

COGGLEVATION

JUNE 2018 | THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PF&R'S STRATEGIC PLAN | WWW.PORTLANDOREGON.GOV/FIRE/COGGLE

CHECKING IN WITH COMMISSIONER SALTZMAN AS HE NEARS RETIREMENT

Portland Fire & Rescue's commissioner discusses what he's learned, what he likes, and what he hopes for from the bureau.

In September 2017, Commissioner Dan Saltzman announced his retirement. By next year, Portland Fire & Rescue will have a new commissioner in charge of the bureau.

Commissioner Saltzman has been in public service for 25 years, formerly as Multnomah County Commissioner (1993-1998) and is currently serving his fifth and final term as Portland city commissioner. During his time with the City, he has been the commissioner in charge of more than 13 City bureaus and offices.

Commissioner Saltzman has overseen Portland Fire & Rescue for the last five years, working with former Chief Erin Janssens and hiring current Chief Mike Myers.

Cogglevation sat down with Commissioner Saltzman and asked him to reflect on his tenure as we move through his final year in office.

Were there any preconceived notions you had about the fire bureau that you learned were not true after you became commissioner?

I respect how gracious the firefighters and the people who work for Portland Fire & Rescue were to me when I became the commissioner in charge. I had somewhat of a rocky history with Portland Fire & Rescue, going back to my days as a county commissioner when I was opposed to their efforts to take over the ambulance system. I also led the voter reforms to the Fire & Police Disability & Retirement system in 2006. So, I wasn't sure how I was going to be received as the commissioner in charge. But they're professionals and I've enjoyed working with them.

I would also say, you never know what you don't know until you become commissioner in charge of a bureau. There was a lot to learn about the fundamentals of how Portland Fire & Rescue works. I learned that everything is sort of a unit of four: four is kind of the base number for fire. And I learned a lot about strategy and tactics by listening to Ops 3, like I still do today.



You say you learned about the number four. But that was previously a debatable number, right? So, you now feel differently about the number four?

Yeah, I think four makes sense. There was this debate about how many firefighters should be in a rig, but four seems to make sense now that that I understand better about how they get to a scene: they split into a B unit, which usually goes inside and checks for people. And the other two remain in the vehicle, at least initially. That's how it works. And that seems safe. It seems firefighters should be paired with one another.



What accomplishments as fire commissioner are you most proud of?

One of the first things I did when I became fire commissioner was to get council to adopt an ordinance to require sprinkler systems for existing nightclubs. I'm very proud of that. Secondly, would be hiring Chief Myers. A lot of people didn't think an outsider could ever do the job. And I think you know the chief is proving his mettle and he's earned respect for his tireless work on the Coggle and he's worked very hard to gain the respect and trust of the people he oversees.

What did you see in him during the interviews that made him stand out?

His broader view of the role of fire and rescue. We're not just a bureau that goes out and fights fires: we're in the community and we should also be expanding our vision to look at public health issues and how, with very highly trained and skilled people, we can contribute to keeping our communities safe and well.

What would you like to see accomplished during the rest of your tenure as fire commissioner?

I'm very supportive of the chief's efforts to pilot Station 22—the project where they're looking at the broader community needs of Station Area 22 and how we can assist in meeting those needs. I really hope we get that up and running for Station 22 while I'm in office.

You're going to be just a regular Portland resident soon. What would you like to see from the fire bureau in the next five years and then farther along?

I want to see a bureau that hones its skills in terms of emergency preparedness and emergency response. That's something we're very good at, but unfortunately, I don't think you know where you need to improve until a tragedy occurs. Seems like at some point you're going to be really put to the test on that and I hope as an ordinary resident by then that I can count on Portland Fire & Rescue. I believe that's true, that they'll provide the leadership necessary to get the city and its residents through a major disaster. Also, I'm hoping the whole effort to make each fire station know its fire management area and the people and their challenges will result in things like home

inspections for our residents. I hope there would be a point where I could call somebody and say, "I'd like to have a fire inspection. I want to know whether my smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are any good. And let me know if there's anything else I should be aware of." I really hope that we get to the point where we can provide that level of service.

You're someone who gets community feedback regularly. What do people say to you about Portland Fire & Rescue?

It's highly regarded by the community. Fire is just universally loved. I also think that people really expect first responders to work seamlessly, whether it's police, fire, medical. And that seems to be the case on the streets. I think sometimes we at City Hall or the County Commission think otherwise. And not to say there aren't issues, but when it comes right down to how they operate on the street, they operate seamlessly together. The one feedback I do get (and we're making efforts on this), is that people feel we over-respond on medical and fire: over-respond to minor incidents. And I think we're working on that. We want to make sure we have adequate response, but we don't want to over-respond.

What advice would you give to the next fire commissioner?

I would advise them to learn about the bureau, learn how it really operates, learn about the rule of four. Listen to Ops 3, it's a great learning tool. And to have faith and confidence in the chief and the people who work for Portland Fire & Rescue.

Is there anything else that you'd like to say to the folks at the bureau?

It has been an honor to serve as fire commissioner. I really gained a lot of respect for the work that goes on. Now that I understand the work at a higher level of detail, that makes me much more respectful. PF&R has very highly trained, highly skilled individuals. I appreciate their competence and their calm in responding to situations. And I have a lot of respect for the things they see that, really, no person should ever have to see. I think we forget about that sometimes. I want to thank them for the opportunity to serve as their fire commissioner and I appreciate the job that they do every day.



Do you have a story about a PF&R cogglevation that would be great for this newsletter? Contact Caryn Brooks on the Communications Team caryn.brooks@portlandoregon.gov or 503-823-3714

