



League of Women Voters of Portland

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Date: February 22, 2023
To: Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners Gonzalez, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan
From: League of Women Voters of Portland
Debbie Kaye, president
Re: Transparency Advocate Charter Amendment (#164)

The League of Women Voters of Portland wholeheartedly supports Auditor Rede’s proposal for a charter amendment referral that would create the position of Transparency Advocate in her office. The city adopted transparency as one of its core values in 2020. We feel, however, that more needs to be done to implement this fundamental value. A Transparency Advocate available to assist the public and city employees, and with the authority to conduct investigations and issue reports, will safeguard our access to information.

As an organization that promotes active and informed participation in government, the League works to fully understand issues before acting. We monitor city boards and commissions and study informational documents produced by city bureaus. There are times, however, when information such as minutes, agendas, and meeting materials that should be publicly available are not posted in a timely manner. Their absence can go on for months. We understand these oversights could be due to staff overload. It is our hope that a Transparency Advocate would assist community members and bureau staff in resolving these types of issues cooperatively.

Furthermore, the city often engages in months or years long efforts to develop new policies or plan new development projects. The League believes the public should be involved in the discussions and deliberations from the beginning. There are times when the public doesn’t hear about these projects until they are near completion. A Transparency Advocate has the potential to instill in city bureaus the importance of making the public aware of these undertakings so they can follow them from the start and provide informed feedback to decision makers.

Transparency is important to the League as a matter of principle and as a practical matter. A Transparency Advocate embedded in the charter will ensure there is someone who appreciates the importance of access to information and whose purpose is to foster a culture of openness and also intervene in individual cases. We urge your support for referring this charter amendment to the voters.