

Portland Charter Commission

Progress Report #1

February 2022

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
Background	2
Phased Approach & Timeline	2
Desired Outcomes for Charter Reform	3
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	3
Partnership with the Coalition of Communities of Color	4
Community Engagement Cohort	4
Public Comment	4
Community Listening Sessions	5
Community Surveys	8
Community Organization Policy Discussions	9
Discussions with City Council & Bureau Directors	10
AREAS OF AGREEMENT	10
Agreement #1: To shift the constituency of City Council from all at-large seats and to increase the size of City Council	11
Agreement #2: To shift from the commission form of government to a form of government in which City Councilors do not directly manage bureaus	13
Agreement #3: To shift to a form of voting that allows a decision in one election, eliminates the primary, and adopts a voting method that captures people's preferences	14
WHAT'S NEXT?	16

INTRODUCTION

Since December 2021, the 20-member, City Council appointed Portland Charter Commission has been deeply engaged in extensive research and ongoing public and community engagement to shape and inform policies on two foundational issues to the City of Portland and its residents: the city's form of government and the city council elections.

This Progress Report will provide an overview and analysis of all the engagement to date, outline shared agreements around the two policy areas and the problems they address, offer benefits and critiques of different policy approaches, and outline next steps. The purpose of the Progress Report is to provide Portlanders with a general sense of where the Charter Commission is headed and provide information on the policies under consideration in a transparent and accessible way. This report does not represent any final decisions made by the Charter Commission.

Background

What is a city charter?

The city charter is a guiding document that establishes the government system and structure of a city. It defines how the government is set up, how city leaders are elected, and the roles and responsibilities of those leaders. The city charter functions as the city's constitution – it creates the city as a legal entity, authorizes city powers, and outlines the basic broad fundamentals of city government. Portland's city's charter can ONLY be amended by a vote of the people.

What is charter review?

The city charter requires that at least once every 10 years, City Council appoint a 20-member Charter Commission to review and recommend changes to the charter. City Council appointed the current Charter Commission in December 2020.

So, what's the process for making changes to the city charter?

There are 20 Charter Commissioners participating in the charter review process. If 15 or more of them agree to a recommended change, those recommendations go directly to the ballot for Portlanders to vote on. If 11 to 14 Commissioners agree to a recommended change, then those recommendations go to City Council. City Council will then decide whether to refer the recommendation to the ballot as-is, modify it, or do nothing. Again, it is only by a vote of Portlanders that the charter may be changed.

Phased Approach & Timeline

In summer 2021, the Charter Commission decided to approach the charter review process in two phases – meaning two sets of issues and two election cycles.

We are currently in the first phase and are focused on two issues - form of government and city council elections. The second phase will begin later this year. At this time the set of issues for the second phase have not yet been selected.

The Charter Commission intends to put its recommendations on form of government and city council elections on the November 2022 ballot. The Commission prioritized the November 2022 election because it's the election with the highest voter turnout during the time the Commission is working, and the Commission believes that the most Portlanders as possible should decide these foundational issues. To qualify for the November 2022 ballot, the Commission's recommendations need to be finalized no later than early July 2022, due to State law.

Desired Outcomes for Charter Reform

The Charter Commission began its work by agreeing that any potential charter reforms would be evaluated based on their ability to advance these outcomes:

1. A participatory and growing democracy with more voices being heard in elections
2. An accessible and transparent government with Councilors who are easy to reach
3. A reflective government with Councilors who look like the community they represent
4. A responsive government with Councilors who understand your community needs
5. An accountable government with Councilors who answer to the people
6. A trustworthy government with Councilors who safeguard democracy

There is additional information about the desired outcomes on the Charter Commission's [website](#).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The important work of charter reform requires engaging Portlanders across neighborhoods, lived experiences, and backgrounds. The Charter Commission is committed to a community-driven process to inform its decision-making and to having an equitable, accessible, and transparent community engagement process.

The Charter Commission's Community Engagement Committee co-creates community education and engagement strategies with our community partners. The committee meets monthly to plan and evaluate engagement strategies for the Charter Commission.

Table 1: Engagement by the numbers

Engagement	Number
Survey responses	4,022
People receiving monthly email updates	929
Community listening sessions (partner & Commission hosted)	26
Participants at listening sessions (partner & Commission hosted)	580
Public comments received	787
Hours of verbal public comment	5 hours 10 minutes
Public meetings	67
Charter review briefings & presentations	48
Policy discussions with community organizations	22
Media articles or interviews	37

Note 1. Includes public comment submitted through 01/18/2022

Partnership with the Coalition of Communities of Color

The Charter Commission partnered with the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) on the design and implementation of community education and engagement activities to meaningfully engage Portland's diverse communities in the charter review process with a focus on Portlanders who have been historically left out of city hall decision-making.

The Coalition of Communities Color partnered with a 12-member collaborative that includes the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Hacienda CDC, Africa House, Pacific Islander & Asian Family Center, Muslim Educational Trust, Native American Youth & Family Center, Street Roots, Slavic & Eastern European Center, Unite Oregon, Urban League of Portland, Verde, and Next Up. All these partners bring deep community relationships and cultural expertise, with extensive experience in community engagement sessions, outreach, and trainings. The primary focus of CCC's collaborative is culturally-specific outreach and community engagement sessions with partner organizations. The secondary focus is broad multiracial outreach to the public at large while ensuring that all outreach materials are accessible to BIPOC communities, with anti-racist engagement strategies.

Community Engagement Cohort

The Charter Commission also established a community engagement cohort made up of seven community-based organizations. Cohort members develop ways for community members to provide input – and then engage the communities they serve to participate in charter review. This approach was designed to elevate voices the city needs to hear, ensure that engagement is culturally relevant, reduce barriers to participation and compensate community organizations for their expertise. Participating cohort members include Taking Ownership PDX, Hygiene4All, Equitable Giving Circle, Rosewood Initiative, East Portland Action Plan, Rohingya Youth Association of Portland (RYAP), and Sunrise Movement PDX.

Cohort members have engaged their communities through various methods that meet community needs and reduce barriers for participation. Engagement has included in-language (Rohingya) stakeholder interviews, community surveys, various charter 101 presentations including in Spanish, Nepali, and Rohingya, community events with partner organizations, newsletter outreach, and video creation.

Public Comment

As of January 2022, the Charter Commission received 787 public comments through an online comment form, email, or a little over five hours of verbal testimony. Of the 787 public comment received 54% mention form of government, 39% mention city council elections, 16% mention homelessness, 11% mention climate justice, 6% mention safety, and 5% mention police.

Of the written comments that mention form of government and city council elections, the two most common themes are to

- Shift away from the commission form of government, and
- Move to district-based elections.

In the public comments, there is preference for a professional manager to oversee bureaus. In addition, about 70 written comments recommend increasing the size of City Council, generally to between 6 and 15

Councilors, and about 60 written comments recommend an alternative voting method with a preference for ranked choice voting.

Who submitted public comment?

The only demographic data the Charter Commission has for public commenters is zip code data and we only have that for about one quarter of commentors. Of those, 34% live in North/Northeast Portland, 29% live in Southeast Portland, 17% live on the Westside, 7% live in East Portland, 10% live in the Portland-metropolitan area, and 3% live outside the Portland-metropolitan area.

Community Listening Sessions

The Charter Commission and our partners hosted 26 community listening sessions with a total of 580 participants. Community listening sessions provided an opportunity for Portlanders to learn about charter review and engage in small group discussions about their lived experiences and perspectives. No community is a monolith, each participant is an individual with their own set of lived experiences and opinions, and these reports only capture the perspectives of those who participated in the events. This information should not be interpreted as universal opinions or preferences from any community.

To educate community members about the charter review process in an accessible way, the Coalition of Communities of Color decided to design two-part sessions. The Charter Commission's listening sessions mirrored CCC's structure and discussion topics. The first part of CCC's sessions, titled the Charter Review 101 Workshop, took place in November of 2021. Participants from the first workshop were prioritized for part two of the series, which took place in January 2022. The objective of part one was to inform community members about what the Charter Commission is and to present foundational education about the topics the Commission is exploring - form of government and city council elections. The objective of part two was to present a more refined set of proposals the Charter Commission is currently considering and to gather feedback, concerns, and opinions from community members about potential changes to the form of government and city council elections. The discussions primarily focused on the form of government alternatives, district representation models, city council size, and alternative voting methods. However, participants shared many other opinions on the Charter Commission's potential proposed recommendations.

November 2021 community listening sessions

In November 2021 our partners hosted part one of the listening sessions, through hosted engagement by the Coalition of Communities of Color collaborative. Five key themes emerged from this engagement.

1. A lack of information and knowledge about the city, its services, bureaus, and processes due to barriers to access and a lack of outreach and communication from the city.
2. City government does not adequately or equitably respond to the community's needs or concerns due to the city not taking sufficient action to meet community needs and community voices not being meaningfully centered in decision-making process.
3. Accessibility is the main barrier to participating in City Council elections. Accessibility concerns included lack of voting education, voter registration, citizenship status, location, the process of voting and language.

4. There's a disconnect between the community and candidates. Candidates don't know the lived experiences or issues that communities face, and/or feeling that none of the candidates reflect their values or interests.
5. Communities prefer some form of geographic or localized representation.

In November 2021, the Charter Commission also hosted part one of their listening sessions. Six key themes and ideas emerged from this engagement.

1. Portlanders want change
2. Portlanders want to be heard by city hall
3. Portlanders want a government that creates positive movement on issues that matter to us
4. Portlanders want all of us to be enthusiastic about voting
5. Shift to a form of government in which City Commissioners do not directly manage bureaus
6. Shift to district-based elections

Some additional solutions included increase the size of City Council, reform campaign finance, adopt a voting method that captures people's preferences, increase access to voting, adopt participatory budgeting, and there was variation on whether primaries are beneficial.

The full reports of the November 2021 listening sessions can be found on the Charter Commission's [website](#).

January 2022 community listening sessions

In January 2022, the Coalition of Communities of Color collaborative hosted part two of the sessions. Nine key themes emerged from this engagement.

1. Participants elevated the importance of accountability, regardless of the form of government
2. Participants supported shifting away from the commission form of government
3. Overall, participants did not have a clear preference between a Mayor-Council or Council-Manager form of government
4. Participants preferred district representation for City Council seats
5. Participants preferred a model of multi-member districts with multiple elected leaders per district
6. Participants raised concerns about the districting process and called for an equitable and community-centered process
7. Participants supported an increased City Council size
8. Participants supported the shift to an alternative voting method rather than Portland's "pick one" method
9. Most participants preferred ranked choice voting as the alternative voting method

In January 2022, the Charter Commission also hosted part two of the listening sessions. Thirteen key themes and ideas emerged from this engagement.

1. Change is overdue
2. Portlanders are unclear who is responsible for different city functions and who to hold accountable
3. A desire for elected leaders to work collaboratively
4. Portlanders want more representation
5. Preference for district-based elections

6. Slight preference for multi-member over single-member districts
7. Shift to a form of government in which City Commissioners do not directly manage bureaus
8. Portland needs clear roles and responsibilities and lines of authority
9. Portlanders were split on Council-Manager or Mayor-Council form of government
10. Portland needs an improved voting system
11. Preference to get rid of primaries
12. Reform campaign finance
13. Need for robust civic education

A full report of all the January listening sessions will be made available by the end of February.

Who participated in the community listening sessions?

Table 2: Charter Commission & Community Partner Hosted Community Listening Session Totals

	CCC & Partner Hosted	Charter Commission Hosted	Total
Number of listening sessions	22	4	26 Sessions
Number of participants	373	207	580 engaged

Note 2. "CCC & Partner sessions" includes sessions through CCC, APANO, Hacienda CDC, IRCO, MET, NAYA, Next Up, Street Roots, Unite Oregon, Urban League, & Verde.

Of the sessions referenced above, collectively, in November 2021 and January 2022, a total of 580 participants were engaged. Of the 373 engaged through our partner-hosted sessions we have demographic information on 70% of session participants for racial and ethnic community identified and 65% of session participants for additional communities identified. Of the 207 engaged through the Commission-hosted sessions we have demographic information on 27% of session participants. All demographic questions were optional, and it's important to note that these percentages reflect the responses of participants who specifically responded to these questions. Additionally, not every participant who attended the listening sessions felt comfortable disclosing their demographic information.

Table 3: Racial & Ethnic Communities

Racial & Ethnic Community Identified	CCC & Partner Hosted	Charter Commission Hosted
Black, African American, or African	19.4%	1.8%
Latinx	30.1%	3.7%
Asian	15.6%	0%
Pacific Islander	5.3%	0%
Native American/Native Alaskan	12.9%	0%
Middle Eastern	< 2 %	1.8%
White/Western European	19.8%	88.8%
Slavic/Eastern European	3.0%	0%
Don't know	< 1%	0%
Don't want to answer	< 3%	N/A
Other (Please List): <i>Biracial, Arab-American, Ashkenazi, Taiwanese, Hmong, Ashkenazi, & Jewish.</i>	6.8%	5.5%

Note 3. "CCC & Partner sessions" includes sessions through CCC, APANO, Hacienda CDC, IRCO, MET, NAYA, Next Up, Street Roots, Unite Oregon, Urban League, & Verde. The demographic information in this table is from 70% of participants from CCC-Partner Sessions and 27% of participants from the Charter Commission hosted sessions.

Table 4: Additional Communities they identify with

Additional Communities they identify with	CCC & Partner Hosted	Charter Commission Hosted
Renter	49.3%	12.9%
Low-income	48.1%	11.1%
Transit dependent	14.8%	9.2%
Unhoused/person experiencing houselessness	< 3%	3.7%
Disabled/person with a disability	11.1%	7.4%
LGBTQ+ community	18.1%	7.4%
Immigrant	32.9%	3.7%
Refugee	6.9%	0%
Retired	N/A	44.5%
Other (Please List): <i>Property owner, citizen, older, business owner, taxpayer, long term resident, veteran, Chuukese, first-generation, first-time homeowner, Muslim, student, Taiwanese American</i>	10.6%	25.9%
None	N/A	9%

Note 4. "CCC & Partner sessions" includes sessions through CCC, APANO, Hacienda CDC, IRCO, MET, NAYA, Next Up, Street Roots, Unite Oregon, Urban League, & Verde. The demographic information in this table is from 65% of participants from CCC-Partner Sessions and 27% of participants from the Charter Commission hosted session. Please note that the CCC's survey did not have a choice option for "retired" or "none."

Community Surveys

In November 2021, in partnership with the Coalition of Communities of Color, the Charter Commission launched a multi-lingual civic engagement survey that asked respondents how they want to participate in the charter review process. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and traditional and

simplified Chinese. CCC's partner organizations and others helped to broadly distribute the survey. In total, 1,036 survey responses were collected.

Most participants, 55.2%, responded that they know some to a little amount about the Charter Commission. 15.4% responded that they don't know anything about the Charter Commission. 31.2% of participants were somewhat comfortable interacting with our city government, and 10.2% were extremely uncomfortable.

Lastly, survey participants were also asked to share what would make it easier to be involved in the charter review process. Some themes in responses included: hosting events at varying times of the day, including evenings and weekends, offering language interpretation, providing skilled facilitators at events who are trusted members of the community, making intentions clear and building trust with the community, and providing more opportunities for the community to engage in open dialogue with Charter Commissioners. This data has helped the Commission inform charter review community education and engagement efforts to be responsive to various community needs and reduce participation barriers.

Who responded to the survey?

Of the 1,036 participants that took the survey 8.8% identified as Black, African American, or African, 7% identified as Latinx/e, 6.6% identified as Asian, < 3% identified as Pacific Islander, 5.5% identified as Native American or Native Alaskan, <1% identified as Middle Eastern, 4% identified as Slavic or Eastern European, 59% identified as White, and <3% declined to answer.

Phase I community priority survey

In December 2021, in partnership with the Coalition of Communities of Color, the Charter Commission launched a second multi-lingual survey that asked respondents how they would like to be served by the city government and how they would like to be represented by city leaders. This survey was designed to capture opinions from Portlanders about some of the Charter Commission's potential proposed recommendations. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Traditional and Simplified Chinese. In total, 2,977 survey responses were collected. A high-level summary of survey results will be available in mid-February and incorporated into our next progress report.

Community Organization Policy Discussions

The Charter Commission knows that Portland's community-based organizations are on the frontlines serving our communities, interacting with city government throughout their work, and have a wealth of knowledge and expertise on the policies the Commission is considering. The Commission has met with community-based organizations and groups to have policy discussions. Policy consultations are distinct from the engagements noted above and seek to understand organization-specific priorities, positions, and expertise on the policies the Commission is considering (compared to organizations engaging their constituents in charter review).

As of this progress report, the Commission held policy discussions with 22 community-based groups and engaged more than 80 people. The Commission will continue to outreach to organizations throughout the rest of the charter review process.

From these policy conversations, emerging themes include:

1. Slight preference for Council-Manager form of government with clear internal protocols for accountability
2. Preference for an equal and equitable distribution of power among elected officials
3. Portlanders need more representation
4. Preference for district-based elections
5. Portlanders have questions about how districts would impact displacement, as well as organizations' work, engagement, advocacy, and direct access to City Councilors
6. Slight preference for multi-member over single-member districts
7. Preference for a voting method that allows for historically underrepresented communities to be represented
8. Slight preference for ranked choice voting, over STAR, due to its simplicity
9. Post charter amendments, there will be a significant need for community education

Who participated in policy discussions?

The Commission met with the Urban League of Portland and Imagine Black, Somali American Council of Oregon, Regional Arts & Culture Council, Native American Youth & Family Center, Sunrise Movement PDX, Muslim Educational Trust, Self Enhancement Inc., Human Solutions, Verde, Bradley Angle House, Coalition of Communities of Color, Next Up, Hacienda CDC, Pacific Islander & Asian Family Center, Home Forward, African Youth and Community Organization, AFSCME, Unite Oregon, SEIU Local 49, Rosewood Initiative, East Portland Action Plan, and Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon.

Discussions with City Council & Bureau Directors

Early in the charter review process, the Charter Commission met with all city elected leaders and bureau directors to understand their lived experiences with our government and to hear their priorities in charter review. As part of these discussion, various key themes emerged.

- The commission form of government limits accountability, coordination, long-term strategic planning, and consistent bureau management
- There is duplication of efforts across bureaus
- There was interest in both a Mayor-Council form of government and Council-Manager form of government
- Changing our form of government is not a panacea to all our community problems

A recording of all these meetings is available on our [website](#).

AREAS OF AGREEMENT

Between summer 2021 and January 2022, the Charter Commission had two issue committees – one on the city's form of government and one on city council elections. The two subcommittees established initial research questions; built an understanding about current conditions and alternatives; agreed to early reforms; analyzed options for reforms; and heard from Portlanders through public comment and community listening sessions.

The Charter Commission currently has three areas of agreements. All of these are supported by a significant majority of Commissioners.

Agreement #1: To shift the constituency of City Council from all at-large seats and to increase the size of City Council

For more than 100 years, Portlanders have been electing City Councilors in an at-large system, meaning any eligible candidate in the city can run for office and be elected, regardless of their geographic location. Despite Portland's continued growth, especially within the last few decades, the number of seats on City Council has not kept up pace, depriving Portlanders of political representation fit for complex cities of our size and decreasing the sheer number of opportunities for diverse communities and interests to elect candidates of choice. Historically, candidates of choice for Black, Indigenous, and communities of color as well as other political minority groups have lacked access, power, and representation in Portland city hall. An accounting of the demographics of previous city commissioners shows that our elected representation was continually and disproportionately dominated by white, affluent, and male councilors despite a demographically diversifying city. Moreover, while city commissioners are elected at-large, city commissioners have resided in the Portland downtown area or west of the Willamette River in significantly higher proportions. These disparities are hard to ignore over the course of Portland's history and will remain persistent challenges without reforms of the underlying system.

Increased City Council Size

The City of Portland's current five-member City Council has not grown for more than 100 years, despite a nearly three-fold increase in the city population. This is a major problem. Portlanders are underrepresented compared to cities of similar size in the United States. Increasing the size of City Council increases the chance that Portlanders can find someone on Council who represents their interests. Expanded Council capacity should also improve government's ability to respond to large, complex problems facing our community. Increasing the size to a greater number can ensure that more leaders are responding to Portland's diverse communities and devote more time to passing new policies. To keep up with comparable cities, Portland will need to consider drastically increasing the size of council. The Commission is considering several options for representation style which will primarily drive determination of the number of city councilors. Currently the range of potential council members being considered by most Commissioners is 9 to 15.

Proponents of keeping a smaller City Council argue that having fewer voices to make decisions keeps those decisions more streamlined, but the dysfunction and gridlock seen in our current form of government would suggest that fewer voices offer no inherent upside. Increasing the number of seats on City Council may give underrepresented communities more voice in the decision-making body and offer a chance to help alleviate dissatisfaction with city council, because more Portlanders are able to elect leaders that represents their interest and understands their experiences.

Geographic Representation

The Commission agrees with the resounding calls from public input to consider shifting City Council from all at-large seats to a system that includes district-based geographic representation. The mayor, if it remains a chief executive position, would still be elected citywide. Both desire for guaranteed council representation from

more parts of the city and lowering financial barriers for candidates to compete were key considerations in favor of this reform.

Dividing Portland into districts so that elected leaders can represent geographic areas of the city instead of the entire city also helps ensure that East Portland residents, who have been continually shut out from representation and political attention in city hall despite making up a large part of the city population and landmass, have representation. The Commission believes that City Councilors should be easy to reach and having leaders represent certain parts of the city can make it easier for people to reach out when they have an issue. Having geographic based representation could also lend itself to more localized and neighborhood-based constituent services, and civic participation that is not dependent on Portlanders' ability to access downtown. Proponents of at-large elections have argued that an incumbent could have a stronghold on a district and prohibit newer voices from running for that seat, but our current system has given dominance to certain areas of the city (west side, inner NE and SE side) with the lion share of city councilors living in those neighborhoods.

Shifting the constituency of City Council from all at-large seats to district seats also addresses the problems associated with the significant financial barrier to a candidate running for office city wide. District-based elections will likely also reduce the cost of campaigning because candidates focus on a smaller constituency. Proponents for keeping at-large seats argue that it allows more people the flexibility to run, instead of being limited to run only in one geographic area. However, this is not how our history has played out, when only a handful of city councilors have been elected east of 82nd out of the dozens to have served. At best, at-large elections allow greater opportunities for financially resourced and politically well-connected candidates flexibility, and those individuals have been shown to be concentrated in particular areas of the city.

To achieve geographic representation, the Commission has looked at several alternatives including multi-member districts, single-member districts, and hybrid forms, where some council members represent districts, and some are elected at-large. No decision has been made, though most Commissioners favor the concept of multi-member districts. Multi-member districts for Portland would mean that more than one elected leader would represent each geographic area, and multiple city councilors would be elected out of the same pool of candidates. Multi-member districts acknowledge the simple truism that it's incredibly difficult for any one single elected individual to represent the diversity of viewpoints and experiences in a geographic district. Having multiple people allows for a greater chance that more viewpoints and experiences will be represented. Further exploration is underway around potential impacts districts may present on addressing issues that require city-wide coordination and planning, such as housing construction, zoning, public transportation and road networks, health and human services, and land-use planning to name a few.

Increasing opportunities for communities of color to elect their candidates of choice has also been a driving goal for the Commission. Portland does not have a geographic distribution of BIPOC residents that could allow for a drawing of a majority BIPOC district, nor does it have the level of income or age segregation and stratification that characterizes other large cities. The Commission continues to investigate reforms that might give smaller and historically under-represented communities (e.g., renters, young residents, communities of color, minor political parties) a greater ability to form coalitions to elect candidates of their choice.

The Commission is prioritizing multi-member districts because this system would help community members feel more connected to their elected leaders and increase accountability between communities and elected leaders. Because multiple leaders would represent one area of the city, this would also increase collaboration and coalition building for geographic issues between those leaders.

Districting and Redistricting Process

To suppose geographic district representation also supposes a process to draw official district lines. A majority of the Commission supports a districting ballot measure that outlines a districting process but would not propose a formal map for adoption. The Commission would look to propose a clear set of criteria to inform the drawing of the lines and a fair community-involved process to draw and implement district lines and district-based elections. The ballot measure referral for districts should articulate clear sets of criteria to inform the drawing of the lines and outline a community-driven process for how the district map will be drawn, as well include a time period for initial districting and subsequent redistricting. The Commission needs to support an engagement process to inform what is described in the ballot measure.

Agreement #2: To shift from the commission form of government to a form of government in which City Councilors do not directly manage bureaus

In our commission form of government, the mayor assigns each member of City Council a portfolio of bureaus to manage. When this form of government was created over 100 years ago, it allowed for cities and towns to be nimble in responding to urgent crises as the councilors could make quick decisions for their bureaus. Additionally, often individuals would run for a seat that reflected their professional technical area of expertise. In modern day Portland, however, this supposed benefit of the commission form of government is not being fulfilled. Additionally, the mayor assigns and reassigns bureaus and Portlanders do not know which bureaus a candidate for office will manage. The Commission continues to hear that this form of government creates siloes, avoids accountability, and lacks transparency. The commission form of government is not driving towards the outcomes that Portlanders have identified as their needs for clear, consistent delivery of services and responsiveness to pressing city issues.

Separation of Executive & Legislative Powers

The unanimous consensus of the Commission is that City Council members should not directly manage bureaus, and that a form of government should be pursued that would ensure a separation of executive (administrative) and legislative (policy) functions in city government. Removing the role of Commissioner-in-Charge of bureaus from City Commissioners and shifting bureau management elsewhere increases City Council and Council staff capacity to focus on legislation, such as making laws, engaging constituents, and bringing community voices into decision-making. Expanded legislative-focus and capacity will improve the quality of laws passed and overall government responsiveness. Removing the bureau management role should also create a more unified voice in city operations, more collaborative and cohesive responses, more consistent supervision of bureaus, create checks and balances through the separation of powers, and increase trust when laws are made.

Proper Role of City Councilors & Chief Executive

The Commission imagined the role of City Councilors when not directly managing bureaus to be traditionally legislative in nature, focusing on policymaking and oversight, with budget authority derived from the elected city council. By removing commissioners from overseeing bureaus, councilors will have additional capacity to focus on solving complex challenges and meeting with their constituency to draft policy and budgets. The imagined role of city councilors would include:

- Greater focus on policymaking (legislating)
- Increased constituent engagement, outreach and community relationship building
- Greater ability to link on-the-ground constituent engagement into effective policy reforms
- More collaboration on major initiatives and long-term strategic planning for the city
- Budgeting
- Oversight and accountability towards city bureaus and executive branch
- Intergovernmental relationship building, collaboration and communication
- Taking up issues that face their districts

The form that the chief executive will take it yet to be decided, but the desired function is clear: a single office in charge of coordinating and overseeing the city's civil service, its bureaus, programs, and resources to deliver a working government and implement city policy passed by the city council. The executive must operate within the bounds of policies set by the council, whether that is a mayor, a chief administrator, a managing director or city manager, or some combination of executive positions. The council has ultimate authority to make laws, set policies, determine annual budgets, and provide proper oversight on city programs and agencies. Several key factors being considered going forward are systems that have streamlined accountability, and numerous pathways for community members to shape city-wide strategies and budgeting to address public needs. The Commission is also examining the consequences of having a mayor that is or is not a member of City Council and when they would vote on issues brought to city council. In connection, the Commission is also exploring the question of appointment authority related to the power of appointing or removing bureau directors and other administrator leaders, and the process involved to provide political accountability.

Agreement #3: To shift to a form of voting that allows a decision in one election, eliminates the primary, and adopts a voting method that captures people's preferences

Currently in our nonpartisan City Council elections, several people can run for one at-large seat ahead of the May primary. If a candidate for that seat wins over 50% of the vote, then they win the race outright. If no one makes it over that threshold, then the top two candidates go to a runoff in the November general election. Proponents of keeping the primary argue that it allows for a process of elimination that can dwindle the number of candidates down to two, instead of having three or more candidates to decide from in the general

election. The Commission favors methods that elect candidates when the most people are likely to be voting. There are fundamental, structural differences between the May and November election turnout and composition of voters.

In our election system currently, no matter how many candidates are on your ballot, you only select one option, and a candidate can win no matter how small their vote share ends up. Simple and familiar as it may be, what if voters had expanded options to offer opinions on multiple candidates of their choice? What would we learn from the Portland electorate if we retained information about their top preferences, their second preferences, etc., and what type of candidates they liked more than others?

Alternative Form of Voting (Ballot Style)

A strong majority of Charter Commissioners have interest in adopting an alternative voting method to replace our current form of voting where voters are asked to choose one candidate, and the candidate who receives the most votes, even if they receive well short of a majority of the vote (50% of the vote plus one), is the sole person elected. There are many elements to voting, chief among them the ballot style, or how the ballot appears to voters and how many votes they are permitted to cast. Of the many alternative forms of voting explored, two key forms emerged as favorites on the Commission: ranked choice voting (RCV) in which voters rank candidates by preference on their ballots and Score Then Automatic Runoff (STAR) in which voters rate candidates on a scale of zero to five, with zero indicating no support and five indicating maximum support.

Key benefits from updating and modernizing our form of voting is to allow for voters to have a fuller accounting of their preferences for the election shown on ballot and allow them to vote their conscience and worry less about strategic voting. Portlanders today are asked to strategically calculate their vote to support a candidate they think can win the election - not necessarily for their preferred candidate in the race - or risk not having their vote impact the election at all. Voters are asked to privately and potentially compromise their vote. Instead, we could elect a city council that more accurately represents the diversity of viewpoints in Portland who would sort out compromise through governing. Adopting an alternative voting method could ensure a city council where more Portlanders are represented by someone from their top vote preferences.

The Commission felt that both RCV and STAR had their appeal and would help achieve desired outcomes, with a majority of Charter Commissioners preferring RCV. STAR voting is an innovative Oregon-invented ballot style but has not ever been implemented in any city or publicly elected body. RCV retains a more familiar ballot style to what voters are already accustomed to and has a track record of successful and recent implementation in other large U.S. cities, states, and counties.

Shifting to One November Election, Eliminating May Primary Election

The Commission has a goal of achieving a participatory and growing democracy with more voices being heard in elections. When more voices weigh in (in this case with their vote) on decisions that affect all Portlanders, election turnout is higher, and Portlanders feel their choice mattered. Eliminating May primaries ensures that our city council is elected during the November elections which typically has the highest average voter turnout. This will better ensure more Portlanders help elect their city leaders. Under our current two-stage election system, a different (May) electorate often sets up candidate choices for another (November) electorate -- an electorate whose turnout more consistently mirrors the demographics of the city.

Election turnout results from this century consistently show that as little as one-quarter to one-half as many Portland voters turn out in May as they do in November. Of the past 15 city council races (not including mayoral races), only five went on to the November election. This means that a large chunk of voters in Portland didn't get a real say in who their elected city council member was because there wasn't an election in November for them to consider. Although Portland City Council races are nonpartisan, they occur within the context of larger statewide May partisan primary elections, whose turnout is driven largely by the attraction of closed primary contests (where only registered party members can vote in their respective primaries), which skews the makeup of the electorate in Portland.

The opportunities to see different types of candidates run for office could be tremendous. This reform serves both candidates and their constituents. Moving to a single election would reduce financial barriers for candidates and widens the pool of candidates who would even consider running by reducing campaign timelines and costs of a campaigns. The cost of campaigning places additional burdens on candidates without personal wealth or connections to large financial backers. Campaigns would not start as early (Portland City Council candidates now regularly declare more than year out from November election), City Councilors running for re-election would spend fewer total days campaigning for votes and fundraising for dollars, and hopefully more days focused solely on enacting policies.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Charter Commission will continue making the case for our phase one reforms to Portlanders, reforms that have been carefully measured and researched over the last eight months of analysis and continue to be analyzed. The Commission will spend the next month and a half hearing from the public and key stakeholders and updating progress reports based on continued discussion and investigation into reform options, with an emphasis on finding a cohesive package of reforms that fit together and makes sense for Portland in 2022 and beyond. The goal is to conclude March 2022 with a preliminary vote on which recommendations to send for charter amendment drafting and financial analysis. The Commission will articulate the intent of any recommendations and let the legal and fiscal analysis show what is legally possible for the November 2022 ballot under the "single-subject" ballot measure principle.

The potential for phase two research is also planned during Spring 2022. Some potential topics for discussion include the role of the city charter as it relates to city agencies like Prosper Portland, the Auditor's Office, proposed reforms brought forward by the city bureaus themselves, changes needed for future charter review processes, an independent campaign finance commission, how the city charter relates to city actions around items like climate justice, transparency, participatory budgeting, and expanding what it means to be an eligible voter to include non-citizen residents have garnered interest.

Below is the timeline of key dates and upcoming activities related to phase one.

Key Dates	Activities
February 17 th	Charter Commission meets
March 3 rd	Progress report #2 released
March 10 th	Charter Commission meets and takes unlimited public comment
March 15 th	Form of government/city council elections cross-issue work session
March 24 th	Progress report #3 released
March 31 st	Charter Commission meets – preliminary vote on reform package to send to the City Attorney's Office to draft charter amendment language and descriptions and the City Budget Office for financial analysis
April	City Attorney's Office drafts charter amendments and descriptions and City Budget Office conducts financial analysis
May 1 st	Proposed charter amendments, descriptions, and financial analysis released
May 15 th -May 31 st	Commission holds public hearings
Early June	Commission meets - preliminary vote on charter amendments to send to the City Attorney's Office to draft ballot titles
June	City Attorney's Office drafts ballot titles
Late June	Charter Commission meets – final vote on charter amendments
Before July 7 th	Ballot referral