

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I examine the evolution of Portland, Oregon's nationally recognized community and neighborhood involvement system with a special focus on identifying the system elements and dynamics that have helped advance and sustain Portland's progress toward achieving a "strong democracy" culture and governance partnership between city government and the community.

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. Over the past decades, researchers have studied many aspects of this "revival" in an effort to better understand the origins and key elements that lead to success or failure.

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 more as partners in shaping the community and in local decision making. Many communities have tried and are trying different approaches to give community members a stronger voice in local decision making and that engage more people in the civic life of their community.

Portland is known nationally and internationally as a city with a tradition of strong community involvement. Portlanders have learned a lot about what works and

what does not over the forty years since the Portland City Council first created community and neighborhood involvement system. Portland's experience offers a valuable case study of what it takes to develop, implement, and sustain a strong democracy system and culture.

Fortunately, for this study, Portlanders are not shy about studying their city and recommending how it could be improved. Since the 1970s, Portlanders repeatedly have reviewed and examined different aspects of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system. The reports and materials that document these reviews and the formal policy documents that implemented changes in the system offer interesting insights into what Portlanders believed was needed for the system to effectively engage community members in civic life and local decision making. The story of the evolution of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system also offers important insights into the dynamics of how system improvements are proposed and adopted or ignored and into what it takes to sustain reforms and advances once they are in place.

Many academic researchers have explored different aspects of what it takes to achieve and sustain "stronger democracy" or "participatory democracy." Their work establishes what we would expect to see over the four decades of the evolution of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system. Chapter Two reviews this academic literature. The chapter first examines the many different terms researchers have used to describe what they identify as the goals of a civic revival and the elements of stronger participatory democracy. The chapter continues by exploring the literature in some specific thematic areas including what research has identified as the elements of

successful city-wide community engagement systems, social capital and community building, community organizing, public agenda setting, and achieving and sustaining government policy and organizational change. The chapter concludes by reviewing previous research, focused specially on Portland and the evolution of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system.

Chapters Three through Seven tell the story of the 40-year evolution of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system (from the 1970s to 2013). These chapters examine the many evaluations of the system completed over the years as well as the major policy and structure changes implemented during that time.

Chapter Three reviews the founding and early years of the system in the 1970s. This chapter examines early proposals that set the stage for the creation of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system, city council ordinances that established the initial formal policy framework for the system, and reports that describe the system's early programs, successes, and challenges.

Chapter Four reviews the 1980s, a time during which the system continued to expand and became increasingly institutionalized. The chapter examines a system review from 1980 that was done in response to early concerns about the transparency and accountability of some neighborhood associations and reviews the first formal guidelines for Portland's neighborhood system adopted in 1987. The chapter also reviews efforts by neighborhood activists to create city wide bodies to analyze and respond to broader policy issues and mechanisms to formally recognize and Mayor Bud Clark creation of mechanisms to celebrate neighborhood achievements. The chapter closes with a review

of the system elements, strengths and weaknesses identified by a research team from Tufts University in the late 1980s.

Chapter Five covers the 1990s a time during which critics of the system repeatedly called for the system to involve a broader range of community members and an increase in the willingness and ability of city government leaders and staff to work with the community. A number of programs that had been identified as key strengths of the system were discontinued. System funding stagnated and conflicts between neighborhood and community activists and city leaders and staff increased. Different system reforms efforts were attempted, but most were not very successful. This chapter reviews these evaluations and reform attempts. The chapter also describes in more detail efforts to broaden participation in the system beyond traditional geographic neighborhood associations to include—particularly, communities of color and immigrants and refugees—and increased efforts to change the culture of city government and increase the quality and consistency of community involvement by city leaders and staff.

Chapter Six covers the early to mid 2000s and describes attempts to shift the focus of the system away from community empowerment and toward the provision of city services, while at the same certain projects and task forces were exploring how to broaden participation in the system especially by historically under-represented communities in Portland. The growing number and intensity of clashes between Portland city government and neighborhood and community activists led to an in-depth study by the Public Involvement Task Force of how to improve the quality and consistency of community involvement across city government. The increasing conflict also set the

stage for former Portland Police Chief Tom Potter's successful run for mayor on a platform of reconnecting the community with city government.

Chapter Seven reviews the significant expansion and reform of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system initiated under Mayor Potter (2005-2009) and the fate of these changes under two subsequent Portland mayors. The chapter describes a comprehensive review of the system, initiated by Potter, called "Community Connect" and the resulting "Five-year Plan to Increase Community Involvement" in Portland. The Community Connect goals set a new strategic course for Portland's system that included involving more people in civic life, building capacity in the community for greater involvement, and changing the culture and practices of city government to ensure that community members can have an impact. Community Connect recognized that many people find their sense of community outside traditional geographic neighborhoods and led to the creation of new city programs to support community organizing and capacity building in non-geographic communities. Chapter VII also examines the creation of City of Portland Public Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) and its innovative work to develop new citywide standards for community involvement and embed them in city government policies and practices. The chapter concludes with a review of proposed next steps for the system, beyond 2013, generated by the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement and its neighborhood and community organization partners.

Chapter Eight analyses the Portland experience in light of the theories and expectations established in the academic literature and this study's primary research questions, presents findings, and recommends areas for future research.

Table 1 below presents a list of major studies, task forces, and reports completed that helped shape Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system over the past forty years.

### Research Questions

Thomson (2001) poses what he says is a central question for academics and practitioners who are seeking to bolster civic society: “[W]hat forms of organizations and activities have the potential to bridge the yawning gap between citizens and their governments....” (Thomson 2001 2).

Portland's experience not only provides insight into the structures and programs that encourage and support greater participatory democracy in a community, but it also provides insights into the dynamics by which system reforms are proposed and implemented and the strategies and mechanisms to sustain these advances once they are in place.

This study seeks to answer the following primary research questions:

1. What structures, program elements, policies, and practices did Portlanders find over time are necessary to encourage and support greater community involvement in local decision making and civic life?
2. What dynamics helped or hindered the evolution of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system?
3. What does the Portland experience tell us about what it takes to sustain and preserve the advances toward greater participatory democracy?

## Methodology

This study draws on the many formal reviews and evaluations of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system and major policy changes from the 1970s to 2013 to identify the evolving understanding in Portland of what it takes to advance and sustain progress toward an effective city wide community and neighborhood involvement system and thereby move toward stronger participatory democracy.

This study uses qualitative research methods to review existing sources of information to prepare a case study of the Portland experience and to identify common themes and trends over time.

The principle data sources for this study include:

- Documents that present the findings of the many different reviews and evaluations of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system produced by government-initiated task forces and community organizations;
- Government policy documents, including city council ordinances and resolutions that enacted system structures and requirements and formal policy guidelines and standards adopted by the Portland City Council.
- City of Portland annual city budget documents, from 1974 to 2013, which provide valuable information about the changing mission, programs, priorities, and funding of the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Associations/Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONA/ONI).

- Mayor's budget messages that accompany each annual city budget document (from 1973 to the present) and which provide insights into each mayor's priorities and their view of the role of community involvement in decision making.
- Newspaper articles from the *Oregonian* archives available online through the Multnomah County Library website, which provide valuable historical details, context, and insights into the views and opinions of people at different times in the history of the system.
- Unstructured informal interviews and conversations with city staff and community members to fill in historical facts and provide insights into the motivations and thinking of people involved in the processes.

### Objectivity

I have participated in a number of the efforts to review and improve Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system, both as a neighborhood association activist since the mid-1990s and as an employee of the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) since 2009. While my activities as a neighborhood volunteer and ONI employee give me useful knowledge of the progression of events, awareness of and access to existing documentation, and access to people who were involved in the processes that are the focus of this study, they also can pose a challenge to the objectivity of my research and analysis.

In response, I have chosen primarily to draw on existing historical and policy documents supplemented by unstructured interviews with other participants for my research, rather than drawing on my own experiences, perceptions, and opinions. In the

interest of transparency, I also briefly describe my involvement as a neighborhood activist and ONI employee.

I have participated actively as a volunteer neighborhood association volunteer and leader in Portland's neighborhood association system since 1995. I began attending meetings of my neighborhood association in Portland in 1995. I have been a volunteer board member of my neighborhood association from 1996 to the present and served as president of the neighborhood association from 1998 to 2003. I also have served as a volunteer board member of the Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition—one of Portland's seven neighborhood district coalitions—since 2004 and served as the board chair for two years from 2005 to 2007.

I participated in a number of the reviews of Portland's community and neighborhood involvement system including: Public Involvement Task Force 2003-2004, the City Budget Study Group (2005), and Community Connect (2005 to 2008).

I also was one of a group of neighborhood activists who joined forces and ran against City Commissioner Randy Leonard in the 2004 city council election. I also was very involved, as volunteer, on Tom Potter's 2004 mayoral campaign.

I began working at ONI in 2009 as a "neighborhood program coordinator" with responsibility to support to Portland's neighborhood association system. In this role I provide training, technical assistance, conflict resolution support, and help develop best practices materials. I administer ONI's grants to Portland's seven neighborhood coalitions and consult with city agencies on their community and neighborhood involvement strategies and projects. I also serve, as an ONI employee, on the City of

Portland Public Involvement Advisory Council and the ONI Bureau/Budget Advisory  
Committee.

**Table 1: Portland Community and Neighborhood Involvement System, Major Studies, Task Forces, and Reports**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Originator</b>
<b>1970s</b>		
1971	Portland Planning Commission Proposal	Planning Commission
1972	District Planning Organization (DPO) Task Force Report	City Council
1974	1974 Ordinance	City Council
1974	ONA 1 <sup>st</sup> Year Report	ONA (Director Mary Pedersen)
1975	1975 Ordinance	City Council
1979	ONA 5 <sup>th</sup> Year Report	ONA (Director Mary Pedersen)
<b>1980s</b>		
1980	ONA Review Committee Report	ONA Commissioner (Charles Jordan)
1987	1 <sup>st</sup> ONA Guidelines	ONA
Late 1980s	Tufts University research team	Tufts University
<b>1990s</b>		
1991	Portland Future Focus	Mayor Bud Clark
1992	2 <sup>nd</sup> ONA Guidelines	ONA
1992	Strachan Focus Group Report	ONA Commissioner (Kafoury)/Strachan
1993	1993 Neighborhood Congress	Neighborhood Activists
1995	Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement (TFNI)	ONA Commissioner (Hales)
1998	3 <sup>rd</sup> ONI Guidelines	ONA
<b>2000s</b>		
2000	SW Community Plan—Citizen Involvement goal and objectives	Bureau of Planning/SW community activists
2000	Administrative Services Review (ASR)	Mayor Katz
2001-03	Interwoven Tapestry	ONI/IRCO
2001-05	Southeast Uplift Diversity and Representation Committee	Southeast Uplift
2004-05	Southeast Uplift Diversity and Civic Leadership Committee	Southeast Uplift
2003-04	Public Involvement Task Force (PITF)	ONI Commissioners (Francesconi, Saltzman and Leonard)
2004 (Dec.)	Neighborhood Coalition Leaders report	Neighborhood coalition leaders
2005	4 <sup>th</sup> ONI Standards	ONI
2005-07	BIP 1—visionPDX	Mayor Potter
2005-08	BIP 8—Community Connect	Mayor Potter

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Originator</b>
2005-06	BIP 9—Public Involvement Assessment Toolkit	Mayor Potter
2005-07	BIP 20—Charter Commission	Mayor Potter
2010s		
2007-12	Portland Plan	Mayor Adams
2012- 2014	Portland Comprehensive Plan Update	Mayor Adams
2013	Title VI – Civil Rights Plan	City Council