

Charter Commission Procedures Committee, September 28, 2021 at 6:00 PM

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:01pm.

2. Approval of the prior meeting minutes

Moved by Dory Waxman

Seconded by Zack Barowitz

Unanimous vote

3. Guest speaker on topic of compensation for elected/appointed officials

Chair Washburn couldn't get guest speakers, so she researched salaries for elected officials. Jim K couldn't come due to a medical procedure. Chair Washburn has asked him to tell us whether there are any legal limits to compensation of city officials. Jim K said there wasn't, besides what voters and/or the city council would approve.

Chair Washburn also asked about a revision process for the charter commission. There is a chapter of state law that governs this area: we can amend the charter per state statutory rules, but substantive changes require the creation of a charter commission.

Chair Washburn surveyed city council salaries and collated into a spreadsheet officials' salaries for every states' biggest cities, listing average salaries. Portland ranks among lowest for part-time city councilors, but it's on par with cities with similar populations. Published research on this issue is rare. Chair Washburn noticed an upward trend through time in councillors' salaries. She favors a higher salaries to reduce corruption and to draw councillors from a larger pool.

Commissioner Barowitz: workload is important in determining councilor salaries.

Waxman: size of cities and their economic situation is also important.

Kebede: can we add a column (to the spreadsheet) for tax base and another column for budget?

Waxman: benefits and retirement plan are important to consider as part of the picture of officials' compensation.

4. Guest speaker on other procedures topics

Postponed for a future date.

5. Preamble

Commissioner Barowitz: change the word “welfare” to “well-being.”

Washburn: I like “welfare” for its more economic, expansive connotation.

Kebede: I like “welfare”.

Waxman: abandon “welfare” and replace it with “wellness.” “Welfare” has a negative connotation.

Washburn: what about “benefit” instead of “welfare”?

Barowitz: What about “commonweal” or “weal”?

Waxman: reads Merriam-Webster's definition of “welfare.” Notes that there is a definition that encompasses financial assistance or government benefits; notes that we don't want our preamble to imply an inherent entitlement to those things.

Washburn: wasn't intending to describe public assistance.

Barowitz: what about a land acknowledgement in the preamble?

Washburn: has asked native American leaders whether it would be meaningful. Waiting to hear back. Preamble will be an open issue until then.

Barowitz: what about “common good” instead of welfare?

Waxman: I will adjourn this discussion for now, but we will continue editing the preamble's language before we pick it up again at a future meeting.

6. New Business

Barowitz: let's review our work plan and priorities.

Waxman: report out on what she has gathered so far.

Looked at how the city departments do outreach to get citizen input. Researched the city website and her own archives. There are about seventeen departments that the city manager oversees. School department kept out of this.

There are about 75 roads (metaphorically speaking) that make these departments accessible to the Portland resident. We could, as a city, perhaps do a better job informing city residents about how to reach departments. You can write to standing city committees is one way to reach departments. You can your counselor.

Empowering neighborhood association is an important thing we can do as a city.

Barowitz: Governance committee is looking a bit at how the city communicates with residents. Would like for us to talk about conflicts of interest.

Communications between staff and officials: complicates issue that doesn't strike him as very pressing.

7. Public Comment

Phil Steele, Public Comment: Portland, Oregon's charter has a provision that says, "there will be a charter commission every ten years." State law would allow this.

Regarding the preamble, re-insert the word, "effectiveness." And mention "responsiveness" and terminology about the city government being "representative." We need those three concepts in the preamble.

Karen Snyder, Public Comment: please include the sources of the data for the spreadsheet in the spreadsheet. City budget and tax base need to be added to spreadsheet. I can't find meeting minutes. City needs to post public comments for past two weeks.

Waxman: I will create a map of departments and how they do outreach to the voters.

Barowitz: city councilors receive some combination of health benefits

8. Adjourn

Waxman moves to adjourn. Barowitz seconds. Vote unanimous.

Action Items:

1. Commissioner Washburn to add a column in the document for tax base and another for budget.
2. Commissioner Washburn to get back to the group at the next meeting with clarity about land acknowledgements.
3. Commissioner Kebede to research models for managing communications between staff and elected and appointed officials.
4. Barowitz to bring a charter amendment about conflicts of interest.
5. Barowitz to bring a charter amendment about citizen initiatives.
6. Washburn to look into the precise nature of Portland's city councillors compensation.