The Dynamics of Creating Strong Democracy in Portland, Oregon – 1974 to 2013

by

Paul Roland Leistner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies

Dissertation Committee:
Sy Adler, Chair
Carl Abbott
Charles Heying
David Johnson
Richard White

Portland State University
2013

© 2013 Paul Roland Leistner

ABSTRACT

Communities across the United States are experiencing a “civic revival” that is reconnecting community members with local decision-making and civic life in their communities. Since the 1980s, academic researchers and local governance reformers have advocated for a shift away from the traditional top-down, expert-driven approach to governance and toward a governance model in which government leaders and staff and community members work as partners to shape the community and make local decisions.

Portland, Oregon, since the 1970s, has been known nationally and internationally as a city with a tradition of strong community involvement. Portland’s successes and failures offer a valuable case study into what it takes to develop, implement, and sustain policies, structures, and programs that encourage greater participatory democracy.

This dissertation reviews the evolution of Portland’s community and neighborhood system from its creation in the 1970s through 2013 through an examination of the many reviews of the system over the years supplemented by reviews of newspaper accounts and informal, unstructured interviews with individuals who were involved in different processes and programs. This dissertation investigates which elements are important to the success of a city-wide community and neighborhood involvement system, the factors that help or hinder the adoption and implementation of system reforms, and strategies that help embed system advances to prevent them from being eroded or undone.

This dissertation argues that a community that wants to move toward much greater participatory democracy and community governance must develop and implement

a comprehensive strategy that accomplishes three goals: involving many more people in the civic life in their community, building community capacity to organize and be involved in local decision making, and significantly improving the willingness and ability of city leaders and staff to work in partnership with community members and organizations. This dissertation also argues that community and neighborhood involvement systems need to include not only traditional geographic-based neighborhood associations but also communities of people who find their community through shared identity.

DEDICATION

To all the thousands of Portlanders who have volunteered their time in neighborhood associations and other community-based groups over the past forty years and who have helped make Portland the great city it is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would not have been able to complete my dissertation without the ongoing guidance of my dissertation committee members, the support of my co-workers at the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement, valuable input from many Portland neighborhood and community activists, and years of support from my family.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee chair, Sy Adler, for remaining calm and always helping me find a way to keep moving forward, and my dissertation committee members, Carl Abbott, Charles Heying, David Johnson, and Richard White, for sticking with me and remaining enthusiastic even when the chapters got long.

I would not have been able to complete this project without strong and ongoing support from my co-workers at the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement. They shared their experiences of working within the system with me, helped me track down information, covered for me during the extended time I took off to finish writing, and always cheered me on. I particularly want to thank Amalia Alarcón de Morris, Brian Hoop, Jeri Williams, Afifa Ahmed-Shafi, Nickole Cheron, Amy Archer, and Mike Kersting.

I also would like to thank the many neighborhood and community activists who shared their memories, frustrations, hopes, and ideas with me and the many city staff people who also shared their experiences and helped me track down information—especially the staff at the City of Portland City Archives office.

Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude to my wife, Amy, and my daughter, Alexa, for their patience and support throughout this long process, for Amy's proofreading, and for Alexa's unflagging belief that I could get this project done.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
LIST OF TABLES ix
LIST OF FIGURES x
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION 1
Research Questions 6
Methodology 7
Objectivity 8
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW 13
What's the Problem to be Solved? 13
Terms Used to Describe the Goal of a Civic Revival 17
What will Get Us There?—Elements of Successful City-wide Community Involvement Systems 29
Social Capital and Community Building 39
Community Organizing 45
Advancing System Reforms 60
Embedding Change—Sustaining Progress Toward Participatory Democracy 64
Literature Specific to Portland 80
What do I Expect to See in My Case Study of Portland's Citywide Community Involvement System? 140
CHAPTER III ORIGINS AND EARLY YEARS—1970s 146
Origins of Portland's System 147
The Birth of Portland's Neighborhood System 148
1971 Planning Commission Proposal for District Planning 150
1972 DPO Task Force Report 157
1972 Portland Downtown Plan 176
Neighborhood System Structure and Requirements--City Ordinances (1974-1975) . 178
Summary of Key Elements of 1975 Ordinance 185

Early ONA Reports--1974 and 1979 199
Observations from the 1970s 244
CHAPTER IV EXPANSION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION—1980s..... 260
The 1980s—Some Context 261
1980 ONA Review Committee 269
Association of Portland Neighborhoods – 1984-1986..... 280
Neighbor Fair – 1976 to 1990 287
Mayor Bud Clark—Community and Neighborhood Celebration and Recognition ... 292
1987 ONA Guidelines..... 298
Tufts University Study 302
Mayor's budget Messages –1980s 304
Observations from the 1980s 313
CHAPTER V SOUL SEARCHING AND DECLINE—1990s..... 315
1990 Portland Future Focus 317
1992 Margaret Strachan Report 330
1993 Neighborhood Congress..... 343
1995-96 Neighborhood Involvement Task Force 356
1998 ONI Standards and formal name change from ONA to ONI..... 397
1998 – Lee Perlman statement to Neighborhoods USA Conference..... 398
Mayor's Budget Messages—Katz—1993 to 1999 403
Lessons from the 1990s 413
CHAPTER VI DEEPER ANALYSIS AND CONFLICT—2000-2004..... 417
Southwest Community Plan –1994-2000 420
Citywide Administrative Services Review (ASR) – 2000-2001 423
Post ASR—Attempts to Centralize Community Involvement Services..... 444
Commissioner Attempts to Improve the Neighborhood System 452
Communities Beyond Neighborhood Boundaries—Reaching Beyond Traditional Neighborhood Associations 472
Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition--DRC and DCL..... 496
Public Involvement Task Force--"A Strategic Plan for Improving Public Involvement in the City of Portland"—2003-04..... 544
Budget Outreach Study Group—2004-05 580
ONI Commissioner Randy Leonard 590

Seltzer Sharpe Strachan Proposal–November 11, 2003 597
2004 Election and Tom Potter—A Turning Point 603
Mayor's Budget Messages – Vera Katz – FY 2000-01 to 2004-05..... 615
Lessons from the early 2000s 620
CHAPTER VII REFORM AND REJUVENATION—2005 to 2013 633
Neighborhood Coalition Leaders' Strategic Assessment—December 2004 636
Bureau Innovation Project—2005 650
Bureau Innovation Project 9—"Develop Improved Public Engagement Procedures"670
BIP 20—City Charter Commission 675
BIP 8/Community Connect..... 681
ONI Expansion and System Changes 733
Mayor's Budget Messages – Tom Potter – 2005-06 to 2008-09 772
Citywide Policy Bodies--Citywide Land Use Group and Citywide Parks Team 782
Mayor Sam Adams and ONI Commissioner Amanda Fritz (2009-2012) 791
Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC) (2008 to present) 809
Office of Equity and Human Rights 843
Title II ADA and Title VI Civil Rights Program 847
East Portland Action Plan 848
Mayor's Budget Messages – Sam Adams – 2009-10 to 2012-13..... 870
Mayor Charlie Hales (2013) 879
Looking to the Future—What Comes Next? 893
Lessons of the Potter and Post Potter era – 2005 to 2013..... 902
CHAPTER VIII ANALYSIS..... 912
REFERENCES 938
APPENDIX PORTLAND MAYORS, ONA/ONI COMMISSIONERS IN CHARGE, AND ONA/ONI DIRECTORS—1973 through 2013 960

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Portland Community and Neighborhood Involvement System, Major Studies, Task Forces, and Reports 11
Table 2: Major New Funding for ONI under Mayor Potter (FY 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09) 741

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Critical Elements of Strong Participation 21
Figure 2: Eight Core Principles of Collaborative Governance and Policy Design 27
Figure 3: Portland Public Involvement Principles, 1996 391
Figure 4: visionPDX Visualizing Social Portland 657
Figure 5: Office of Neighborhood Involvement Mission/Goals/Values 739
Figure 6: City of Portland Financial Impact and Public Involvement Statement (FIPIS)—Public Involvement Questions 818