



**League of Women Voters® of Portland**

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Date: July 21, 2025  
To: Portland City Council  
Cc: Mayor Keith Wilson  
City Administrator Michael Jordan  
From: LWVPDX City Government Transition Interest Group  
Wynne Furth, Interest Group Leader  
Debbie Aiona, Action Committee Chair  
Re: **LWVPDX Observations of Council's First Six Months**

The League of Women Voters of Portland (LWVPDX) congratulates you on completing your first six months in office under the revised City Charter.

We have long been interested in the city's form of government, especially since our 2017-2019 study of Portland's government,<sup>1</sup> in which we wrote,

*LWVPDX believes a thriving, livable city requires a city government that is accountable, responsive, equitable, efficient, effective, transparent, and nonpartisan.*

We believe a city government should solicit input through representative, accessible, and robust public involvement.

The Portland League's City Government Transition Interest Group is focused on observing and reflecting on Portland's new form of government: how a new City Council, with no incumbents, traditions or customary practices, establishes itself as an effective legislature. One way we have done this is by watching hundreds of hours of public meetings.

Councilors have demonstrated intelligence, sophistication, a strong work ethic, a diversity of opinion, and a wealth of relevant experience. You have an admirable record for listening to people in all districts, giving people in diverse communities a chance to be heard. Not only is the city's government undergoing enormous organizational changes, the city is also facing daunting economic and social challenges. We need excellent governance to make use of the riches we have and enable the growth we need.

From our observations and our perspectives as thoughtful, engaged Portlanders, we offer some reflections on your first six months as a City Council.

1. **The new Council is more transparent.** Our new elections were designed to produce proportional and geographically-distributed representation. They have delivered. The

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<sup>1</sup>Link: [The City That Works: Preparing Portland for the Future](#)

diversity of interests and opinions on the Council in turn lead to engaged public discussions. There is a sense of policy developing before our eyes.

2. **A strong committee system is essential for an effective 12-member Council.** This requires a willingness by Councilors to delegate information gathering and policy development to colleagues. Revisiting committee work at full Council is necessary at times, but too much revisiting can burden the Council, staff, and the public without attendant gains.
3. **Council committee meetings are a powerful form of civic education.** The public can watch the presentations designed to bring the committee up to speed, read the staff reports, hear the witnesses, listen to, and participate in the deliberations.
4. **Public sector budgeting and accounting are complex.** It will take time to improve the process, tools, and data so that the participants feel fluent in “budget-speak.” A budget note asks the City Budget Office to develop options for restructuring the budget format. Judging these options on their ability to increase public participation and understanding of the budget is prudent.
5. **Shared values matter.** We agree with Council President Elana Pirtle-Guiney’s May 12 statement: “Good governance, honest conversation, doing our due diligence, and working together across differences can actually make great policy that can make the community better for everybody in Portland. What we want for ourselves we have to offer to the rest of the body.” While councilors differ in approaches and priorities, their underlying shared values are dismantling siloed operations.

Finally, we offer these suggestions:

1. **Hold a retreat.** Follow up on the recommendations of the Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) and Council Vice President Tiffany Koyama Lane to have council retreat(s) that focus on a shared understanding of roles and differences. Include the city administration as part of the process, because we need efficient interaction between the council and the executive branch.
2. **Agree on the most essential changes for the coming year.** Consider GTAC recommendations to (1) develop a list of Council priorities for the near term and (2) implement *Recommendation B3* to develop a city-wide strategic plan. A new City Plan is essential for common grounding for policy making and budget decisions.
3. **Be patient with the process.** Give staff time to implement changes in the budget, continue breaking down silos, and improve the data they provide to Council.

Congratulations on your six months of accomplishments. It takes time to implement a new governing system, and we see progress and promise. LWVPDX supports you in this work and will continue to monitor and encourage best practices.