



It just got easier to fight Portland City Hall, and City Council is thrilled

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The Portland City Council unanimously approved a new policy Wednesday that makes it easier, and cheaper, for ordinary residents to appeal hundreds of city decisions, from permit denials to unexpected fines.

Portland City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero and Ombudsman Margie Sollinger **introduced the reform measure in late April** after receiving complaints that the administrative appeals process is arbitrary, obtuse and needlessly burdensome for ordinary people.

According to their analysis, some appeals cost as much as \$1,300.

The new policy requires city agencies to give residents proper notice of their right to appeal, and limits charges to "nominal fees." The city can waive the charges altogether if the appellant demonstrates "an inability to pay due to financial hardship."

On Wednesday, the City Council enthusiastically agreed that the reforms were long overdue.

Commissioner Nick Fish praised Hull Caballero and Sollinger for shining a light on an issue "which I don't think we accurately understood."

Fish characterized the proposal as "one of the most significant reforms" to come out of the auditor's office during the last decade.

The policy is good governance, because it brings added scrutiny to city decisions.

"When citizens exercise that right," Fish said of filing appeals, "we sometimes learn we've got it wrong."

Commissioner Amanda Fritz said the policy represents a "basic rights and due process" issue.

Hull Caballero credited Sollinger and the ombudsman's role in city government for bringing systemic change to the city.

Here's the full ordinance.

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