

## **The Oregonian**

# **Portland as ‘cesspool’ vs. ‘politics of fear’ -- verbal punches traded ahead of police contract talks**

*By Maxine Bernstein*

*January 14, 2020*

The president of Portland’s police union ruffled feathers this week with a blunt statement ahead of contract talks that repeated his belief that the city is “becoming a cesspool” and argued that local politicians are giving short shrift to public safety and the city’s livability.

“In July 2018, I said our city was becoming a cesspool and today I stand by that assessment; our once vibrant city is on the wrong track,” Officer Daryl Turner wrote Monday on behalf of the Portland Police Association.

His statement comes as the city begins contract renewal negotiations with the union. The contract – for rank-and-file officers, sergeants and detectives - expires in June.

Turner blasted efforts by Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty to seek changes in the next contract and her invitation to leaders of a national police reform campaign who addressed the City Council in October. They recommended city officials push for changes that would restrict use of deadly force, hold officers accountable for misconduct and allow greater civilian oversight.

Turner said the meeting “lacked context and fundamental knowledge on the rights all public employees have under collective bargaining laws, the Oregon Constitution, and the United States Constitution.”

He criticized recent public forums that Hardesty and Mayor Ted Wheeler organized to draw public input on the contract talks and characterized local government efforts as “paltry” to help people who are homeless, have mental illnesses or addictions.

He also urged the city to address a serious staffing shortage in the Police Bureau, which has about 104 officer vacancies with an authorized strength of 1,001.

On Tuesday, Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, condemned Turner’s remarks in his own prepared statement, saying they were “disappointing and even harmful.”

“Upholding fairness, dignity, and equity by identifying and addressing problems in policing is an opportunity, not a threat, for members of the Portland Police Association,” Singh wrote. “The upcoming contract negotiations are a critical opportunity to make steps toward all of Portland’s communities feeling safe, valued, and included. For too long, Mr. Turner and others have been eager to push a self-serving and misleading conversation around policing and community well-being.”

**Below are Turner’s and Singh’s full statements:**

**Officer Daryl Turner’s statement:**

On the State of Public Safety in Our City

As we move into a new year, the Portland Police Association (PPA) and our members face many challenges. It will take time to adjust to the change in leadership from former Chief, Danielle Outlaw, to our new Chief, Jami Resch, and the realignment of command staff, supervisory staff, and their priorities.

Contract negotiations for both the police and dispatchers is a critical topic for the PPA. But we will not lose sight of the many other important issues we face; particularly, the severe and catastrophic staffing shortage that has a huge impact on how we provide resources to meet the evolving needs of the diverse communities we are called upon to serve.

Our commitment to you, our PPA members, is unwavering. We will not be distracted by the false narratives and self-serving agendas of those who seek to drive a wedge between police officers and our community. We recently heard a lot about contract concerns from City Hall and the media. On October 1st of last year, activists from the anti-police group Campaign Zero gave a nearly two-hour presentation to Portland's City Council at Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's invitation. It was obviously choreographed and orchestrated, but it lacked context and fundamental knowledge on the rights all public employees have under collective bargaining laws, the Oregon Constitution, and the United States Constitution.

On top of that, Mayor Wheeler and Commissioner Hardesty hosted two separate community listening sessions to hear priorities for the upcoming negotiations between the City and the PPA. We again saw the lack of basic understanding of public employee rights.

As an organization, the PPA believes our community and residents should have input on public safety priorities. However, my concern is that these two forums were not widespread across the city, neighborhoods, and businesses. The forums appeared to be skewed toward a prescribed outcome and to set unreasonable expectations causing frustration for some community members. The forums also ignored the broader issues faced by our community.

Meaningful conversations about public safety are vital to our evolution as first responders, as an organization, and as a community. Historically, neighborhood associations have been a mainstay for civic involvement, the Portland way of life. At a time when their very existence has come under fire, it's even more important for the PPA to support and connect with our neighbors to talk about what's important to them.

Over the past two years, I've attended several meetings with neighborhood associations, business associations, and other community gatherings across the City. Residents are frustrated with the City and County's paltry humanitarian efforts to have adequate resources for those who are homeless, in mental health crisis, and experiencing addiction issues. I hear the same things again and again: people don't see enough police in their neighborhoods; due to limited police staffing, livability issues continue to go unaddressed; our community wants proactive policing to reduce crimes of opportunity; and they are alarmed about gun violence citywide. Portland police have been called to twenty-five different shootings that showered residential neighborhoods with hundreds of bullets. We've seen two homicides and several wounded and we are just into the second week of the new year. This weekend, two unrelated traffic stops by officers with the Gun Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) led to arrests and the seizure of two guns.

The Mayor recently described our city as successful and vibrant. Yet, we continue to spend millions of taxpayer dollars and things are not getting better. For example, the City's Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program (HUCIRP) reportedly cleaned 2,828 campsites, collected 1,954 tons of garbage, removed 8,000 gallons of human waste, and removed 457,461 needles from July 2018 – June 2019. The problem is worse than ever. And the city just approved an over \$22 million contract with Rapid Response over the next five years to continue the cleanup efforts.

While Mayor Wheeler and Commissioner Hardesty were eager to hold narrowly focused forums on the contract, they have neglected to prioritize, with the same sense of importance and urgency, the issues affecting the day to day safety and livability of our communities at large. In

July 2018, I said our city was becoming a cesspool and today I stand by that assessment; our once vibrant city is on the wrong track.

The first responders of this city, the rank and file of the Portland Police Bureau, and the call takers and dispatchers of the Bureau of Emergency Communications—the boots on the ground who do the work—are the foundation of public safety in our city. As the subject matter experts who take the calls for service every day, we are frustrated. We have firsthand knowledge of the fears, anxiety, and frustration of a community disillusioned by empty promises made every election cycle. Through all the changes, I know our officers and dispatchers are and will continue to be the steady driving force in building relationships and trust in the community while providing the highest level of service. The PPA and the community at large support you in your efforts as we move into the new year with new hope and new opportunities.

### **Bobbin Singh's statement as executive director of Oregon Justice Resource Statement:**

Daryl Turner's "State of Public Safety in Our City" was disappointing and even harmful. We're among the many people in Portland who want to see criminal systems guided by the latest research and social science and following best practices. Upholding fairness, dignity, and equity by identifying and addressing problems in policing is an opportunity, not a threat, for members of the Portland Police Association. A lack of transparency and accountability around law enforcement officers who are alleged to have engaged in or have actually engaged in misconduct or wrongful use of force hurts our community. It also hurts officers who are trying to do the right thing. Building more trust with the community, improving training and practices, and creating safer conditions for officers would be good for PPA members and Portlanders.

What's more, Mr. Turner's statement continues down the same outdated path of peddling the politics of fear and anger, deflection, and making allegations that those who seek a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to community well-being are 'anti-police.' The evidence does not support Mr. Turner's zero-sum mentality that any increase in accountability and transparency will reduce employee rights and due process. The data support the fact that our community and our law enforcement officers will be safer if our city incorporates national best practices and model provisions into the union contract.

The upcoming contract negotiations are a critical opportunity to make steps toward all of Portland's communities feeling safe, valued, and included. For too long, Mr. Turner and others have been eager to push a self-serving and misleading conversation around policing and community well-being. Too many Portlanders have paid the highest price for our unwillingness to address police violence head on, particularly people of color, and people experiencing mental health crises. It is past time for an honest conversation about acknowledging the harm done, encouraging healing, and acting to prevent future tragedies. Portland deserves better from Daryl Turner and the Portland Police Association.

## **Rose Quarter project would likely exceed \$1 billion if freeway caps are expanded, reinforced**

*By Andrew Theen  
January 14, 2019*

A state report indicates the Rose Quarter freeway project would likely cost more than \$1 billion if proposed covers spanning the interstate are expanded and strengthened to allow for multistory buildings.

That's one of the takeaways from the Cost to Complete Report released Tuesday by the Department of Transportation. The report also offered the first glimpse at what the various project elements -- like the additional merging lanes or freeway covers -- will likely cost. State lawmakers approved funding for the project, which is on a key stretch of Interstate 5 through inner North and Northeast Portland, in the landmark \$5.3 billion transportation package approved in 2017. That law mandated a report on updated project costs be finalized by Feb. 1, 2020. The state is expected to brief lawmakers on the report next month.

The report adds a new wrinkle to the political controversy that is increasingly circling the mega project. While some vocal critics, including some elected officials, have pushed for a more extensive environmental impact statement to study the project's potential impact on air pollution, traffic congestion and other factors, a separate sticking point has centered on whether the state is doing enough to bridge together the neighborhood that was divided by the freeway decades ago.

The project, which has been in motion for roughly a decade, calls for replacing several existing overpasses spanning I-5 with a freeway cover in two locations. But the state is not currently planning to design those covers to support multistory buildings, instead envisioning two public spaces, which would total roughly two acres.

The Albina Vision Trust, a group that has called for significant changes to the project to help stitch together the neighborhood, has demanded more extensive freeway covers to allow for commercial and housing space atop them. Portland politicians like Commissioner Chloe Eudaly and Metro Council President Lynne Peterson have echoed that sentiment.

According to the 58-page state report released this week, building such covers would drive project costs even higher, and the state said a decision on how to proceed must be made by this summer or the entire project would be delayed.

"Preliminary estimates suggest a range of \$200 million to \$500 million of additional cost to design and build expanded covers," the state wrote, "depending on the required length and strength of the covers."

"Much of the cost is attributed to providing the structural capacity to accommodate the weight of the buildings," the report states.

The transportation department said the state needs to decide "no later than June" whether to revise the freeway covers to accommodate buildings, or construction would likely not begin by 2023.

Gov. Kate Brown last month called for an independent consultant to examine the freeway cap issue. In May, the state said it planned to hire a consultant. It never did.

In a briefing with The Oregonian Editorial Board and this reporter, the project's leaders said they still plan to hire that consultant, but they said the state can conduct that analysis on its own and provide details to the Oregon Transportation Commission so it can decide how to proceed.

Megan Channell, the project's director, said the \$200 million to \$500 million in additional costs included in the report came from "preliminary estimates" from ODOT employees.

The Cost to Complete report also includes a revised total cost estimate to build the project, which calls for new freeway shoulders in both directions of the Rose Quarter on I-5, merging lanes on a 1.7-mile stretch of freeway between I-84 and I-405, and a number of surface street changes like a new bike and pedestrian bridge spanning I-5.

The project, first estimated to cost \$450 million to \$500 million, is now expected to cost \$715 million to \$795 million. That dollar figure is based on 2025 dollars.

The final report's price tag matches a draft figure first reported by Willamette Week last month.

Project costs rose largely due to inflation. According to the report, the new estimate's base range includes \$130 million in inflation, factoring in a 3% inflation rate. The state also projects it must buy at least \$42 million in right of way from adjacent landowners, though no homes will be displaced.

ODOT staff this week again declined to say whether they support moving forward with the project as currently designed or pausing to conduct a more thorough environmental analysis.

But Channell said conducting a full environmental impact statement would add three years to the project timeline. "The need for the project isn't going away," she said. Under its current timeline, construction would begin in 2023 and wrap up in 2027.

The report sheds additional light on how difficult the construction could be for the region. ODOT intends to keep "as many open lanes as is possible" on the interstate during construction. But the construction would jam up TriMet and Portland Streetcar service for years.

The streetcar, in particular, would be affected "for approximately two to three years," with service "switched to a bus bridge" while construction moves forward on demolishing the bridges on Broadway and Weidler spanning the freeway. Roughly 5,000 to 6,000 riders use the streetcar through that area every day.

In a December letter to the state transportation commission, Portland Streetcar Executive Director Dan Bower said a bus shuttle would leave his transit service holding the bag and paying for the added operational costs. "We believe the best solution to minimize disruption and maintain vital transit connectivity during the construction phase is to continue regular streetcar service on temporary tracks over the temporary structures planned for the project," he wrote.

ODOT says the highway section is the 28th worst bottleneck in the nation, based on the length of its rush hour delays.

Adding the auxiliary travel lanes is a common-sense solution to the weaving issue that leads to rear-end and side-swiping accidents, ODOT says. Some 99% of vehicles that travel southbound after merging onto I-5 from I-405 during evening rush hour commutes are exiting at the Broadway, I-84 and Morrison exits, all of which are inside the project area. "The addition of an auxiliary lane will allow drivers to make these trips without merging into the two through lanes on I-5 before exiting," the report states.

When asked whether ODOT is considering building the freeway projects like the shoulders and auxiliary lanes first, then dealing with the rest of the project, Channell said that is not the plan at the moment.

"It's a package right now," she said.

It's not clear when the Oregon Transportation Commission will decide the project's future. The volunteer board, which is appointed by the governor, meets Jan. 26.

Other takeaways from the report:

- Costs are estimated to be at a 70th percentile, meaning planners believe there is a 70% likelihood the final costs will either be within or less than the estimated range.
- ODOT says costs to build retaining walls and sound walls near Harriet Tubman Middle School also contributed to escalating costs. Channell said the state knows more about the topography of the area than it did in 2017, and more dirt needs to be extracted to build retaining walls, and that dirt is contaminated, adding to project costs.

- The overpass bridge known as the Hancock-Dixon Bridge, which is expected to replace the existing Flint Street bridge, has been revised a bit to limit what had been a steep 10% grade. The revisions added some costs and put the bridge at a 7% grade.

## **Willamette Week**

### **Portland Now Contains What Might Be the Largest “Slow Zone” of Any U.S. City**

*By Elise Herron  
January 15, 2020*

#### **Most of Northwest Portland is a 20 miles-per-hour zone.**

Driving through Northwest Portland? Slow down.

Earlier this month, the Portland Bureau of Transportation finished installing 20 mph signs along major surface streets in the Northwest quadrant, making the 1.6-square-mile area one of the largest "slow zones" of any U.S. city.

PBOT spokesman John Brady says the bureau "lowered speed limits on streets where it knew it could make a real safety difference"—and adds the bureau may do more. "We're looking at this across the city," he says, "and have lowered speeds across the city."

The 20 mph zone stretches from Northwest Couch to Upshur streets and west of Naito Parkway to Pittock Mansion. Portland personal injury lawyer Scott Kocher says Portland's slow zone is now larger than any in New York City, where such zones are typically five by five blocks in size, or Seattle, where the largest slow zone covers about 1.5 square miles.

The historic slow zone's creation is thanks in part to the advocacy of Kocher. This summer, WW reported on his demand that Portland lower the speed limit on what are known as "collector" streets—wider, more heavily trafficked streets that travel through residential neighborhoods ("Blindsided," WW, Aug. 21, 2019). Local streets, which have less traffic, are already subject to the 20 mph limit.

Kocher says he advocated for months that PBOT lower speed limits on collectors in Northwest from 25 to 20 mph, in compliance with a 2017 city ordinance that gave the bureau authority to slow down traffic. The bureau agreed to start by lowering speeds on thoroughfares like Glisan, Lovejoy and Thurman streets. (Brady says he doesn't know how much of a role Kocher's advocacy played in bringing about the change, but that PBOT "talks with many organizations and individuals in Portland who are concerned with safety like we are.")

Kocher announced his success in the Northwest quadrant last week in an op-ed on the website BikePortland.org. He now wants to see the same speed limit applied citywide.

"I believe that anyone who lives on a collector street in a residential district should be asking PBOT why they don't have a 20 mph limit outside of Northwest, because it's what they are entitled to," Kocher tells WW. "We can now [go to PBOT] and say, 'We've done Northwest Portland and the sky hasn't fallen—what next?'"

# Former Mayor Sam Adams Moves Closer to a Political Comeback Bid—Which Could Have Ripple Effects on Other Portland Contests

*By Nigel Jaquiss*  
*January 15, 2020*

**Some close to Adams have urged him to challenge either Mayor Ted Wheeler or City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.**

The most polarizing City Hall figure in the past two decades is preparing a return bid.

As soon as Jan. 15, former Mayor Sam Adams could signal which of four Portland City Council seats on the May ballot interests him most, according to a half-dozen sources familiar with his thinking. (Adams declined to comment.)

Some close to Adams have urged him to challenge either Mayor Ted Wheeler or City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.

Both incumbents are drifting toward re-election bids in listless fashion. Wheeler lost his campaign manager, recently announced he's getting a divorce, and has raised little money for his political war chest; Eudaly has neither hired a campaign manager nor filed the paperwork due by Jan. 15 to qualify for public financing.

"They're both vulnerable," says pollster John Horvick of DHM Research. "If you look at broad measures like 'right direction/wrong direction,' they are very, very low. There's just a lot of anger around homelessness and no clarity about what to do."

Also in play: the seat held by City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who is retiring after three terms. But Adams has already pledged his support to the front-runner for that seat, Latino Network executive director Carmen Rubio.

Conversations with Adams insiders suggest his most likely target is the seat vacated by Commissioner Nick Fish's Jan. 2 death from cancer.

Adams would enjoy a name recognition advantage over a large field, including such potential candidates as former Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith and Metro Councilor Sam Chase.

Two influential union leaders say they'd welcome Adams' candidacy, although neither expressed a preference for which race he enters.

"As mayor, Sam was an incredible advocate for janitors and low-wage workers," says Felisa Hagins, political director for Service Employees International Union Local 49. "It would be difficult for our union to count somebody out who's been such an amazing champion. We would welcome him with open arms into our process—whatever he decides to run for."

Lt. Alan Ferschweiler, president of the Portland Firefighters Association, says he and his union would also like to see Adams on the ballot.

"We have enjoyed a great relationship with Sam," Ferschweiler says. "He was respectful and civil, both to the unions and all city employees. We'd love to see him back in City Hall."

The question is whether Portland voters are willing to welcome back an often divisive figure whose energy and ambition sometimes created conflict.

Len Bergstein, a longtime City Hall lobbyist and observer, dealt regularly with Adams when Adams served as chief of staff to Mayor Vera Katz for more than a decade and while Adams was city commissioner and mayor. Bergstein notes the city has changed significantly since Adams left office and that a whole new cadre of leaders has emerged, many of them women and people of color who are poised to run for Fish's seat.

Bergstein, a close friend of Fish's, says the outpouring of affection for the late commissioner shows that what voters want in his replacement is somebody with Fish's conciliatory, diplomatic approach. He's not sure Adams can fill that void.

"I'm skeptical," Bergstein says. "He will have to prove he's a different and more mature version of what people saw when he was last in office. "

Adams, 56, who served as mayor from 2009 to 2013, is also perhaps the most accomplished leader to hold that position since his mentor, Katz, left office in 2005 after three terms. As mayor, Adams extended the Portland Streetcar to the eastside, expanded bicycle infrastructure, brought the Portland Timbers back to town, and introduced curbside composting.

But a scandal over his relationship with a young man named Beau Breedlove tainted his tenure. Although Adams survived two recall attempts, he did not run for a second term.

Adams rebuilt his reputation, serving first as executive director of the City Club of Portland and then at a high level at the World Resources Institute, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit.

His rehabilitation crashed in November 2017, however, when his former mayoral scheduler, Cevero Gonzalez, accused Adams of sexual harassment in a letter to the City Council. Adams was then working for WRI but lost that job after WW reported on Gonzalez's letter. (Neither Adams nor the institute would comment on his departure.)

Horvick says despite the baggage he would carry into any comeback, Adams retains a considerable base of support.

"I think he's still well known to voters," says Horvick. "Are they receptive? Sam is a polarizing figure. I don't think that's changed. People will remember his accomplishments and the scandals that went along with them."

Adams' allies say he would like to qualify for the city's new public campaign financing program. The Jan. 15 filing deadline for Wheeler's, Eudaly's and Fritz's seats puts a tight timeline on his decision. Although Fish's seat will also appear on the same May 19 ballot as those other races, candidates to replace Fish have until Feb. 7 to file for public financing—another reason Adams will probably move in that direction.

"People are anxious for action," Horvick says. "And whatever else Sam brings, he brings that."

## **Mingus Mapps Qualifies for Public Financing in Challenge to Commissioner Chloe Eudaly**

*By Nigel Jaquiss  
January 14, 2020*

**Mapps will now be eligible for up to \$250,000 in his quest to unseat the incumbent.**

Mingus Mapps, the former city employee and political science professor, made a big step forward today in his challenge to incumbent Portland Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.



Mapps became the first of five candidates challenging Eudaly in the May primary to qualify for public financing under the city's new Open and Accountable Elections program.

That allows Mapps to collect matching funds in a ratio of 6 to 1 from the city and to spend up to \$250,000 for the primary. (Mayoral candidate Sarah Iannerone and Carmen Rubio, a candidate in the District 1 race to succeed Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who is retiring, both qualified for public money in October.)

"I want to thank the hundreds of Portlanders who have donated to our campaign," Mapps said in a statement. "You are helping prove that 'Big Money' does not have to dominate Portland politics. Our campaign is complying with the donation limits passed by Portland voters, and I challenge the other candidates in this race to do the same. I am humbled and honored at the outpouring of grassroots support."

Eudaly's re-election bid, in contrast, is off to a slow start. She has not yet filed to run or hired a campaign manager and although her office says she intends to meet the Jan. 15 deadline for filing for public funding, she has not yet done so.

## **The Daily Journal of Commerce**

### **'Unicorn' due to arrive in historic district**

*By Josh Kulla  
January 14, 2020*

Developer Kevin Cavanaugh's latest brainstorm – a proposal for a 14-unit residential project in the Nob Hill neighborhood – got a hearty go-ahead from Portland's Historic Landmarks Commission on Monday.

DAO Architecture designed the Unicorn Bed Apartments, two three-story buildings, for Cavanaugh's Guerrilla Development. The complex will occupy a 5,000-square-foot lot at 2171 N.W. Glisan St., and drawings suggest it will strongly resemble the type of wood-clad walk-up commonly found a century ago.

"I like the simplicity of the design and I like the more modern interpretation of a historic design, including the iron railings," Commissioner Matthew Roman said just prior to the unanimous vote to approve the proposal. "It's putting a modern building together that still has the warmth and human scale; it just feels like it's not just a machine-made monster unpacked from someplace else."

An existing triplex is set back from the street on the lot, with a small surface parking lot in front. The building will be demolished to make way for the new development, which will feature 13 two-bedroom units approximately 600 square feet each. The 14th unit is intended to provide residents with a day care space, but it could be converted into another residence.

At least one of the ground-floor apartments will be fully accessible for persons with disabilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Exterior materials will include a concrete foundation, wood lap siding, aluminum-clad windows, standing-seam metal roofing, and ornate, laser-cut metal railings.

Commissioners approved requested modifications to building height, side setbacks, landscaped areas and pedestrian path width.

The proposal calls for bicycle storage in the building's basement, but no motor vehicle parking. The building is geared to serve single mothers with young children, and the on-site day care space is intended to attract such tenants. The plan is for rents to be "affordable."

"Existing zoning would allow a much larger structure here, but our client and landowner have prioritized a different direction to fit a special population of tenants," DAO Architecture principal David Horsley said. "We believe it's this program and the architectural features of the project that have garnered such positive feedback from the neighborhood association."

Guerrilla Development has gained much attention for its colorful, bold projects such as the Fair-Haired Dumbbell and Tree Farm. But the Unicorn Bed Apartments, at a glance, does not follow suit. The neutral color palette, siding and metal railings all hark back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when multifamily buildings came in many more shapes and sizes than typically are found in Portland now. The surrounding neighborhood features a mix of historic single-family and multifamily structures.

"We wanted to create a modest, welcoming, dignified project for families that blends into the neighborhood context," DAO Architecture principal Joanne Le said.

The commission did not spend a long time deliberating. Instead, the jovial discussion ended up in laughter.

"It fits in so well," Commissioner Derek Spears said. "I can see that the building in that spot fits in perfectly. One thing, and humor me here, but I don't see any unicorns on the side though."

Roman quickly answered.

"Some," he said with a chuckle, "argue affordable housing in a historic district is a unicorn."

But maybe not.

## **The Portland Observer**

### **Fire Chief on Dr. King's message**

*By Beverly Corbell  
January 14, 2020*

#### **Sara Boone embraces roots in journey of discovery**

Portland Fire Chief Sara Boone, the first African American to head Portland Fire & Rescue, was born in 1969, a year after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, but as a young girl and woman she discovered his teachings as she was discovering herself.

"It was self-discovery of what blackness meant," Boone explained. "When you're older, you start reading books on African American history because in the U.S. education system you have many a day of celebration, but African American history is not really celebrated within the history of this country and I think that what I realized growing up was, 'Where do I get my identity? Where are my roots?'"

Boone said government and educational systems "completely eliminate objectifiable truth when it comes to African Americans and every other culture that has also contributed to the founding of this country and where we are today."

Studying great black leaders, like Dr. King, on her own, helped the future Portland leader learn more about her place in the world.

“Whether it was Malcolm X, whether it was Dr. King, or whether it was Barbara Jordan (Texas black activist and politician), whether it was all the great civil right leaders, everybody has a story to tell about what it was like for them and what they were championing,” Boone explained in an exclusive interview with the Portland Observer.

It was in college that Boone expanded her reading of Dr. King and other civil rights leaders.

“One of my heroes is Marian Wright Edelman,” she said. “She really pours her heart and soul into young kids, and it was her words, ‘If you can’t see, how can you believe?’” that gave her a lot of inspiration.

Boone said when you have to have kids seeing people just like them, from a diversity of races, taking part in varied occupations and professions, they can dream about their own futures in such lines of work, “So that is one thing that has always stuck with me. Who are your heroes? What is your imagination? What are the possibilities?”

Boone started out to be a teacher, and when she was student-teacher right out of college, it was a chance encounter with a fire inspector that led her to consider working for the fire department. She knew there were few if any people who looked like her in a department that was almost entirely male and white. Advancing diversity in the bureau is now a priority for her.

When she was younger, Boone saw black women become successful in modeling, sports, music and somewhat in politics.

“So I know that is the one thing that I can change at Portland Fire, is that we have to have visual representation, which means we have to be out there in the community.

“I have to be engaged when it comes to, ‘Can you see yourself working for Portland Fire?’ and not just for the African American community,” she said. “Every culture that’s out there, every ethnicity that’s out there, we do have representation for now, and so I need to be able to message and market that to kids at a younger age. That’s why it’s so important – so they can see themselves.”

Portland Fire & Rescue connects with young people through school fire safety events, community engagement, and hiring events. The department also has a public education office and a job recruitment office, she said.

“My challenge today, since I stepped into the Bureau, is to understanding all the systemic and institutional policies and practices and removing barriers so everybody has a chance to succeed,” she said.

Boone said the department needs to build trust in marginalized communities, like the thousands of people who lack a place to sleep or eat on a daily basis, “So that’s a shift in what we’re doing” with the new Street Response Team to primarily serve Portland’s homeless population.

The Street Response Team, becoming operational this spring, answers Dr. King’s call for compassion and service to others, Boone said. The integrated mobile health team is being assembled by City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty’s office by working with about 50 local stakeholders, including social and mental health care agencies, fire department, police bureau and 911 dispatch, Boone said.

“I think that Commissioner Hardesty realizes and understands is that there was a vulnerable population that wasn’t getting the most appropriate response to meet their needs,” she said.

Street Response is the latest evolution of the fire bureau, which earlier expanded to take on emergency medical care, Boone said.

“Where Street Response is different, is that if somebody’s life is not in immediate harm, we have time,” she said. “We have time to be compassionate because we’re not treating the emergency heart attack where we have no time, we just have time to stabilize and transport.”

Boone said most emergency calls to Portland Fire & Rescue are concerning chronic health issues, mental health issues and substance use disorders.

“So that is a big area where first responders have to identify what is the right need and then what is the appropriate resource,” she said. “And it’s not the emergency room, because it’s not life threatening, but it’s how you navigate the health care system. And so that’s where I think of Dr. King and his message, that you have to think of others first.”