

The Oregonian

Time for Portland City Hall to stop shunning auditor's office: Editorial Agenda 2015

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board
November 9, 2015*

It was almost a year ago that Gail Shibley, who led Mayor Charlie Hales' office at the time, decided to disinvite the chief deputy auditor from weekly meetings with her and the other city commissioners' chiefs of staff.

It was never quite clear why. The weekly "execs" meeting has long been an opportunity for the top lieutenants for each of Portland's six elected officials to gather and discuss council agenda items, proposals in the works and housekeeping issues. The chief deputy auditor, Sarah Landis, had been attending the meetings ever since her appointment to the position in 2010. But Shibley claimed communications problems among City Council offices somehow necessitated cutting her out, said City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero.

So now Landis checks in with chiefs of staff individually to find out what's in the works. A new safety committee handles building security concerns that would have routinely been discussed at the execs meeting. And while the change doesn't hobble city government, it's definitely a shift that makes Portland a City that Works ... Less Efficiently.

Shibley's departure this summer, however, as well as turnover in two other commissioners' offices make this a good time to reverse that decision. Hales' director of strategic initiatives, Josh Alpert, now leads the mayor's office. Commissioner Nick Fish named Sonia Schmanski as his chief of staff last March. And Tim Crail now serves as Commissioner Amanda Fritz's chief of staff.

Considering the breadth of the auditor's responsibilities, there are several practical reasons to have Landis attend.

The auditor's staff is responsible for planning and publishing the Council's agenda, for one thing. Knowing what councilmembers are planning is important for mapping out the schedule, Hull Caballero said. Other times, councilmembers propose ordinances that relate to functions handled by the auditor's office, such as registration of lobbyists or handling citizens' appeals of disputes with city bureaus. The weekly staff meetings are easy ways to keep tabs on what each office has in mind that may translate into additional responsibilities for the auditor's staff.

City bureau staff will often go to the chiefs of staff meetings in order to update all five commissioners' offices at once, Hull Caballero noted, whether that be Human Resources with employee information or early guidance on the budget.

And finally, there's a good governance aspect as well. "It probably makes that group look more transparent with someone from the auditor's office sitting there," Hull Caballero said. Not to mention Landis' institutional knowledge, considering she's been in her position longer than all but one of the chiefs of staff – Brendan Finn, who works for Commissioner Dan Saltzman.

Interestingly, the best reason to have the auditor's staff rejoin the meeting is for better communication – the issue that Shibley cited in barring Landis. Alpert said he is already talking with the other chiefs of staff to gauge their willingness to invite her back. Judging from responses by three of the other chiefs of staff, who all told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board that they don't oppose her participation, it looks like an invitation should soon be on its way.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor

Slippery Roads Ahead

*By Dirk VanderHart
November 12, 2015*

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS were jammed clown-car tight last week, as commissioners considered rules that would give Uber and Lyft lasting permission to operate in Portland.

The city's cabbies showed up en masse, arguing the so-called transportation network companies (TNCs) are getting an unfairly sweet deal. Uber and Lyft drivers came, too, wearing matching shirts and ready to cheer on the new regs. The scene was so packed that a visiting tourist delegation from Japan was left standing in the balcony's back row to watch the battle unfold.

But there was also a smaller, more-interesting contingent sitting, frustrated, in the audience: Representatives from sectors of the city's "private for-hire transportation" industry that have looked on as taxis and TNCs exchanged blows over the last year. These are pedicab companies, and outfits that drive Medicaid patients to doctor appointments. Limos and carriages, as well.

For months, they'd been assured their time would come—that once this Uber business was done, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) would seek their input on potential changes to regulations that dictate their livelihoods. Then the new TNC rules came out, and it turned out the city hadn't waited at all. Inserted into the new code are all manner of new regulations that some companies say are disastrous.

For instance, there's a requirement that pedicab companies—which offer tricycle transport—must have car insurance in addition to existing liability insurance. Their operators, according to the new rules, need to have driver's licenses. That was never discussed with pedicab representatives.

There's also a restriction that no for-hire vehicles can be more than 10 years old, when just a few years ago the city carved out an exemption to that limit for some wheelchair-accessible vans, many of which are currently allowed to operate for 15 years. That's a worry for folks who drive patients to medical appointments, but the city never bothered to ask them about it.

And there are stiffer rules for how many traffic tickets drivers at these companies may have. The old rule was that more than two in a year could disqualify you from a city license. Now it's more than one—a fact that PBOT's summary of the proposed rules blatantly misrepresented.

"Just under 20 percent of my drivers would have to be terminated if the code passes," says Kirk Foster, who employs around 40 people at Wapato Shores Transport, a Portland medical transport company. "I will guarantee you it puts hundreds of people in the unemployment line if it passes."

Foster and others are flummoxed that PBOT would float new rules without consulting them. "We were promised our own process," he says.

So was this just sloppy rulemaking or terrible communication? And is that process Foster counted on still coming?

Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick's office says it is, but isn't offering much more comment. Meanwhile, PBOT spokesman John Brady answered my lengthy inquiry with two sentences noting "minor code fixes" would be addressed when council next takes up the rules, suggesting some of the new regulations might be excised. He didn't elaborate.

Turns out it's not just pedicabs getting scant communication.

GoLocalPDX

City Council Considers Multnomah Village Shelter

*By GoLocalPDX News Team
November 11, 2015*

The Portland City Council will vote on Thursday on whether to adopt the recommended fall supplemental budget adjustments, including whether to establish a temporary homeless shelter in Multnomah Village by the end of the month.

The proposed budget includes \$1 million for upgrades at the Jerome F. Sears Army Reserve Center, which has been decommissioned, on Southwest Multnomah Boulevard. The upgrades would be used to create a six-month nighttime shelter for women and couples that would open before the end of November.

The armory is set to be used as an equipment storage facility and a fueling station for city transportation vehicles in the event of a natural disaster, but the building needs roughly \$12 million in upgrades before it can be used.

The improvements made to turn the building into a shelter—made possible by the declaration of a housing state of emergency—would bring it closer to the site's intended purchase.

The building is equipped with roughly six showers and a small kitchenette. The city plans to house roughly 100 people there.

Neighborhood groups in the area have raised concerns about the project, and held a neighborhood meeting to discuss the project on Tuesday.

More Money Set Aside for Housing

The homeless shelter in Multnomah Village is not the only housing project looking for funding in the Fall Supplemental Budget Process.

The budget also includes a request to increase the Portland Housing Bureau budget by \$10 million next year. The increase is part of a \$30 million pledge made by Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury to help fix the city's housing crisis.

Also in the budget is a proposed \$1.26 million for other homeless shelters. According to the Mayor's Office, these funds would be used to establish mobile provider teams. These units would offer housing referral, triage and veteran assistance services at shelters around the city.