

The Oregonian

Portland bureau director's departure follows criticism of management

By Jessica Floum

March 14, 2017

The director of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement will step down next week after 18 years with the bureau, marking the first management shakeup by the new City Council.

Amalia Alarcon de Morris spent 11 years directing the bureau, which came under scrutiny after [a November audit](#) found the bureau suffered from poor oversight, distributed money unequally and failed to establish and execute plans. She disclosed her decision to leave the job Monday in an email to bureau employees obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Newcomer Commissioner Chloe Eudaly oversees the bureau, which was previously managed by Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

Fritz gave Alarcon de Morris a glowing performance review and significant raise in January, two months after the city auditor issued a scathing report on the bureau. It noted rudderless leadership and a failure to correct funding inequities.

Eudaly's Deputy Chief of Staff Dave Austin and the bureau's operations manager, Amy Archer, will act as interim directors of the bureau, which has about 64 employees.

The audit completed four months ago by Auditor Mary Hull Caballero found the office--tasked with promoting the interests of Portland's 95 neighborhoods and offering grants to nonprofits that promote diversity--lacks direction.

"The Office of Neighborhood Involvement's "authority is unclear," the report said.

Auditors found Alarcon de Morris failed to write a required annual action plan every year since she took over the bureau's management in 2006.

"Without a plan, staff struggle to accomplish tasks and much remains incomplete," the audit said.

Auditors found the city spends about \$4.8 million each year on neighborhood involvement, more than half of which goes to grants. However, the bureau does not hold the grant recipients accountable for their work. They neither require planning documents nor measure benchmarks for success, auditors found.

The audit also found that the bureau does not fund neighborhood coalitions equitably, based on population.

Fritz, who oversaw the bureau for more than five of the last eight years, reacted to the audit optimistically.

When the findings were released in November, Fritz wrote in her official response: "I am proud of how much has been accomplished in the past eight years on a limited budget, while recognizing that there is much work to be done."

Fritz's staff told The Oregonian/OregonLive in January that Fritz was upset when Mayor Ted Wheeler reassigned the bureau's management to Eudaly.

Fritz wrote a rosy performance evaluation of Alarcon de Morris in January, awarding the outgoing director two extra weeks of management leave and a 4.1 percent raise for her "continued dedication to serving her bureau, the council, and the people and communities of Portland."

Two weeks is the maximum amount a commissioner can award a director. The raise brought Alarcon de Morris' salary to more than \$140,000.

"I continue to be very pleased with Amalia's performance," Fritz wrote. "She shows grace and perseverance under pressure."

But Fritz's review noted morale issues and management challenges within the bureau.

"Despite significant personal challenges in both her own family and the families of several key staff, she has stayed the course," Fritz wrote. "This past year several staff have had performance issues that have influenced morale and camaraderie within the bureau."

Fritz also wrote upper management lacked support of administrative officials.

A transition memo sent to Eudaly's office by Fritz in January said the bureau had "personnel issues in process" at the time of transition.

Austin said he will look at ways to reorganize the bureau to better serve renters and other diverse populations that have felt "boxed out" by the bureau.

"With a new commissioner at the helm, we want to see what we can do to help move that work and other important aspects about Portland's future forward even more," Austin said.

He said he wants to make sure "that community engagement involves all people helping make sure that sizeable populations out there that don't feel they have a seat at the table feel welcome."

He also wants to help the bureau's managers better evaluate their own progress.

The Office of Neighborhood Involvement offers a wide range of neighborhood livability services. Those include regulating marijuana retailers, supporting neighborhood organizations, abating graffiti, helping groups representing communities of color, issuing liquor licenses and responding to noise complaints.

Alarcon de Morris emailed city employees Monday to tell them she would leave "city service" March 20. Her public calendar indicates she was on vacation the last three days of this week and, for this week, is completely void of meetings and events until Friday.

Her email to employees was complimentary. "You have inspired me through the years and I only hope that I've been successful at clearing the way for you all to do the flawless jobs you do," she wrote.

Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement director to step down

By Jessica Floum

March 13, 2017

The director of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement will step down after 18 years with the bureau in the first management shakeup by the new City Council.

Amalia Alarcon de Morris spent 11 years directing the bureau, which came under scrutiny after [a November audit](#) found the bureau had poor oversight, unequal funding and problems with finishing plans. She disclosed her plans to leave the job in an email to bureau employees obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Newcomer Commissioner Chloe Eudaly oversees the bureau, which was formerly managed by Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

Eudaly's Deputy Chief of Staff Dave Austin and the bureau's business operations manager Amy Archer will act as interim directors of the bureau, which has about 64 employees.

Austin said he will look at ways to reorganize the bureau to better serve renters and other diverse populations that have felt "boxed out" by the bureau.

"With a new commissioner at the helm, we want to see what we can do to help move that work and other important aspects about Portland's future forward even more," Austin said.

He said he wants to make sure "that community engagement involves all people helping make sure that sizable populations out there that don't feel they have a seat at the table feel welcome."

He also wants to help the bureau's managers better evaluate their own progress.

Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement offers a wide range of neighborhood livability services. Those include regulating marijuana retailers, supporting neighborhood organizations, abating graffiti, helping groups representing communities of color, liquor licensing and responding to noise complaints.

Alarcon de Morris emailed city employees Monday to tell them she would leave "city service" March 20. Her public calendar indicates she was on vacation the last three days of this week and, for this week, is completely void of meetings and events until Friday.

Her email to employees was complimentary. "You have inspired me through the years and I only hope that I've been successful at clearing the way for you all to do the flawless jobs you do," she wrote.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, activists optimistic about reconciling

By Jessica Floum

March 10, 2017

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said "it's possible" Portland police might not be following their chief's de-escalation directives after activists voiced concerns about police accountability in a Friday morning open forum with some only-in-Portland moments.

The meeting--billed by Wheeler as an open session for people to air their grievances over city action and inaction--was the first of several new steps the mayor said he will consider taking to improve communication with the public.

Wheeler said he will continue to hold public forums. He said he liked activists' suggestions to add more public testimony slots to Portland's weekly City Council meetings. He said he'll also consider inviting residents to come speak when there's not enough city business to last through the slotted weekly meeting time. He welcomed an offer to create a workgroup that would help those voicing frustrations with City Hall to help create the change they seek.

"I actually strongly agree with this," Wheeler said. "The frustration you're hearing is genuine...People are really frustrated, and business as usual isn't going to work."

The mayor and Commissioner Amanda Fritz spent an hour Friday listening and responding to Portlanders' concerns about police protest response, homelessness and a proposal to proactively exclude frequent disrupters from Portland City Council meetings. Participants in the forum expressed a variety of frustrations, but the overarching theme was the city government's lack of transparency and communication with the public.

Wheeler said he thinks he and the activists agree "from a philosophical perspective, that we're trying to move in the same direction."

"We've just had disagreements on how to get there," Wheeler said. "This isn't the complete answer, but today I think we got bits and pieces of a better answer for how to conduct business going forward."

Portlander Mary Sipe pleaded with both the activists and the mayor to learn to work better together. She offered to coordinate a work group at the city where protesters, perhaps using city-provided white boards and markers, can turn their frustrations into action.

"It is not realistic or reasonable to expect that everything that is brought to the attention of City Council is addressed but somehow there should be a mechanism to identify issues that can and should be addressed," Sipe said.

Activist Joe Walsh, known for his no-holds-barred attacks on Wheeler and his predecessors, said he and others have been asking for these types of meetings since Sam Adams was mayor in 2009.

Walsh attends almost every Portland City Council meeting and [won a lawsuit](#) against the city after then-Mayor Charlie Hales barred him from meetings for as many as 30 days at a time.

On Friday, he urged Wheeler to keep open communication with the public.

"You've got to listen to us and say, 'This is what I've done,' " Walsh said. "Then come back again and say, 'This is what the results are.' You can't just do this for an hour."

Walsh said Friday's forum made him cautiously hopeful. He doesn't trust politicians. He said when he talks to commissioners, he wants to hear more about what they have done and what they can do to address concerns. Meanwhile, he plans to reflect on how he can be more effective.

He said he needs to "look in the mirror and say 'You know what, Joe, maybe you're a little outrageous sometimes.'"

At the end of the day, Walsh said, he wants to stand with, not against, the Portland city government. He wants Portlanders and their government to stand united against the federal government when and if they come after immigrants, protesters and sanctuary cities.

"What's coming is a lot worse," Walsh said. "That's why I'm so upset by this."

Mayors lobby Salem: Help us solve Oregon's homelessness crisis

*By Gordon R. Friedman
March 10, 2017*

SALEM -- A group of Oregon mayors lobbied state officials Thursday to ask for money and other help to solve their cities' homelessness problems.

"Local government in America right now is the dumping ground for all of society's problems," Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler told reporters gathered in the Capitol's basement pressroom. "To be honest, we're not going to take it anymore."

The scourge of opioid and heroin addiction, homelessness and a failing mental health safety net that is "an embarrassment among industrialized nations" are only some of the problems foisted on city governments, Wheeler said.

What's more, dwindling federal funds for social assistance programs, such as Section 8 housing vouchers, make addressing those problems that much more difficult, he said.

"We need the state government and we need the federal government to understand this is not a local government problem," Wheeler said. "This cannot be solved by local government alone, or even with the resources of the private and philanthropic sector."

Mayors of numerous other Portland-area cities, who are members of the Metropolitan Mayors' Consortium along with Wheeler, agreed that the state should help cities combat homelessness and shortages of affordable housing.

Homelessness is perhaps the most "vexing" problem that cities face, said Gresham Mayor Shane Bemis. But cities have limited resources, he said.

"We've talked with other mayors from across the United States," Bemis said. "They're all dealing with similar issues."

Cornelius Mayor Jeffrey Dalin said his city will soon be breaking ground on a new library with 45 units of affordable housing for seniors on the second and third floors. That's the good news.

"The bad news: ten years we've been working on this," Dalin said. "Ten years it took to get to this point."

He said allowing tax credits for the project's developers is what finally made it financially feasible. If the state or federal government would expand those tax credit programs, perhaps more housing could get built, he said. The other mayors nodded.

Unlike the other mayors, Wheeler said he supports two bills before the Legislature that would prevent tenant evictions without cause and allow cities to establish rent controls.

Wheeler said that although the mayors don't agree on everything, they came to Salem to lobby as one voice and get what assistance they can.

"We don't have the resources," he said. "We're asking for it and we need help."

Portland fire chief sidelines embedding EMTs with protest police

By Allan Brettman

March 10, 2017

CORRECTION: The original story version was changed to reflect the correct spelling of the last name of Portland Fire & Rescue Chief Mike Myers.

Portland Fire & Rescue Chief Mike Myers, responding to citizen complaints, has suspended operations of an emergency medical team deployed with police at protests since the [inauguration of President Donald Trump](#).

Myers acted because of complaints that emergency medical technicians were dressed identically to Portland police riot officers with whom they were embedded - though the Fire Bureau employees were unarmed.

A member of a citizens group called Empower Portland spoke last week before the Portland City Council, telling commissioners the group objects to firefighters dressing in police riot gear, which it says sends a message that the Fire Bureau was not impartial at the event. Empower Portland spokesman Standard Schaefer also displayed a photograph of an embedded EMT who wore a patch associated with support of police on his uniform shirt.

Myers said he disapproved of the specially trained technician wearing the patch - an American flag in black and white colors with a blue line as one of the stripes -- on his riot gear during a downtown [Not My President's Day protest in February](#).

"That is unacceptable and not appropriate," Myers said of the patch.

The Fire Bureau for years has deployed emergency medical technicians at public protests, typically keeping them stationed with a truck two blocks from the scene and sending in technicians when called on.

However, Empower Portland representatives have said EMTs took too long to reach the scene of an [Oct. 12 clash](#) between protesters and police at City Hall. The confrontation had nothing to do with Trump - demonstrators appeared in the council chambers Oct. 12 to protest approval of a police contract.

Using that incident as an example, Empower Portland representatives met Nov. 22 with fire and city officials to discuss finding a better way to deliver treatment at protest scenes.

That's how the bureau arrived at its decision to embed EMTs with riot officers, Myers said in an interview with [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#).

In doing so, the bureau was adopting a procedure used in other U.S. cities, Myers said. In those cities, EMTs are dressed in protective gear similar to police uniforms, the chief said.

Since the embedded team was launched, 10 people have been treated at about a half dozen protests, fire officials said, for these reasons: laceration, tear gas, pepper spray, loss of consciousness, diabetic reaction, chest pain and asthma.

But Myers this week acknowledged the combination of riot gear and a variety of pouches on the EMTs uniform might give the impression a medic is armed with weapons. He is not, the chief said of the all-male unit.

During the suspension of the Fire Bureau's team, Myers said he wants to explore finding protective gear that is distinct from a riot officer's and has clear "medic" or "EMT" labels on the uniform.

Myers in an interview with [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#) spoke at length about the inappropriateness of the EMT wearing the patch, commonly called the "Thin Blue Line Emblem" and associated by some with the ["Blue Lives Matter" movement](#), saying it damages the bureau's reputation.

"That damage is extremely difficult to fix," said Myers, who was [selected as chief](#) of the 700-employee bureau in May. "That sends the message that out of all the things we do - the do-no harm, the firefighters are always ready, we'll be there all the time - we put something like that on and you make a statement to another group that we're taking a side? That has a long-term damage for us. I just want to make absolutely sure we understand every step of the way how we're viewed."

Myers also said he expected more protests, calling it "the new normal," and that Portland firefighters would need to be aware of "the political environment we're in today."

Myers on Wednesday informed City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the bureau, of the decision to suspend operations of the embedded team. Saltzman told [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#) he supported the decision, adding that he would meet with Empower Portland representatives Monday.

"We don't want our paramedics dressed like police officers," Saltzman said.

Portland police have appreciated having a firefighter EMT in their rapid response units, spokesman Sgt. Pete Simpson said, noting that flares and other objects have been thrown at officers at protests.

Myers said he does not have a timeline about resuming the practice of embedding a technician.

"As fire chief, my role is to make sure people are healthy and safe. Everyone," he said. "We're not taking sides here. We need to be able to treat everyone and treat quickly."

Willamette Week

Longtime Director of Problem-Plagued Portland Bureau Is Leaving Abruptly

By Rachel Monahan

March 13, 2017

The long-time director for the Office of Neighborhood Involvement announced her departure this morning in an email to staff.

The announcement comes after Amalia Alarcón de Morris, who led the bureau for 11 years, faced a withering audit of her bureau in November for its management failures.

As he took office, Mayor Ted Wheeler called ONI the bureau [most in need of reform](#), outside the police bureau. He [reassigned the bureau](#) from Commissioner Amanda Fritz, a fierce champion of the bureau and the Portland neighborhood system, to Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.

Alarcón de Morris's email did not state a reason for her departure, though she's leaving abruptly, on March 20.

"We wish her the best with whatever she does next," says David Austin, a spokesman for Eudaly.

Austin acknowledges that Eudaly is looking to address problems the audit identified.

"Clearly, the audit pointed out some issues within the bureau," he adds. "We have been working with the hardworking ONI staff to examine those issues and fix them. A lot of the ground-level people in this organization are doing a great job, and we're going to make sure a solid leader is brought in to help move the bureau in a new direction."

The audit in November found, notably, that East Portland neighborhood groups were given less funding than wealthier, more centrally located neighborhoods—something the bureau had no immediate plans to fix.

The bureau had also collected [a wide range of responsibilities beyond managing neighborhood associations over the years](#), including the new public financing of elections and recreational-marijuana licensing. Alarcón de Morris disparaged her office as an "Island of Misfit Toys," according to the audit working papers, though she told WW she never used that nickname.

Alarcón de Morris did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

UPDATE, 11:15 am: [David Austin, Commissioner Eudaly's deputy chief of staff](#), will serve as co-interim director along with Amy Archer, who is ONI's operations manager, starting next Monday.

Portland Building Gets a Second All-User Bathroom Back, in New Location

By Rachel Monahan

March 10, 2017

The city of Portland has a second all-gender, multi-stall bathroom back in action in its biggest building.

Earlier this week, the city converted one of the two all-user bathrooms on the second floor of the Portland Building to a women's room.

The change came after Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz [threatened not to attend council meetings there](#)—if action was not taken on "unsafe" conditions. Council meetings are being held in the Portland Building this month while work is completed on council chambers.

By Friday morning, the city's Office of Management and Finance converted the women's restroom on the building's first floor to an all-user restroom, leaving a men's room on the first floor as a gendered bathroom. The second floor will continue to have a women's room and an all user-bathroom.

As part of an effort to make bathrooms available to transgender people and others, the city converted all of 600 of its single-stall bathrooms last year, making them open to all users. It also launched a pilot project in the Portland Building converting two bathrooms with multiple stalls into all-gender restrooms.

City Commissioner Nick Fish, who championed the all-user bathrooms, says he's pleased with the outcome in the Portland Building this week, because offering an all-user bathroom on two separate floors creates more options.

"OMF, which oversees this program, has actually come up with an improvement," says Fish. "They've improved access and convenience."

Fritz had [threatened in emails](#) last month to boycott City Council meetings if a second-floor all-gender bathroom wasn't changed to a women's room. She described the multi-stall, all-gender bathrooms as dangerous and threatening to women and transgender people.

Fish says he's heard from members of the transgender community who were alarmed after Fritz's emails became public in WW's story Tuesday. He is meeting with community partners this afternoon, he says.

[Fritz apologized in an email earlier](#) this week and says she still supports the all-user bathrooms.

The Portland Mercury

Meeting Between Mayor's Office and ACLU Over Exclusion Proposal Won't Happen

By Dirk VanderHart

March 13, 2017

When Mayor Ted Wheeler last week eased off the gas of a new proposal that [could see disruptive audience members banned](#) from City Council meetings for months, he did so with an understanding.

"I was disappointed that we didn't have more opportunity to engage with ACLU," Wheeler said at the end of a meeting packed with testimony—including that from the ACLU of Oregon—urging city council to hold off on the new policy.

But when the exclusion proposal comes back before council on Wednesday, it looks like the civil liberties group and Wheeler will still have failed to engage. After tentative plans for a Tuesday meeting, the ACLU canceled, according to Wheeler's office. That means that the proposal appears headed for a vote without significant changes.

"We will bring the resolution up for a vote on Wednesday," says Michael Cox, a spokesperson for Wheeler. "I do not anticipate any significant amendments at this time."

The ACLU says it wanted to meet with Wheeler—and still does. The organization's legal director, Mat dos Santos, is on vacation currently. He'd hoped to meet with Wheeler's staff on Tuesday, but awoke this morning to a notice that his flight had been cancelled, and asked Wheeler's office to push back.

Wheeler's deputy chief of staff, Kristin Dennis, asked whether another ACLU staffer would want to meet instead, and dos Santos responded that it wouldn't make sense to hold a meeting without him there, and suggested the mayor's office meet with others who have concerns about the policy. He says he didn't hear back until the Mercury inquired about the matter with news the vote was moving forward.

"It makes me believe that whatever they said on the record was a farce," dos Santos said this morning. He points to [Wheeler's appearance](#) on the OPB show Think Out Loud last week, in which the mayor said: "Frankly, I'm in no particular hurry. I'd rather get this right."

"If the mayor moves forward now, that's his choice, and a direct contradiction to the message that he wants to get it right," dos Santos says.

It's not entirely clear that Wheeler and the organization could find common ground even if they met. Wheeler wants to re-institute a system—banished by a 2015 federal court ruling—that would allow him to exclude audience members after they repeatedly disrupt meetings. A first exclusion under Wheeler's proposal would last for 30 days. Subsequent exclusions would be for 60 days.

The ACLU and others have pointed out that the policy seems to fly in the face of US District Judge Michael Simon's finding that it's illegal to ban people from meetings "for possible or assumed disruption in the future." The judge did say the city could restructure its code to

create a new policy, but it's not clear how this proposal would be permissible given the 2015 ruling. The City Attorney's Office clearly thinks it will.

Wheeler's staff has been putting together the exclusion proposal for months, and fast-tracked its introduction in light of repeated disruptions at council meetings this year. The ACLU has said Wheeler hasn't used one available tool for calming those disruptions: having individual protesters escorted out (or arrested) and prevented from re-entering the meeting.

"There are ways to deal with it within the bounds of the constitution," says Sarah Einowski, an attorney who works with the ACLU. "Although it may be inconvenient for them to kick people out every day, the city does have tools available to it."

If the vote moves forward as planned on Wednesday, it likely has support to pass. But as things stand now, it wouldn't take effect right away. Wheeler asked his colleagues to remove an "emergency" designation from the ordinance at the end of last week's meeting, meaning it would take effect 30 days after passage.

It's possible the mayor could convince council to re-designate the matter as an emergency, in which case it would apply immediately after passage.

After Facing His Loudest Critics, Ted Wheeler Will Push to Change City Meetings

By Dirk VanderHart

March 10, 2017

Mayor Ted Wheeler's first listening session with his largest detractors might have an interesting outcome: opening up Wheeler and other city council members to more detractors like them.

After an hour-long informal meeting in which Wheeler had invited members of the public to air their grievances, the mayor said he'd pursue changes—suggested by an audience member—that would expand public commentary at the beginning of City Council meetings, allow citizens to sign up for that commentary the same day of the meeting, and utilize light city council agendas for more-such listening sessions.

"I think they're great ideas," Wheeler said after the meeting. His staff cautioned, though, that it was unclear how easy the changes would be to effect. It's possible they'd require a change of the City Charter, which would mean a public vote.

The proposal came at the tail end of a meeting that was sort of remarkable for its context. After months of repeated outbursts and demonstrations have stymied City Council meetings, one nighttime visit to his home, and even calls for him to resign, the mayor had invited all interested parties (who could get time off at 11 am on a week day) to tell him what he is doing wrong.

Wheeler sat directly across a table from people who testified, alongside Commissioner Amanda Fritz who'd asked to attend. Both officials took notes, and Wheeler promised action on several peoples' complaints.

Inevitably, many of the comments came from people who've critiqued the mayor the most, and focused largely on the issues of police accountability and homelessness, which have been flash points of Wheeler's young term.

On police, people wanted answers for why cops had [roughed up peaceful demonstrators at a Presidents' Day protest downtown](#). When Wheeler pointed out he'd since directed Police Chief Mike Marshman to emphasize de-escalation, an interesting exchange occurred.

"Why the hell have you not fired him yet?" a woman named Jenny Nickolaus asked. "If he's not listening to you and you're not listening to us, something bad is going to happen."

"You're assuming that the police chief doesn't agree with me on this," Wheeler responded. "Don't assume that."

When Nickolaus suggested that meant officers weren't listening to Marshman, the mayor said: "That's certainly possible."

The Mercury asked about that comment after the meeting. "These are large complicated bureaus... and they all have their own culture," he said. "A lot of what people are saying is they're very frustrated that I have not been able to change the culture of the police bureau. Changing a culture isn't something you do over night."

(In the meeting, Wheeler put that sentiment thusly: "I've been mayor for like 10 minutes, and this is a cultural shift.")

For years, the city's been under a settlement with the US Department of Justice aimed at reforming aspects of the police bureau, and it's worth noting that Wheeler's take on this diverges somewhat from that of his predecessor. Mayor Charlie Hales frequently praised the immense improvements he'd seen in the bureau.

When the subject turned to Quanice Hayes, the 17-year-old Portland teen killed by police last month, Wheeler stressed that he couldn't comment on two ongoing investigations into that case. It didn't mollify attendees.

The mayor also took critiques about homeless camps and the city's response to the bitter cold snap that claimed several lives. He pointed out the city had helped expand shelter offerings during that period, but acknowledged improvements were possible.

The most concrete result of the meeting, though, was after testimony from Mary Sipe, a Portland resident who's [helped advise the city](#) on public involvement matters in the past.

"When I watched the videos of people screaming and name calling, I was first put off and my first thought was to dismiss them," Sipe said. But she came to feel that people were yelling because they didn't think earlier pleas had been heard.

"Only after feeling not heard... did it devolve," Sipe said. "What this group of citizens is doing is not working, and what you, mayor, and the city council are doing is not working for any of us."

She suggested that Wheeler expand the five "public comment" slots at the outset of council meetings. These are the only opportunities for people to speak on topics that aren't otherwise on the agenda. Wheeler said he'd look into increasing the slots from five to 10. He also said he'd work to allow people to sign up for them the same day of the meeting, rather than days before as is practice now. He is concerned, though, that it could lead to the same people speaking at every meeting.

And Wheeler voiced early support for a concept that might have his colleagues wincing. Currently, if council agendas are light enough, the body doesn't hold meetings on Wednesday or Thursday afternoons. Sipe suggested when that happens, commissioners could hold public comment sessions.

What this meeting means for decorum at future council sessions is unclear. Wheeler envisioned the event as a sort of pressure release that might stop people from disrupting other public hearings, and the feeling in the room seemed amiable when it was finished.

"It went really well because it allows us the kind of interaction we can't have in a council session," Wheeler said afterward. His biggest take away, he said: "At least from a philosophical perspective, we're trying to move in the same direction. We've just had disagreements about how to get there... Today I think we got bits and pieces of a better answer."

Whether or not that's true might be driven home next week, when Wheeler will once again take up his proposal to change city policy to [exclude disruptive people from meetings for up to two months](#).

The proposal's faced backlash from citizens, the ACLU of Oregon and others, who believe it flies in the face of a 2015 federal court ruling. Wheeler pushed back a vote on the matter on Wednesday, saying he wanted to meet with the ACLU about possible tweaks.