

**Charter Commission
Information Gathering Subcommittee Meeting
with City Bureau Directors
May 26, 2021, 4:00 p.m.
Minutes**

Attendance

Commissioners Present		
Bryan William Lewis	Vadim Mozyrsky	Melanie Billings Yun
Andrew Speer	Debbie Kitchin	Karol Collymore
Candace Avalos	Becca Uherbelau	Anthony Castaneda

Staff Present		
Name	Name	Name
Julia Meier	Diana Shiplet	Ariella Frishberg (JLA)
Mike Myer	Chief Sara Boone	Chief Chuck Lovell
Bob Cozzie	Jonna Papaefthimiou	

Welcome

Julia welcomed the group, gave an overview of the format for today’s meeting, and reminded everyone that the meeting will be recorded.

Commissioners introduced themselves and stated why they were interested in attending today’s meeting.

Bureau Directors Statements

Mike Myer, Director of Community Safety Transition Program – Informed the group that he joined the City of Portland in 2016 as Fire Chief, having previously worked for the Cities of Las Vegas and St. Louis. Las Vegas had a city manager form of government and St. Louis is a strong mayor form of government. Having worked in all three forms, he can state that it is very unique to have fire work supervised by someone not professionally experienced in fire or in city management. There are intricacies of this work that a commissioner wouldn’t naturally know and, if a director chose to withhold information, would never know.

Mike provided an example of the ways fire has to ask for permission to do their work in an emergency because of lack of single authority. Additionally, commission form of government means that there is a great deal of duplication of efforts across each bureau such as: administrative services, public information officers, accounting, etc. Additionally, he’s never worked in any city prior to Portland where bureaus actually bill each other for work.

Fire Chief Sara Boone, Portland Fire and Rescue (PF&R) – Stated she has been with the bureau for 26 years, and as chief is focused on community building and community trust. Stated that City of Portland’s issues are greater than any one bureau can handle and that bureaus can no longer operate in a silo they have to partner with each other to overcome budget constraints. However, we can’t forget the need to lead from a compassionate base of operations.

Chief Boone stated that while a city manager would enhance efficiencies, it would limit seats at the table. She is also concerned that it may limit quick decision-making capacity in extreme emergency situations requiring quick incident command creation and authority.

Police Chief Chuck Lovell, Portland Police Bureau (PPB) – Provided some history of the bureau. It was formed in 1870 as the Metropolitan Police Force. At the time there were 6 patrol officers and 1 lieutenant. Now there are 811 sworn staff and 250 non-sworn. PPB was the first to hire a female officer and the first to have a female chief.

Chief Lovell stated that Portland's form of government has many challenges and that having a political figure as the head of running public safety bureaus is not easy or right. It means no decision can be made without political fallout. A strong mayor or a city manager form of government may bring efficiencies and greater operational success.

He also raised concern with at large representation and the ways it gives advantage to the loudest or wealthiest voices, rather than representing smaller, or disadvantaged areas. We see these disparities in the far east side of Portland due to lack of focus and stronger representation.

Bob Cozzie, Director of the Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) – Stated that the bureau was established in 1974, originally as a police dispatch service. It was later expanded to include emergency medical services and fire dispatch.

Bob stated that he agrees with the need to change the form of government in order to have better representation. He would like the group to consider districts and a bigger council. If we had a true city administrator, with a deputy to focus specifically on public safety, they could hold the 50,000 foot view of all safety-related issues. Any form of government is not a fix for everything, but the form of government can help all city staff to work well together.

Jonna Papaefthimiou, Interim Director of the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) – Provided history of the bureau – it's one of the newest bureaus, only created in 2004. Originally it was only police and fire staff doing this work but was later expanded to its own bureau.

Jonna stated that they are a few things that are currently working in our form of government that shouldn't be lost, no matter what the Commission decides is best. These include:

- Portland is an innovated city. The City leads on climate change, bike access, community emergency response training, etc.
- She has felt very supported as an interim director by the other safety directors and thinks the form of government may help with that cross-bureau support.

However, there are parts of the current form of government that Jonna thinks do not work, these include:

- If something is wrong or conflicts occur, there is no one higher up to mediate or have final word on an issue.
- There is lack of authority in big emergencies.
- Every bureau has to be its own island with administrative roles, payroll, timekeeping, purchasing, etc. – this is particularly challenging in small bureaus with limited resources.

- Bureaus don't always feel supported by centralized services, as they aren't actually centralized but rather a separate bureau.

Question and Answer Time

Question: There seems to be a dichotomy between a manager form of government and the current form of government in emergency situations – is there an example of how form of government may be helpful in getting services quicker?

Chief Boone: Depending on the size and scope of an emergency, the lead bureau may change. Last year, in the lead up to the wildfires, fire needed the green light to staff up, but everyone was focused on the pandemic and on-going civil unrest. Safety bureaus need to not have their hands tied in order to plan far enough in advance for potential emergencies.

Question: What system would have both day to day and emergency response covered?

Chief Boone: Not sure, but we do seem to be getting there with the new Community Safety Transition Program. What's more important than form of government is funding to be able to handle all the hazards bureaus are responsible for.

Question: How might a more centralized form of government take directors and chiefs out of the hot seat so you can focus on good community outcomes?

Chief Lovell: Even having the one layer of separation of Mike's new role between directors and political decisions helps to provide support, translation, and a buffer for better focus. Currently, directors have to be hyper aware that all decisions, even minor ones, have political ramifications rather than being able to solely focus on making good decisions for the whole of the community.

Question: We've heard a number of examples of challenges with a commission form of government and how a strong mayor/city manager can lead to increased efficiency, collaboration, and clarity of purpose but can you speak to the potential consequence of concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals and what accountability to the community looks like under that model?

Mike: In those forms of government, there would be a city-wide strategic plan, built with the community, commissioners, directors, etc. Directors would report on and be accountable to how they are or aren't meeting those plan goals. In Portland though we only do what one commissioner wants. Other forms of government are actually the opposite of concentrations of power. Commissioners in other forms of government are out holding public meetings, gaining community input on specific projects, areas of concern, etc. rather than spending their time doing administrative work of bureaus.

Chief Boone: Community engagement is different here – it's at a bureau-level only. You're never going to see all public safety bureau directors engaging with the community together. If they do engage with the community, it's one director alone. Leads to lack of overall visioning.

Question: Is the need for Mike's role an indication that our form of government has challenges?

Mike: My position here is to help coordinate across bureaus, not to supervise or manage the other directors. In, for example, a City Manager form of government, that manager would have 3 or 4

deputies, each over specific areas such as Public Works, Public Safety/Emergency Response. Those deputies could have the high-level view while the others focus on day to day operations. Good governance and good efficiency require the elimination of duplications of services. That's my role here but it needs to be looked at across all the bureaus.

Question: In a City Manager form of government, wouldn't that person help coordinate planning in advance for crisis?

Sara: I'm concerned that in another form of government we won't have the leeway to do things like focus on underserved communities the way PBEM was able to in it's pandemic response. Not sure if that's possible with a more centralized funding system.

Question: Other directors have suggested including a preamble or the core values to help give context to the Charter – how could that help and support your day to day work?

Bob – That would help to keep our values at the forefront of all our work. It's a fantastic idea and would allow all bureaus to be aligned together.

Chief Lovell: This would be centering in a way that's helpful. Having our values clearly stated would set the tone for work going forward.

Meeting adjourned

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

MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED BY THE CHARTER COMMISSION

Meeting Chat

16:07:42 From Karol Collymore (she/her) to All panelists : Yes, I was going to say that too :)

16:40:39 From Andrew Speer : Is the implementation of an IMT model still a way to manage crisis while still have a central management model? By still achieving continuity but making decision making more efficient during crisis.

16:44:27 From Becca Uherbelau (she/her) to All panelists : Question for all directors: We've heard a number of examples of challenges with a commission form of government and how a strong mayor/city manager can lead to increased efficiency, collaboration, and clarity of purpose but can you speak to the potential consequence of concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals and what accountability to the community looks like under that model.

17:01:53 From Mike Myers : Thank you everyone

17:02:07 From Vadim Mozyrsky to All panelists : Thanks everyone for your time and insights.

17:02:13 From Sara Boone, she/her, Fire Chief : Thank you!!!

17:02:15 From Debbie Kitchin : Thank you for your time today

17:02:16 From Comm. Lewis (He/Him) : Thank you for your time