

CHARTER COMMISSION- PUBLIC COMMENT REPORT

Date range: July 20, 2021 – August 5, 2021

From July 20 to August 5, 2021, at 8:00 a.m., **25 public comments** were submitted through the online public comment form, via email, and at the 7/21 Information Session meeting. 8 out of the 25 comments were made on behalf of a community-based organization.

Public comments:

While I know there is work to be done to ensure that the mayor and council members are representing constituents and not bureaus, as someone who commutes to Portland and has a city manager, this unelected individual, is VERY DIFFICULT to HOLD ACCOUNTABLE and also get rid of. There's no real transparency with a city manager that is not elected to office. It would be better to offer up both an elected city manager and an elected police commissioner. It's not just the PPB that is problematic. Many of the bureaus that function are not functioning in a transparent way for the public. That must change. I would also like more representation for those who don't become part of neighborhood associations. My partner has never joined as a resident of Portland and yet has many great ideas. Some people like their neighborhoods but not the neighborhood association which "represents" them. That is something worthwhile to change. I went to a housing meeting and many progressives would be very surprised about the pushback by at least one association fighting affordable housing. They were more concerned about home value rather than the wellbeing of other Portlanders. Leaders are not all voices. It's even annoying to hear elected officials say that they met with leaders of a sector such as leaders in the black community. Even coalitions and nonprofits have too loud of a voice. Not everyone is a part of them and sometimes elected officials give them preference rather than reaching a consensus on a topic. I hope this charter will support a way to get a public bank so more of Portland is invested in directly by Portlanders. I also hope that the high cost of public records gets addressed. Add public financing of elected officials or address the loophole of being able to finance a campaign yourself by the thousands of dollars to get elected as a city official. And Address a more equitable usage of resources so that neighborhoods are no longer underserved while others are abundantly served.

Esteemed Charter Members:

I would like to encourage you to consider improved voting methods that I believe are central to meaningful electoral reform. The most significant of them are:

- score voting - rate the candidates on a scale, e.g. 0-5, 0-9, etc.
 - approval voting - use a normal ballot but voters can approve any number of candidates
 - STAR voting - like score voting but with an instant "automatic" runoff between the top two
- Approval voting in particular is a practical and powerful option. It was adopted in Fargo, ND by a 64% majority in 2018, and then in St Louis, MO by a 68% majority in 2020. Approval voting uses a normal ballot, but simply allows voters to select as many candidates as they "approve" of. The winner (or winners, in cases such as a top two runoff) is simply the candidate(s) with the most votes. This requires no voting machine upgrades nor any major educational efforts or expense.

All three of these cardinal (rated) voting methods are much simpler and more accurate than the older and more well-known ordinal (ranked) voting methods, particularly instant runoff voting, which has come to be marketed generically as "ranked choice voting". Despite its notoriety, "RCV" is significantly more complex, opaque, and vulnerable to tactical voting. See explanation by experts here.

<https://electionscience.org/library/approval-voting-versus-irv/>

All of these methods have proportional forms in the case that proportional representation is a topic of interest. There is no need to invoke a complex and antiquated system like Single Transferable Vote (STV). This field has progressed significantly in the past few decades, and numerous better simpler options exist.

See letter attached from Public Records Advocates

Portland is at a low point and there is a general awareness that we need real structural change.

I would like to see the following changes:

- Adopt a Council-Manager form of government. With this form the Council sets policy, the Manager implements it, and the Mayor oversees and supports it.
- The Mayor would be elected in a city-wide election by a majority as we do now.
- The Council would be elected by districts. Districts should be drawn by an independent non-partisan committee. These districts should be proportional and represent the diversity of the City.
- Consideration should be given to how best to ensure the district elections remain fair, equitable, and implement a campaign funding cap.
- The Mayor and Council members should remain non-partisan
- The Council members maintain legislative powers BUT NO longer exercise administrative duties of the Bureaus. Rather, skilled managers should implement Bureau policy.
- Volunteer Citizen Advisory Boards or Commissions should be established to provide advice and feedback to the Bureaus. This might be in such areas as policing, land use, homelessness, civil rights, etc.

Thank You

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 5:21](#)

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 12:19](#)

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 8:53](#)

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 15:33](#)

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 19:09](#)

[Verbal public comment starting at minute 22:26](#)

See letter attached from Portland-Metro People's Coalition

Dear Portland Charter Review folks,

While performing research for another topic, I stumbled across this recently-released audit of the Bureau of Development Services:

<https://www.portland.gov/audit-services/news/2021/3/23/building-permit-review-audit>

While I was pulling permits for the first adaptive re-use conversion of a single family home to a fourplex under the modern commercial code in Portland, I ran up against this first-hand: our project was delayed six months due to dysfunction at BDS, and wound up losing a lot of money. As a result, I won't be doing any more projects like that; it only takes one project losing money to end a career in real estate development.

It wasn't just my project, however; BDS is even more dysfunctional than I could have possibly imagined.

According to this audit, BDS only meets their goals for on-time permit issuance for SEVEN PERCENT (7.0%) of permits for new residential construction; this only improves slightly, to 27%, for new commercial construction.

THIS IS PATHETIC!!

This is NOT an example of a "City that Works."

The audit clearly states that the City Council has been either ignoring dysfunction at BDS, or ineffective at providing reforms, despite setting targets for performance that BDS has repeatedly and catastrophically failed to meet.

Dysfunction at BDS and the City's development-related bureaus has a direct causal link to our housing crisis. We've lost whole development cycles worth of new homes because the previous generation was held up in permitting delays, meaning that the finance was tied up, and could not be re-deployed for the next cycle of home construction.

The Charter Review Commission should carefully consider how to design a city bureaucracy that is more streamlined, accountable, effective, and able to respond nimbly to deliver on goals and policy objectives.

Thanks for taking the time to carefully read through and consider the audit's findings and recommendations.

I would like to respectfully request that the Charter Commission please recommend/push for changes to the City of Portland Charter to change the way the Portland City Council is elected and how the City is run.

I prefer a commission made of of commissioners from areas of the city they govern, similar to how the Oregon Legislature or US Congress is organized, by region.

Further, I would like the city bureaus managed by professional managers, not by elected officials.

Thank you for your consideration.

I think the city attorneys office should be completely uninfluenced by the mayor or city council. The city attorney need to be able to have the freedom to makes decisions that they believe are in the best interests of the city with our fear or influence from elected leaders. If the city attorney was assigned to the city auditor I believe there would be much more transparency in their decision making and as to why some court cases get settled or go to trial, along with any other legal decisions that are in the public's interest.

I moved to Portland 14 years ago hoping for a refreshing change from the Washington, DC, area where I lived prior. However, I now realize that the current form of city government in Portland is

broken and is preventing our city from progressing. We need a change, and soon. No other cities the size of Portland are structured the way Portland 's government is structured. One of our big problems is that in our form of government, is the mayor doesn't really have much power, just one vote on the council, and we have no manager that runs the business of the city regardless of the underlying politics. In Portland's system, each commissioner, when elected takes over a department so ever newly elected official might be charged with running a water department or the police department with no prior experience in the department. Being elected doesn't make one an expert in running the water department, or other divisions. why do we do that??

Until the form of government aligns more with the rest of the cities in the United states we are going to have a disfunctional system of management because we have a disfunctional form of government, ie no city manager, a mayor with no real authority and a collage of chief executive officers running all the major departments in the city. A change is WAY OVERDUE! Please proceed to accomplish this ASAP to save our city.

I read with interest Candace Avalos' opinion piece in a late June Oregonian issue. I agree Portland's system of government is archaic, leads to complete dysfunction and no longer serves a city of our size.

I am a native PNW citizen and chose Portland in 2006 looking to be more sustainable. I wanted to bike commute safely to work and live where I could actually save for retirement and for emergencies and extras like travel. I have no problem paying taxes for schools, libraries and other services important for an educated society. What I detest is waste and the feeling I'm getting less and less for my money in Portland due to complete incompetence in city leadership and little accountability for decisions that negatively affect Portland and residents' safety (example - how we got to current homeless situation).

I'm not alone in the growing realization that in the more than a decade I've lived here I've seen a lack of leadership, lack of representation by where you live, and very little strategy, let alone one that sticks. This disturbs me, along with the fiefdoms that are created by counsel members whose domain are departments rather than constituents' overall needs and wants for their city.

I seek change in the structure of our government, toward one that more represents the people of Portland. City Council members need to be representing a district rather than city wide (remember when all city council members lived in SW Portland??) where they have little accountability to actual constituents.

I'm hoping my letter, as they say, represents many who don't write but feel the same way. Please add my support for changing the current ineffective city council/weak mayor system

This topic should be included as part of the charter review. Besides changing to a city manager council form of local government, you should look at city county consolidation. We have too much government. Portland has approximately 663,000 residents and the county has about 812,000. The boundaries mostly overlap. There has been some effort to eliminate redundancy but why not have one governing unit. Some of these departments could stay the same, some would have be combined.

We have the most inexperienced city council in office in the 50 years I have lived in Portland. Our police force now is about the same size as it was 50 years. I think there needs a serious review about what the police department. Should do and how many people should be police officers. To just with hold resources without any good reason to do so makes no sense to me at all. Finally, metro sends to every household a newsletter I think it is quarterly. I think a quarterly newsletter from the city council and mayor telling us what they are doing and what the city is doing would go a long ways to reestablish credibility with your customers. It should be a high quality product talking about actual things that are being done and problems that you are having trouble with. Not political issue.

I agree with Hardesty - Graffiti is the least of our problems. Instead it would greatly benefit the City if a Vendor was hired instead to clean up the accumulating unhealthy garbage left behind in all areas of Portland and Suburbs

I believe the Charter Review Commission should consider three changes, which would bring about more expertise, less bureaucracy, and an increase in equitable and diverse representation for beautiful city:

1. Move away from the commissioner form of government to a city council form of government with a city manager. It doesn't make sense that a city of our size uses an antiquated form of government.
2. Increase the number of council members and elect them based on geographical districts. It's wild that so few of our commissioners have historically lived on the East side of the city, where the majority of the city population lives. We need to move towards a government that represents the whole city, not just a small and limited part of it.
3. Enact Rank Choice Voting. It would allow for more empowered voting and give more diverse voices a fair chance of being elected to office.

I want to chime in on where I'd like to see the Charter Review Committee take us. This is an opportunity to enact some real changes to how things get done. Some of these changes are pretty big, but I believe in this city and I know we can accomplish this.

- Public trash/recycling cans on the street and trash pickup by one city organization. We have a trash problem in this city and this one doesn't relate to houseless folks. I have customers from out of town repeatedly asking why there aren't many trash cans on the street. Let Portland be the city that works and establish public trash can management.

- Ranked-Choice Voting. We see where a split election got us in this last mayoral election, and even the commissioner run-offs are costly. Give us the opportunity to make bold choices with our votes, knowing full well that we can still have an alternative fall-back candidate.

- Establish a city council form of government with a city manager.

- Council members and the mayor don't head bureaus. We're one of the last big cities with this commissioner system and we need to start getting qualified individuals to run government departments/bureaus.

- Council members are elected by geographic district. We need even representation within our city government that actually reflects our diversity. We've made some inroads on a more diverse government but these elections have historically been about who can afford to win the election, even though they don't represent most neighborhoods of this city.

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I would like a ranked choice voting system. Thank you.

I would like to urge the Charter Commission to move Portland away from the current commissioner system of governance that is not representative and fails to hold commissioners accountable. We should look at the role of a city manager, a ward system, and options for more direct democracy. I would like the Charter Commission to look into ranked choice voting for the city which would allow the most fair outcome for a wider field of candidates. Portland deserves leadership and a way of voting for them that is equitable and leads to accountability. Thank you.

STATE OF OREGON

TODD ALBERT
OREGON PUBLIC
RECORDS ADVOCATE



800 Summer Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97310
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July 21, 2021

City of Portland Charter Commission

Dear Charter Commission Members:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Oregon's Public Records Advocate to lend support to the proposed idea of embedding transparency in Portland's Charter. The City of Portland represents the second largest recipient of public records requests in the state after state government. Given the number of Oregonian's who live or work in the city or are affected by its actions, ensuring all requesters have appropriate, timely and cost-effective access to its public records is essential. Moreover, funding, staffing limitations and technological issues all play a part in holding back the City from fulfilling both the letter and spirit of Oregon's public records law.

Centering transparency at the heart of Portland's guiding laws will send a clear message to elected officials, policy makers, agency leadership and staff, as well as community stakeholders, that the City is serious about its commitment to fair, just and equitable government and empower those who have the final say over these matters to choose the necessary funding, staffing levels and technological systems and, most importantly, the will to be leaders in this regard.

I hope you find this information helpful. Please let me know if you would like to discuss this matter further or if my office can be of further assistance to your work.

Sincerely,

Todd Albert

July 22, 2021

Portland Charter Review Commissioners,

We are a wide array of groups interested in using this once-a-decade opportunity to update our city's charter to make this foundational document one that drives equity, sustainability, and the betterment of the lives of the least advantaged Portlanders. We have been meeting regularly as a **Charter Review Working Group** since the beginning of the year and have been testifying at charter meetings about our work. We applaud the Commissioners' appetite for bold, progressive change, and we would like to share our intersectional vision and suggested structure with you.

Our group includes **Sunrise Movement PDX, Participatory Budgeting Oregon, Portland Forward, 350PDX, Portland's Resistance, Portland Chapter of DSA** and other Participating Organizations of the **Portland-Metro People's Coalition**, which seeks to build coordinated and strategic progressive power with and for the 99% (AFSCME Local 88, Alliance for Democracy, BerniePDX, Cedar Action, Climate Action Coalition, Climate Jobs PDX, independents for Progressive Action, Jewish Voice for Peace, Justice Advocates, Municipal Broadband PDX, Nasty Women Get Shit Done, Portland Caucus of Rank and File Educators, Portland Harbor Community Coalition, Portland Independent Business Bloc, Portland Jobs With Justice, Portland Tenants United, Right 2 Survive, Sisters of the Road, and SURJ-PDX Black Lives Matter Committee).

Some of these groups have been the drivers behind Honest Elections and other campaign finance reform initiatives, the Real Police Accountability measure, the Portland Clean Energy Fund, the Relocation Ordinance and Universal Preschool, and others are currently working on houselessness, municipal broadband, police accountability, and a public bank.

All PMPC organizations support this shared policy platform (to build the necessary intersectional community power that no individual group can achieve alone), along with a Bill of Rights, a set of visionary principles we aspire to that expands the commons and pushes power and resources downward and outward into the community. **Based on this experience of nesting policy proposals under larger rights that open the door to future campaigns, our Charter Review Working Group is submitting the following vision and set of proposals—as well as a suggested subcommittee structure—that encompasses all 18 of your current topics as well as our own.**

We have been outreaching to our collective bases about the Charter Review process, holding community events, and are working with lawyers, economists, researchers, and organizers with years of experience in their respective issues and are ready to provide you with the background and current campaign information as subcommittee members. We would also be interested in convening educational sessions for the Commissioners and additional community members, should this be of interest.

Our Vision

We imagine a city where Black, Indigenous, other people of color, and other marginalized people don't have to fear violence from police or white supremacists. We imagine a city where people's homes are safe and healthy to live in, where everyone can be secure in their housing, food and water, and mental well-being. We imagine a city that takes public health, environmental, and changing climate consequences seriously, and acts at the scale these challenges demand. We imagine a city willing to make real investments in community safety and committed to outcomes that are beneficial to the community, not just promoting its own brand. Following the leadership of BIPOC leaders, we recognize *intersectionality* as the most important part of addressing our multiple crises, for without it there is no *justice*.

Community Engagement

We have been closely observing the commission's efforts thus far and are encouraged to see an emphasis on public engagement and taking time to have the citywide conversations that are necessary to create the community credibility to make bold changes to the charter through this process.

As the Commission structures its community engagement processes, we hope that you will prioritize transparency and respect for the community. Specifically, we hope the plan will include the following principles:

- Communicate ahead of time what members of the public can reasonably expect from engaging in the process. How will their input be used? Who will make decisions about what will and will not be used and how will those decisions be made?
- Do not solicit input where it will not be used in a meaningful way to craft a solution.
- Communicate during the process regarding what has been done with community input. Which parts were incorporated and which parts were left out and why? Message beforehand when this follow-up will take place.
- Develop protections so that community input, particularly from historically underrepresented communities, is not extractive. Where possible, compensate people for their physical and intellectual labor so resources flow back to the community and energy is equitably exchanged as we work towards solutions. Remove barriers (technology, food, translation, childcare, etc.) that function as additional obstacles to marginalized community members participating in the process.
- Create structures and conditions that advance civic engagement beyond input solicitation and meaningfully incorporates community into decision-making processes with an emphasis on including marginalized groups.

Potential Structure for the Commission's Work

We offer as a proposal for a community-engaged process for the commission a five-subcommittee structure with each subcommittee doing research into the areas where charter changes in this domain could be used as a mechanism to enhance the lives of the residents of our city. The subcommittees would be:

Participatory and Representative Democracy
Economic and Civil Rights
Environmental Justice + Infrastructure
Expanding/Protecting the Commons
City Administration

We believe these subcommittees would encompass all of the areas the commission has discussed wanting to look at. Each subcommittee would be given a charge and instructed to produce recommendations for the Charter Review Commission on specific changes.

Participatory and Representative Democracy

Charge: This subcommittee is charged with producing recommendations for ways the City Charter could be amended to enhance and broaden democratic participation in our City. The subcommittee will focus on recommendations that increase the relative representation for communities and groups that have historically been underrepresented in city decision making.

Specific topic areas for recommendations:

- Structure of Government
- Participatory Budgeting
- Voting Rights/Methods
- Elections Administration
- Citizen Juries / Sortition
- Democratize Prosper Portland and Enhanced Services Districts
- Campaign Finance Reform

Economic and Civil Rights

Charge: This subcommittee is charged with producing recommendations capturing ways the City Charter could be amended to expand the rights of all those who call Portland home. The subcommittee will focus on recommendations that use the charter to grow the quality of life for all Portlanders and ensure that our city's foundational moral document enshrines healthy protections to the community.

Specific topic areas for recommendations:

- Community Safety Rights
- Race + Gender Rights
- Houseless Rights
- Tenants Rights
- Workers Rights
- Tax Equity
- Participatory Rights

Environmental Justice + Infrastructure

Charge: This subcommittee is charged with producing recommendations reflecting the ways the City Charter could be amended to codify climate justice and environmental sustainability. The

subcommittee will focus on recommendations that use the charter to accelerate our necessary move past carbon dependence, safeguard the frontline communities who will be hardest hit by a rapidly changing planet, and take the bold steps needed to provide a sustainable region for future generations of Portlanders.

Specific topic areas for recommendations:

- Sustainable Planning and Zoning for a Livable Future
- Climate Emergency Declaration, Decisions and Accountability
- Climate Resilient Housing for All
- Mental Health and Educational Resources for Youth
- Decriminalization and Police Accountability
- Increased Investments in Climate Resiliency Work

Expanding/Protecting the Commons

Charge: This subcommittee is charged with producing recommendations around aspects of the City Charter that could be amended to facilitate and increase the public ownership of resources. The subcommittee will focus on recommendations that use the charter to make sure the city is not dependent on megacorporations that extract resources from our community through profit to provide basic services to its residents. New public utilities would provide better and more affordable services for all, allow for community wealth building, mitigate against growing economic inequality and boost confidence in government. Resilience and the city's self sufficiency should be key themes in the recommendations.

Specific topic areas for recommendations:

- Municipal Broadband
- Public Bank
- Land Trusts/Surplus Property Acquisition

City Administration

Charge: This subcommittee is charged with producing recommendations for amendments to the City Charter that would streamline and enhance city administration. The subcommittee will focus on recommendations that use the charter to standardize best practices across bureaus, promote collaboration over competition, build transparency and accountability, provide stability and consistency to bureaus, and enhance resident interactions and meaningful engagement with the city's administration.

Specific topic areas for recommendations:

- Centralizing/standardizing city functions
- Centralized permitting
- Budgeting/contracting
- Bureau independence

We recognize that by the time this Charter is reviewed again, the landscape of Portland and its surrounding areas will be drastically different. We urge you to take bold actions in this review

process so that the youth of Portland may grow into a world in which they are housed, in which they are safe from state-sanctioned violence, in which they do not fear consistent wildfires and snowstorms. We envision a future in which democratic processes are honored and expected, and where those who govern are accountable to the people they serve. We envision a future in which the differences of each and every community are considered in decision-making processes, because one size does not fit all. We want to support you in moving toward reparative justice and to take actions now to build systems of resilience by investing in critical social services that reinforce the safety of Portland's diverse communities, and create a solid plan and commitment to protect communities that have experienced historical displacement.

We would like to know how we can best participate in this process in a way that produces results for our community and that also honors the amount of time and effort we as volunteers are putting in. We want to work with you to engage our collective communities so that their desires are turned into real progressive policy change. We are excited to work with you on this historic effort, and thank you for engaging with us.

Sincerely,
Sunrise Movement PDX
350PDX
Participatory Budgeting Oregon
Portland Forward
Portland-Metro People's Coalition
Portland DSA
Portland's Resistance

The Charter Review Working Group can be reached at info@portlandpeoplescoalition.org