a recruitment without first answering these questions: What is the scope of the Board's work over the next year or so? What skills and experience would be most valuable for that scope of work?

The delay means we will not have new Board members by July when terms expire for 4 of the current PUB members and must make some decisions to ensure work can continue.

Background

Formation of the PUB — The PUB was formed in 2015 following the Anderson lawsuit, in recognition of the need for heightened oversight of the two utility bureaus. The statewide utilities non-profit, Citizens Utility Board (CUB), also stepped in to provide additional outside oversight. At the conclusion of FY 2020-21 budget year, CUB formally withdrew from their oversight role, stating they felt things were in good shape and their outside oversight was no longer needed.

PUB's Shift — Over the years, PUB too has moved from its origins to focus on broad program and policy issues and large-scale trends and infrastructural needs in the bureaus and utilities. With PUB's shift in focus has come a recognition that the current structures, procedures, and scope of work may no longer be effectively serving the Board, the bureaus, or the Commissioner's office.

City Governance Change — The November 2022 election put in motion radical transformation of City government. Come the fall 2024 election, voters will elect 12 Councilors from four geographic-based districts. By January 1, 2025 there will be a non-elected City Manager who along with City staff leadership will administer/manage the City's services and operations. The elected Council will act in a legislative/policy-making role similar to their counterparts in other Cities. This move to disentangle legislative (policy) and executive (administrative) functions is huge.

The City is at the beginning of this transition and things will be changing in a short timeframe. The City is conducting a program assessment with plans to return to Council in Fall 2023 with a high-level organizational chart. As the Commissioner shared at the February 7 PUB meeting, in the immediate future the three bureaus, PBOT (Portland Bureau of Transportation), BES, and PWB will be in one Public Works portfolio.

Even as we move towards a Public Works budget for FY 2023-24 it is likely there will remain program offers within the Public Works budget specific to the services and operations of BES and PWB which could be a continued focus for PUB. At the same time, the budget work will be infused with discussions of how the three bureaus (and beyond) might integrate, collaborate, innovative, and consolidate. City transition will now be a priority focus area for the two utility bureaus in addition to maintaining core services, operations, and addressing infrastructure needs.

Advisory Body Changes — The transition to a new form of government will also mean changes for City advisory bodies, including PUB. For example, PUB's current code speaks of advising Council, which was the right approach for a Commission form of government. It needs to be determined who PUB would

advise under a City Manager form of government. If PWB and BES are housed under a Public Works Department, should/how/does that impact the scope of PUB's work? There will be many changes as the City takes the transition as an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current City-wide advisory bodies system.

Opportunity

The City's transition to a new form of governance is an opportunity. It is an opportunity for PUB to engage in the transition conversations the utility bureaus will be having regarding the bigger picture, foundational values driving the transition, and long-term trends. It is an opportunity to vision the structure and future of a Board under a new form of City government. It is an opportunity to build on last fall's joint decision between the bureaus and PUB to realign PUB's future budget work to better synch with the bureaus' budget cycle in ways that also incorporate the City governance transition.

The alternative to engaging in the transition work is to attempt to continue along with the status quo operations of the Board, perhaps with reduced number of members and quorum. As the larger transition discussion and decisions move forward, this will become harder to do while remaining relevant.

The Commissioner's office is a key partner in this opportunity as PUB serves at the pleasure of Council, in particular the Commissioner-in-Charge of utilities and the Mayor. Their input, insights into the higher-level transition changes, and expertise in navigating the political terrain will be critical to success should the Board decide to take this opportunity.

Commissioner's Recommendation on recruitment and short-term scope of work

The Commissioner values the work of the PUB as a public oversight body and would like it to take into consideration the opportunity to evolve its work during the transition to a new form of government. The PUB could play a critical role in discussing and advising on how advisory bodies will take shape in the new form of government AND help lay out a future and new goals for its own work under the auspice of a Public Works portfolio. This could look like:

Focused Scope for PUB in 2023

- Ongoing budget work focused on the core services, operations, and infrastructure of BES and PWB. (As transition continues, this work may shift some and will certainly be infused with transition themes.)
- Engaging in transition policy issues to the utility bureaus
- Visioning what a future PUB might be - effective scope, structure, composition, etc.
- Visioning what the future of advisory bodies are and their functions

Targeted Recruitment in Fall

Based on the above scopes, who you recruit will matter. The below are a couple of options we are thinking about;

- Run a smaller board with an adjusted quorum and a plan to recruit during the fall with new members starting January 2024. (if we know enough to initiate a recruitment by late Sept, or it would be winter/spring)
- Extend term for specific board members willing to serve a 6-month extension, with a plan to recruit in the fall and have new members start January 1.

Fine-tuning

Between now and the fall recruitment, further discussions can fine-tune the PUB scope of work as well as what skills and experiences you are recruiting for. Additionally, the transition team has indicated they will have a firmer game plan in place by the fall. That information can also inform PUB recruitment and the fine-tuning of PUB's scope of work.

Next Steps

The Co-Chairs, Commissioner's office, and PUB staff would very much like to hear your initial individual thoughts. Please email, text, or call PUB staff with those thoughts and we will collate to share with the Co-Chairs and the Commissioner's office.

We envision the next steps to be some conversations internal to the Board and some jointly with the Commissioner's office in the May-June timeframe.

The first task will be to move forward to ensure Board functionality come July 1. The second task will be some conversations to scope PUB's work and prepare for a fall recruitment.