



## Portland fee reform; Beaverton medal misstep: Editorial Peaks and Valleys

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Portland's city auditor and ombudsman are proposing sweeping changes to make it easier for residents to appeal city rulings. (*The Oregonian*)

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### Peaks

**A wonky winner:** Portland's city auditor and ombudsman pitched a somewhat wonky idea to Portland's commissioners this week. The proposal may not have the pizzazz of, say, Subway's **lunch-meat sculpture of former Oregon Ducks quarterback Marcus Mariota**, which is probably a good thing. But what it does promise is much more important than anything offered by a baloney bust: a tangible and lasting effect on the average Portlander.

On Wednesday, the auditor and ombudsman proposed some changes to Portland's bureaucratic labyrinth that will resonate with anyone who's ever received an adverse administrative decision – a big fine, a denied permit, whatever – and wondered, "what the heck can I do about this" ... and, discovering the answer, asked "It costs HOW much?"

The problems Auditor Mary Hull Caballero and Ombudsman Margie Sollinger see involve what they characterize as "administrative justice," **Andrew Theen of The Oregonian/OregonLive reported** this week. It's not always clear to affected Portlanders that they can appeal adverse decisions, and the fees required to appeal – which can climb above \$1,300 – provide a powerful disincentive, especially for those who don't have a lot of money.

In simplest terms, what Caballero and Sollinger have proposed is this: Notify people in a timely fashion of their right to appeal, and establish nominal filing fees for appeals hearings.

A surge in frivolous appeals could result from such changes, as the city's public utilities consumer advocate noted in a letter supporting the proposed changes. If this does happen, the city can always readjust its policies. In any case, what Caballero and Sollinger have proposed is a one-year pilot program in which the city would free up \$56,000 to cover the cost of appeals during the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Mayor Charlie Hales indicated support for the concept Wednesday, though he said it needs some refining. He and his colleagues should make a good-faith effort to see it through.

### Oregonian editorials

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**Oregon academic successes:** Terrible graduation rates! Insufficient funding! Rising tuition! Smarter Balanced, Smarter Balanced, Smarter Balanced! Oregon's public education establishment is fertile ground for dissatisfaction, which is no surprise given the vast sums of money involved, the number of people touched by the state's schools and, of course, some very real problems.

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Notwithstanding all of this hand-wringing, plenty of outstanding teaching and scholarship occur at every educational level, as anyone with a child in a public school or university knows. Parents and students know the excellent teachers, as well as the not-so-great ones. Determined students succeed regardless of larger structural problems. The same applies to faculty.

This week, for instance, **The Oregonian/OregonLive reported** that Oregon State University Professor Aaron Wolf, a geoscientist, has won a \$250,000 Heinz Award for Public Policy. Wolf, a negotiation specialist, hammers out international water conflicts. Meanwhile, **two students in a single Portland Community College program** have won a prestigious U.S. State Department scholarship to study in Russia this summer. HadrianKyle McQuillan and Chase Riegel, who study at PCC with Kristine Shmakov, are among only 50 students nationwide to be honored this year.

## Valley

**Tragedy, not valor:** The family of a suicidal woman shot by two Beaverton police officers last year has taken issue with the department's decision to give the pair the department's Medal of Valor. The family has a point.

By all indications, Officers Dan Coulson and James Beane acted appropriately Nov. 20 following a 911 call by Chelsea Fresh's boyfriend, who reported that she was drunk and suicidal. He also said she had access to weapons, but not ammunition. Fresh came out of her house several times with a rifle, **Rebecca Woolington with The Oregonian/OregonLive reported**, and the officers shot her only when she pointed it at them. Fresh's gun was not loaded, but the two officers could not have known with certainty regardless of the boyfriend's claims.

The problem, rather, is the Beaverton Police Department's decision to memorialize the tragedy by handing out medals of valor, which a statement released by the Fresh family calls "a slap in the face." There is, indeed, something off-putting about the recognition. The officers may have acted appropriately, but department officials should know better than to recognize the fatal shooting of a woman who's struggled with mental illness – and whose rifle was unloaded – as an act of valor.

The desire of police officials to support officers – especially those who've endured traumatic experiences like this one – is understandable. But the department's primary obligation is to the public it serves, and handing out medals of valor for participating in such a tragedy is far more likely to leave Beaverton residents queasy than impressed.

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