



Independent District Commission

Charter Commission Public Hearing March 22, 6:00 p.m. Minutes

Attendance

Commissioners					
Name	Present	Absent	Name	Present	Absent
Amanda Manjarrez	X		Neisha Saxena	X	
Arlene Kimura	X		Paul Lumley	X	
David Michael Siegel	X		Sharon VanSickle-Robbins	X	
DaWayne Judd	X		Steve Fleishman	X	
Edie VanNess	X				
Joshua Laurente	X		Alternate Commissioners		
Kari Chisholm		X	Marta Hanson	X	
Lamar Wise	X		Ransom Green III	X	
Melody Valdini	X		Sohrab Vossoughi		X

Staff Present			
Sofia Alvarez-Castro, City of Portland	Adam Briggs, City of Portland	Diana Shiplet, City of Portland	

Welcome

Sofia welcomed everyone to the public hearing. Adam provided zoom logistics and information on how to access language interpretation.

Co-chair Saxena welcomed everyone, thanked community for taking the time to provide input, and outlined the meeting agenda.

Educational Presentation

Co-chair Saxena provided an overview of the Independent District Commission process as outlined in the Portland City Charter, including roles and requirements, required public hearings, and commission timeline.

Co-chair VanSickle-Robbins provided an overview of the district criteria, which is legally required by Federal law. The first is the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, also known as “one-person, one-vote” and requires that districts be of roughly equal population based on Census input. The second is the voting rights act of 1965, in section 2, which prohibits districts intended or in effect to be racially discriminatory. She provided information on the voter approved district criteria and outlined what data sets could be used to help define these criteria.

Co-chair VanSickle-Robbins informed the attendees that the commission would like to have community input on two questions:

1. Should the commission consider any additional district plan criteria?

2. Should the commission be more explicit about the equitable distribution of public goods and services in the criteria?

Public Testimony

Wynne Furth – Lives east of the river. Stated when she moved to Portland she was bewildered by the current form of government, and she looks forward to the new form of government. Thanked the commission for its work in bringing about this change. Stated that what is most important about this process is that at least nine commissioners agree on a map – nothing could generate greater public confidence in the process. She stated that she supports flexibility in the criteria because the group doesn't know yet what the data, trial maps, etc. may show. Encouraged group to use the broadest set of criteria as possible to be able to use all the data they can. Struggled to figure out how being more explicit with the equitable distribution of public goods and services. Everyone knows that fixing inequities is a major driving force in the new form of government but is unsure what that means for districting. Are the four districts supposed to have equal distribution of goods and services? Or are districts to be judged by their ability to elect representatives who will promote the equitable distribution? This is very speculative, and she is opposed. There are other goals like increasing civic engagement which likely matter more.

Richard Gronostajski - Lives in northwest Portland and is the treasurer of the Northwest Neighborhood Association but is speaking for himself tonight, not the association. Wants to be absolutely certain that council members are required to live within the districts that they are elected. This will make them accountable to the members of that district. Council members should also have offices within the district and the council members should decide to split each district into three parts so that one member is responsible for an area and members of the public know who to contact. Stated that Portland is a great place to live, and he admires the city for going through this experimental process of redesigning its government to be more responsive to the needs of the people. Thanked group for its efforts in trying to collect as much information as possible.

Jenny Lee – Is testifying on behalf of The Coalition of Communities of Color. They encourage the commission to use the district criteria set forth in the amended charter and to continue the discussions of what the commission will need to identify communities of common interest without adding formal additional criteria. They believe that this districting commission's public engagement process will be the most impactful way to identify what features or communities should be taken into consideration. There is a great deal of complexity across the city – geography, demographics, institutions, histories, and other ways of experiencing Portland – making meaning of this would be best done through existing criteria. The Coalition would like to see as many maps as possible so that Portlanders can shape the final lines through public engagement and the existing criteria will give the most opportunities and options for maps. Encouraged the commission to listen to community members about what data is important to them. Also encouraged the commission to formally note for the record that understanding distribution of goods and services is important data for identifying communities of common interest but should not be a criteria.

Madelyn Elder – Lives in north Portland. Encouraged the commission to use the criteria outlined in Measure 26-228 and move onto what will be the challenging but also fun work of balancing criteria to develop district maps. Stated that a perfect map is impossible, but a map to move Portland into a future with more representation is possible. Equitable distribution of goods and services is an important element of legislating by the new city council and is best achieved by this commission figuring out how not to break up communities of common interest. Regarding comments about adhering to

neighborhood boundaries, please keep in mind that the creation of many of these neighborhoods was due to development patterns by wealthy, white, landowners. And, therefore, a concern for equity is undermined by rigid adherence to those neighborhoods. She stated that it's likely new community-based alliances will form due to the district lines and elections which facilitate better representation. She thanked the commission for its work.

Gordon H. – Stated that Portland previously had a commission similar to what you propose. It was changed because of corruption. He hopes that the commission stays aware of this corruption possibility. Hopes that the commission takes the population of the Portland area and divide it four equal squares by population and do not gerrymander. He does not want a district map which looks like federal maps used to in Georgia.

Bob Weinstein – Lives in northwest Portland. Thanked the commission for its work. Suggested the commission focus on the one criteria constitutionally required – the one-person, one-vote requirement mandated by the 14th Amendment. This is due to many lawsuits and court decisions regarding district criteria. He also urged the commission to not add any additional criteria. Adding criteria means there is potential for straying from the one-person, one-vote requirement and the greater chance the map may be litigated. He stated that there doesn't appear to be an explicit or implicit requirement in city Charter for the commission to add criteria. He anticipates that in developing maps with the help of demographers and specialists the commission is likely to find there are only a few options for consideration which meet legal requirements.

Robin Tokmakian – Lives in northwest Portland. She stated that it's important for everyone to understand how city resources are spread throughout the city and how different parts of the city may or may not have access to similar resources such as parks, supermarkets, street trees or libraries. This data may be useful in determining districts but does not need to be a criteria. This is because the districts will be quite large and may appear to have equal resources but when you view it at neighborhoods you can see the inequities. Additionally, having it as criteria rather than just useful data, may have unforeseen and negative consequences. Neighborhood associations or coalitions were originally formed due to Portland's form of government and the difficulty residents had in reaching elected officials. With the new form of government residents will have three people to speak to who can focus on community needs. So, neighborhood association boundaries may be a good place to start but should not be a criteria. Thanked the commission for its work.

Melanie Billings-Yun – Former Charter Commission member. Stated that the reason she encouraged the commission to add the criteria of compactness. It's because she gave over 150 presentations and heard from community members, largely in the east of Portland. What she continually heard was that they felt they did not have a voice in the city and did not matter to elected officials. It's no surprise that, given these feelings there is very low voter turnout in Portland's east side. When discussing districting with community members, and that it would give them a voice, they expressed suspicion. Even when she stated that it would give these historically disenfranchised community members equal voice to the wealthiest community members, they were concerned that maps would be drawn in a way to combine them with richer areas of town so that their voices still would not be heard. That's why the commission agreed to include the criteria of compactness. This was a promise to those people that the commission had heard their concerns and that the commission wanted to equally and equitably represent all Portlanders. She stated that this is why she opposes adding additional criteria around equitable distribution of public goods and services – as it may dampen the voices of the underserved by lumping

them in with the more fortunate and more politically active neighbors. Thanked the commission for their time.

Ryan Nielsen – Representing LiUNA, local 97. This union typically represents “blue collar” workers and the union hall is located in outer east Portland. They have discussed the lack of infrastructure and the under investment in east Portland. Asked the commission, in a city where we are lacking critical infrastructure in key areas, even with so many people prepared to work and skilled in their trades, why do we keep having this problem? He believes that the answer is that we have not centered working-class people in governance structure of our city. When talking about what a community of interest is, that should capture much of the important issues around distribution of public goods and services. He asked that the commission heavily weigh the needs of those areas of the city currently underserved when drawing the districts.

Reflections on public input

Comm. VanNess requested clarity on what is intended by “goods and services”. Is the request to look at this to ensure underserved communities and goods and services are not disconnected as a result of district boundaries? This seems strange because the wealthier areas don’t have many businesses so can’t connect goods and services with equity or inequity.

Comm. Manjarrez thanked community for tonight’s input. The question was put out for her own clarity. When we think of places of interest, those may be imbedded in geographic boundaries or they may be communities of interest, and so was curious about whether there was a need to be more explicit. What she heard today was a little confusion about the question – what we’re talking about isn’t about equitable access, which is a policy goal, but instead wanted to bring a more assets-based lens to the maps. In her experience of Portland, particularly around culturally specific communities, she has seen the incredible assets they bring to their neighborhoods. Where are we looking at where things like neighborhood parks or Sun Schools and which districts are connect to those? It’s less about creating maps to give access to neighborhoods historically underserved and more about how we are setting everyone up for success.

Comm. Fleischman stated he is glad the commission asked the question of the community and appreciated the thoughtful input. He has an impression of the input that there is concern about equity but no appetite for adding criteria.

Comm. VanNess stated she appreciated the testimony. Is concerned that we’re conflating goods and services. Believes that all the commissioners are coming at this work with a lens of equity and so adding additional vague and ambiguous criteria could leave the map open for legal challenge. She stated she does not believe that adding criteria is necessary because the current criteria will be evaluated with a lens of equity.

Comm. Saxena stated she appreciated the testimony and the discussion, especially the context around the criteria of compactness. She got the impression that the consideration of goods and services should be considered as a data set rather than as a criteria. The commission’s ability to create a multiple map scenarios is important but might not be available with additional criteria.

Co-chair Saxena thanked the community for input. Reflected that what she heard tonight was to not add additional criteria. She reminded the group that public input is open until April 3rd at 8:00 a.m. Commission can then review this input and deliberate on all of the input at the meeting of April 5th.

Comm. Lumley stated that the main reason he applied for this commission was that he lives east of 205 and wanted to bring that lived experience to this commission's work, particularly around the lack of public services. Thanked everyone who gave public comment tonight. It was informative, and he looks forward to hearing more input from the community later.

Next Steps

Co-chair VanSickle Robbins stated that the public comment period closes on April 3rd at 8:00am and explained the many ways to provide input or stay engaged with the commissions work. Thanked everyone who testified tonight.

Next commission meeting is April 5, 6:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned, 7:10 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Diana Shiplet, SPOT Coordinator

Q&A

Q: All commissioners should be required to live in the districts that they represent. Their Tax home should be in the district.

Q: Do you have a well defined time-line of how to get this done in time?

A: Yes, here on our website is our timeline and workplan:

<https://www.portland.gov/transition/districtcommission/districtcommissionoverview>

Q: Thank you this was answered clearly.

Q: Richard - they DO have to live in their district. They will NOT be splitting up the district the way you asked. Most of us voters wanted that but unfortunately we were not allowed to vote on these things as separate line items to work out those types of details, they wanted it to be this way, without one person being held accountable for one area, in their words, to 'avoid NIMBYism'.

Q: I feel like it would behoove the conversation to give a better definition of what creating extra / new criteria actually means. It sounds like most people providing feedback are asking for considerations, not mandatory criteria. As Bob is explaining right now!

Q: I think Melanie Billings-Yun raises a good point: if resources are not distributed evenly, then drawing boundaries "equitably" ends up masking that inequality. (As an extreme example, imagine if parks were located west of I-205. If all districts were required to have an equal number of parks, not only would that require the eastern neighborhoods to be split up, there would be no commissioners representing people who would advocate for building more parks for those communities)

Q: I don't need to testify, but one very specific question as you evaluate the criteria testimony tonight might be simply how to handle the INEQUITY felt in East Portland. Do you need to be careful that you inadvertently *pack* the lack of city services into a single district? If less wealthy East Portland could elect FOUR commissioners, does compactness work against that?

Q: Thank you all for your thoughtful consideration of everyone's comments.

Q: If my comment is confusing (I did kinda type it out quickly) I could try to clarify on stream.

Meeting Chat

18:21:57 From Commissioner VanNess to Everyone:

Thank you co-chairs for such a thoughtful and helpful presentation!!!

18:22:10 From Commissioner Fleischman to Everyone:

+1

18:22:15 From Commissioner Hanson to Hosts and panelists:

+1 !

18:25:37 From Sofia Alvarez, City of Portland to Everyone:

Order of public comment: Wynne F.

Richard G.

Lewellyn R.

Jenny L.

Madelyn E.

Gordon H.

Bob W.

Robin T.

Chris Cobey

Melanie B.

Ryan N.

Tim L.

18:36:37 From Sofia Alvarez, City of Portland to Everyone:

If you are just coming into the hearing and would like to testify you can sign up, by "raising" your virtual Zoom hand. If you need help, we have the Q&A open. Thanks!

18:48:19 From Commissioner Saxena (she/her) to Everyone:

really appreciate all the thoughtful testimony

18:48:42 From Commissioner Hanson to Everyone:

Likewise! Really appreciate the perspectives that everyone has shared.

18:52:48 From Sofia Alvarez, City of Portland to Everyone:

Folks listening in who are just joining, if you would like to testify please let us know by raising your Zoom hand and we will note that. Commissioners are reflecting on the comments received.

18:53:09 From Sofia Alvarez, City of Portland to Everyone:

Richard G., we see you'd like to testify, we are brining you in!

18:53:49 From Commissioner Saxena (she/her) to Everyone:

I'm really glad we asked the question

19:03:36 From Commissioner Saxena (she/her) to Everyone:

good point!

19:06:17 From Commissioner Siegel to Everyone:

I think it's important for all to know that equity is among the core values we adopted and bought into as a Commission. It's of utmost importance to us.