

TO: Mayor Wheeler
FROM: Government Transition Advisory Committee
CC: Commissioners Gonzalez, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan
DATE: August 11, 2023
SUBJECT: Role of the Government Transition Advisory Committee

The Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) is a group of Portlanders appointed by the City Council in March 2023 who are committed to the important role of ensuring that the Charter amendments approved by voters in November 2022 are implemented effectively, efficiently, and in alignment with the City’s core values.

In the past month, we have realized that there is not a shared understanding between Committee members, the Mayor, and City Council about the role of GTAC. Though we are in our positions until March 2025, implementation is already well underway, and so we seek to address this urgently so we can provide clarity to everyone—ourselves, the public, City leadership, and the transition team.

The purpose of this letter is to describe instances where we have noted discrepancies in our understandings of GTAC’s role, to outline the effect this has on the community, and to clarify GTAC’s role so we can move forward with a shared understanding and commitment.

Our understanding of the Government Transition Advisory Committee’s role

As stated by Council Resolution 232-2023, the role of GTAC is:

- Ensuring implementation of November 2022 voter-approved Charter amendments is done effectively and efficiently, following the City’s core values of anti-racism, equity, communication, collaboration, transparency, and fiscal responsibility.
- Maintaining open and consistent communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders throughout the transition, and ensuring input is meaningfully integrated into the City’s implementation of the November 2022 voter-approved Charter amendments. Other than districting-specific public input, serving as the primary solicitor and repository of public input related to the transition.

- Advising the City on the November 2022 voter-approved Charter amendments transition plan and community education and engagement plan, including project schedule and project budget, resource allocation and funding strategy.

Additionally, Council Resolution 232-2023 clearly states that “GTAC will develop its own workplan”.

With this information, GTAC has met regularly since May 2023 to develop a work plan that speaks to the broad experience, expertise, and interests of the group, including city budgeting, voter and candidate education, city staffing and administration, council operations, change management, legislative process, policy development, organizational development, and community engagement. As we have begun to employ this work plan, implicit in our understanding of our roles has been:

- A. GTAC will be informed and able to deliberate and make recommendations on everything associated with effective and efficient implementation, and
- B. City leadership will give credence to the Committee's advice, while keeping us abreast of their plans and actions so that we can best share about the transition with the public.

Inconsistent application of the Government Transition Advisory Committee’s role

There have been several instances that have eroded our confidence that there is a shared understanding of the role of GTAC between the Committee and City leadership.

Example#1: City Organization

At the GTAC meeting on June 6, 2023, slides 20-21 of the presentation materials indicated that GTAC would "provide advice to Council" on code 3.02 revisions, but NOT on city organization under the City Administrator. After the meeting, GTAC alternate member Terry Harris wrote to the transition team to seek clarification and received a response on June 16 stating that "GTAC was not envisioned to deliberate" on city organization work. Mayoral staffer Hayley Blonsley reinforced this on July 18, sharing that city structure and organizational expertise was not a criterion for Committee member selection. This had never been communicated at any point prior and came as a surprise since several GTAC members have worked with local governments regarding structure and process and volunteered to serve with the understanding that this was part of their charge.

Since the organization of the City under the newly-created City Administrator role is a crucial component of Charter implementation, it is clear to us that this

falls firmly within GTAC's role of "advising the City on the November 2022 voter-approved Charter amendments transition plan".

Example #2: Charter Reform Proposals and Work Session

On July 13, 2023, GTAC members learned through media outlets that Commissioner Gonzalez and Commissioner Ryan were exploring three potential proposals to alter the Charter amendments that were approved by Portland voters in November 2022. In interviews with these media outlets, the Commissioners noted that they were pursuing these proposals because of feedback from Portlanders about the Charter implementation process.

As the primary solicitor and repository of public input related to the transition, we feel it would be fair to assume that GTAC would be consulted on public feedback regarding Charter implementation. However, there was no notice or outreach to the Committee about the proposals, nor about the Charter Reform Amendments Referendum Work Session on July 18. This undercut both the advisory role of GTAC and our ability to effectively engage with the community, while endangering public trust in the process through actions that were not transparent, collaborative, or well-communicated.

Owing to these experiences, we find ourselves unclear about how we can fulfill our role of ensuring effective and efficient implementation of the Charter amendments. Crucially, this means that we cannot carry out a vital task: ensuring transition alignment with the City's core values of transparency, communication, and collaboration. Finally, due to this lack of clarity, there has been a tremendous waste of precious meeting and staff time debating our role.

Impact on the community

Lack of clarity about GTAC's role harms the community at large. As Mayoral staff member Hayley Blonsley noted at GTAC's July 18 meeting, a primary reason for convening GTAC was to build confidence about Charter implementation in the community, acknowledging general public distrust in government and the well-documented opposition to elements of Charter reform that have been expressed by the Mayor and several council members.

Without clarity on the role of GTAC, the community cannot benefit from the trust and accountability provided by an oversight body, lacks education on important aspects of the transition, and is deterred from engaging in the full scope of the transition.

Request for clarification and explanation

We believe that the two examples described point to a broader lack of clarity about the role of GTAC. As such, we are requesting the following:

1. Written clarification from the Mayor regarding which aspects of Charter implementation are NOT within GTAC's scope, along with an explanation of why this is the case. As the Council resolution is written, it is the role of this Committee to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of all aspects of the Charter amendments.
2. Written clarification from the Mayor regarding how City Council, the Mayor, and GTAC communicate with each other regarding activities related to Charter implementation moving forward so that GTAC can fulfill its role of gathering and providing feedback from the community and be prepared to answer questions from the community when they arise.

Please respond to these requests in writing no later than Monday, August 21, 2023. In addition, we request a meeting between you and a handful of Committee members to ensure we understand your perspective.

Again, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the City of Portland, and we are committed to doing all that we can to ensure the Charter amendments approved by voters in November 2022 are implemented in the most efficient and effective manner possible. We look forward to establishing a shared understanding about that role so we can best support and advise the excellent work of the transition team, while continuing to educate and engage the public.

Sincerely,

David Burnell and Lory Hefele, Co-Chairs

On behalf of the Government Transition Advisory Committee