

The Oregonian

New Portland Police Chief Jami Resch talks officer shortages, protests and people in crisis

*By Maxine Bernstein
January 26, 2020*

Three weeks into her job as Portland's police chief, Jami Resch said she's working on getting to know community leaders, doesn't expect to make significant changes and believes the bureau is moving in the right direction.

Resch, 45, was sworn in as chief on Dec. 31 in a quick transition after Chief Danielle Outlaw accepted a job to become Philadelphia's police commissioner. Resch served as Outlaw's deputy chief and will mark 21 years with the bureau next month.

She met with reporters Friday in a round of individual interviews in a 15th floor conference room at police headquarters downtown and talked about her short- and long-term goals.

To deal with an ongoing staffing shortage, Resch said the bureau has changed patrol shifts to have more officers available at times when emergency calls typically are more frequent and temporarily eliminated some specialty units in two of its three precincts. There are now 104 officer vacancies in the bureau that has an authorized strength of 1,001 officers.

The chief said she plans to reach out to area law enforcement agencies to help during large-scale city protests expected this election year. She said she won't allow officers to use the controversial aerial flash-bang grenades for crowd control, a step Outlaw had taken after the distraction devices caused serious injuries to protesters. Resch also supports her predecessor's call for not allowing protesters who commit crimes to wear masks during demonstrations, but there's no law prohibiting the conduct now.

Resch said she believes federally mandated reforms have improved officer encounters with people in mental health crisis, though 2019 saw an increase in fatal police shootings of people suffering from mental illness.

The bureau halted its use of Central City Concern's sobering station, finding it wasn't a safe place to bring people who were either drunk or under the influence of drugs, but is working with the city and local partners, such as the county and nonprofit service agencies, to find an alternative, she said.

She said she also believes the Unity Center for Behavioral Health needs more resources and that stable transitional housing for people with mental illness is sorely missing.

She said she's committed to leading the bureau as chief for at least five years, when she's eligible for retirement. But she said she'll need support from within the bureau and outside for that to happen. (It would be the longest tenure since Chief Charles Moose, who served from 1993 to 1999.)

Her relationship with City Hall? "My role over there is to make sure whoever is in those chairs understands who the Portland Police Bureau is and what we do," she said.

Here's what she told The Oregonian/OregonLive in a 19-minute session. Her answers have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

What are your short-term goals?

The biggest one has been to try and meet everybody who wants to meet me. There's been an overwhelming positive support for me, and I've been super appreciative of it. I'm trying to get to know everybody as quickly as I can because I think it's super important that the community get to know me. That's been my personal short-term goal. I'm trying to fit that in as much as I can with the job requirements. And also, just to continue that forward momentum that we had started when now-Philadelphia Police Commissioner Outlaw was here.

I know there were a lot of questions from bureau members at first: Am I going to come in and make a huge shakeup? Am I going to change everybody in the chief's office? Am I going to move people around in their positions? Because that unknown can be unsettling. For me to be able to say, "That's not going to happen," I think made a calming effect for folks.

And for the community to know, I think you have a great police agency, and that I'm not going to make significant changes because I don't think there needs to be. When I say I don't think there needs to be, that doesn't mean that we don't need to continue to improve, but I am staying the same course that we were on.

What do you mean by 'moving forward'?

That the changes that were made in the bureau (resulting from the city's settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice) are going to continue. They were made for very positive reasons. They had positive impacts on the bureau. I felt the community has felt those positive impacts, as far as just how much more transparent we are in relation to use of force, our accountability measures that have been put into place, and then also moving forward and continuing to build and strengthen those community relationships.

We say build community relationships a lot, and it makes it sound like we're at the ground floor and we're not. We need to continually strengthen the relationships that we have. When I say moving forward, I want to be able to provide the officers more time to do that, and that's very difficult when we have an increased call load and we have a decreased number of officers. But there are ways we can be creative that allow officers and the community to interact more when it's not a call for service or a crisis.

Do you feel the bureau has improved in its police encounters with people in crisis? With all the federal Justice Department's mandated reforms, how can you show the community the bureau has improved?

What I wish I could do is do just that: literally show them. I rode around with (Traffic) Officer Bill Balzer (who was assisting patrol on some calls) a couple of days ago. We responded to a call. It came out as a fight. It was actually two people who happened to be brother and sister. The brother was attempting to help his sister, who he thought was having some mental health issues and she was not cooperating with that. I stood back and watched both of the officers who responded take so much time and so much compassion in talking to this woman and in also talking to her brother and trying to bring in every resource possible in a very calming, considerate manner. When we show up, people watch, and this woman didn't want to be watched. They were able to talk to her for a significant length of time; and reassured her and were actually able to talk to her brother and able to take her to a local area resource. If people could see that. I don't think they understand the amount of compassion that the Portland Police Bureau takes when it deals with these people because you don't see those encounters. You don't see them in the paper. You don't see them in the news. Yes, I think we've made significant

strides in how we interact with people who are experiencing or who we perceive are experiencing mental health issues.

(The Police Bureau hasn't allowed The Oregonian/OregonLive to shadow officers assigned to its Behavioral Health Unit's mobile crisis teams or attend the unit's advisory council meetings despite repeated requests.)

What changes has the bureau made to deal with its staffing shortage?

Our strategic services division created a living staffing tool for us. They looked at our calls for service, our response times, our number of officers and kind of broke down what are the minimum number of officers that we need. What we were seeing during a certain time of day, officers were responding literally from call to call to call. They didn't have time to do anything in between. We went from a 3-shift configuration to a four-shift configuration. We added what we refer to as what I believe is a 'B' shift from about noon to 10 p.m. We're trying to distribute the officers evenly so they have the ability to do some proactive work and occasionally eat lunch.

When we start to climb out of the shortage, we'll be able to continually modify our staffing with this tool, a computer program they developed for us.

North and Central Precincts are doing away with their street crimes units.

Precinct commanders are tasked with running their precincts. When the precincts are more fully staffed, they have the ability to pluck maybe three or four officers out and have them specifically address something and that's what a street crimes unit would do. As the staffing starts to get lower, our primary response is calls for service, and we're also accountable for overtime. I think the precincts were realizing that because we had officers specializing in the street crimes units, that we were going through a lot of overtime. To be fiscally responsible as well as address our calls for service, those units have been collapsed. The hope is when our staffing begins to increase, those types of units will be brought back.

What's the bureau's relationship with the Unity Center for Behavioral Health. How do you feel Unity Center is working as the city's main psychiatric ER?

I'm very grateful for Unity. I met with the new director a couple of weeks ago. She's very cooperative and wants to have a great relationship with the police, which I feel is critical because of the fact that we do interact on so many occasions. I wish that Unity actually had more resources. I know from my understanding they were designed for one thing and they had to take on many other roles, and I think if we had more of those types of resources -- I constantly mention stable transitional housing -- that would lessen the encounters folks have with the police because they'd actually have a place to go. I think that's where the shortfall seems to be. The people who work at Unity and the people who provide mental health services across the state and the county, they're fantastic, compassionate people, but just like the law enforcement system or the criminal justice system, the mental health system has been cut so severely. They just literally can't do what they want to do. It's really important for us to have a good relationship with them.

Can you explain why the bureau at the end of December abruptly cut off its use of the CHIERS van and Central City Concern's sobering station?

(CHIERS stands for Central City Concern's Hooper Inebriate Emergency Response Service)

I remember when I was an officer in the street if you found somebody who was intoxicated and they couldn't tell you where they live, you took them to detox. They had some soup and they were OK and went home. But things had changed over time, and they were experiencing more people who either were under the influence of alcohol and some other substance, or they were

experiencing mental health issues. They were having more incidents. They were running out of safety rooms and they were unable to staff it appropriately. So when I made that decision, I was told by Central City Concern they did not have the staffing to provide a safe environment for the folks that we were bringing there and they were turning away a lot of folks already by that point because they were so agitated, that it wasn't a safe environment for them. In my mind, it seems pretty logical to me, if I'm taking you out of situation because I don't feel that you can care for yourself it makes no sense to then take you to a place that I can't guarantee your safety. Just based on that information, we stepped away from the sobering station. We are 100 percent committed to finding a better solution than our local area emergency rooms. We are working with the mayor's office and all of our community partners to try to figure out what this long-term sustainable answer will be.

We put out a request for information to see if any companies around were interested in doing this work. If we can't find a company or business here who's interested in it, then maybe we'll be working with all our partners to create our own. Obviously, it's something we feel is important to have.

What can the public expect to see in how police respond to city protests this year?

I think what you're going to see is more of what you saw on Aug. 17, where it was a citywide response. We're going to be reaching out to our surrounding agencies as much as we can to ask for assistance on those larger-scale ones. When we have these large-scale ones, my message is going to be to those coming down here with the intent to express their rights and their opinions, to do so in a lawful manner. That criminal activity will be addressed, whether it's immediate if we can handle it or whether it's after the fact with follow-up (investigation). We will continually do our best to ensure the safety of everybody who comes down here.

Outlaw had temporarily halted any use of the aerial flash-bang grenades as a crowd control device? Is that still in effect?

That's still in effect. It's not my intent use them again.

Do you support legislation to bar protesters from wearing masks?

If you're coming down here to commit crime and wear a mask, then yes, I support that. But if you're going to come down here to lawfully walk around and express your opinions and beliefs and wear a mask, then you're fine. But if you're wearing a mask to commit a crime, then no I don't support that.

You've said you're committed to leading the bureau as chief for the next five years. Many of your predecessors were unable or chose not to last that long. How do you expect to achieve that goal?

Honestly, it will take a lot of support internally and externally. When I meet people in the community, and they're like, 'What can I do to help?' I'm like, 'You can publicly support us. You can publicly support me.' There will be some controversies, something that will happen. I ask people to please don't rush to judgment. Please get all the information that you can. But it's going to take a lot of internal and external support to allow me to be here five years. That's just when I'm eligible (for retirement). That doesn't mean I'd leave right away.

How do you see your role and relationship with the mayor and City Hall?

I do work for the mayor of the city of Portland, and I understand that. Obviously, the Police Bureau is very influential in the city. I think a lot of people are very, very curious about what we

do and why we do it. My role over there is to make sure whoever is in those chairs understands who the Portland Police Bureau is and what we do.

What do you like to do when you're not on the job?

I like to go to national parks. I went to nine last year. I like to do big road trips to national parks. We've kind of got the Western ones done. Now we have to venture a little farther away.

Justice Department finds Portland police in 'substantial compliance' with required reforms

By Maxine Bernstein

January 24, 2020

U.S. Justice Department lawyers on Friday said they've found the Portland Police Bureau in substantial compliance with 190 reforms required as part of a city settlement adopted six years ago after a federal investigation determined officers used excessive force against people with mental illness.

Now that a community oversight group is staffed and has met regularly for a year and two months, the Justice Department said the city meets the settlement's accountability requirements. The bureau also has instituted needed changes to its use of force policies, training, crisis intervention tactics and employee information system developed to identify officers with excessive complaints or uses of force, the Justice Department said in new court documents.

The city must remain in compliance with all of the reforms for one year before the settlement agreement ends.

If that happens, "the United States anticipates the parties would jointly ask the Court to terminate the Agreement thereafter," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jared D. Hager wrote.

The federal government's assessment comes as the city and Justice Department lawyers prepare to return to the courtroom of U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon on Feb. 25 for a status hearing.

Portland's new Police Chief Jami Resch applauded the finding, calling it a "major milestone," but said the bureau must work to continue its progress and "improve the Police Bureau's service to the community."

"The key focus of the Settlement Agreement is on police response to people experiencing mental illness or mental health crisis, but the reforms include much more," Resch said in a statement. "Achieving substantial compliance took years of hard work and many changes in policies and training, as well as improvements in areas related to force, community engagement, and accountability. While this is a significant goal, we are not finished with our reformatory work. The next phase is to maintain the progress we have made even as we continually seek to improve our performance."

The Rev. T. Allen Bethel, chair of the Albina Ministerial Alliance and co-chair of its Coalition for Justice and Police Reform, said he'll urge the Justice Department to "take another look" at whether the bureau's reforms are working. Bethel said he's not convinced. The coalition is a group of residents who advocate for police accountability and improved relations with law enforcement.

At an afternoon news conference surrounded by police brass, the chief and Mayor Ted Wheeler both said the settlement reforms won't assure the city will never have a fatal shooting by police of someone in crisis.

"This is not a guarantee that there will be no use of force or that there will be no mistakes made by the Portland Police Bureau in carrying out the important work they do in the community," said Wheeler, who also serves as the city's police commissioner. "What this is about is ensuring that they have the training, the supervision, the practice and the protocols to minimize the possibility of use of force that's not compliant with the policies of the bureau or the training that people receive within the bureau."

"We're not coming in here celebrating even though this is a very important milestone along the path of improving accountability of the Police Bureau," he added. "We have both said there is work that needs to continue to be done."

Simon approved the settlement in 2014 after a Justice investigation found police engaged in excessive force against people with mental illness and fired unnecessary cycles of Taser gun shocks.

In June, the judge held off giving his stamp of approval to the settlement reforms, saying he wanted more proof that the city's new Committee on Community-Engaged Policing was effective, particularly since its predecessor fell apart amid inner turmoil and lack of support from the city and that nothing filled the gap for more than a year.

"I think it's going in the right direction," Simon said then. "I'm not ready to conclude it's adequate ... until I see a record of positive performance."

The Justice Department's assessment, filed in federal court in Portland, said the new Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing "is capably exercising its authority. It has solicited information from the community and the City about PPB's performance, recommending concrete actions to City leaders; received public comment and concerns during regularly scheduled, open public committee and subcommittee meetings; and contributed to the development and implementation of Portland Police Bureau's Community Engagement Plan."

In October, a co-chair of the new community oversight group, Lakayana Drury, wondered how the city's hired compliance officer, Chicago-based academic Dennis Rosenbaum, came to the same conclusion that the city had achieved substantial compliance with all of the settlement requirements when police continue to shoot and kill people with mental illness. Such excessive force prompted federal officials to investigate Portland police in 2012.

Portland officers fatally shot five people in 2019, three who were suffering from a mental illness. The five shootings were the most since since 2010.

"We have a duty to represent the community," Drury said then. While the bureau has changed its policies on use of force and adopted new training, "is it actually leading to officers using less force?" he asked.

Drury called Rosenbaum's findings "premature" and said he believes the city "is still a ways off" from meeting all the settlement's requirements.

"It seems like a rush to the finish line, and that's not fair to our citizens," Jan Friedman, an attorney with Disability Rights Oregon who sits on the Police Bureau's Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Council, said at the same meeting. The advisory council is a group working to improve and reduce police encounters with people in mental health crisis.

Rosenbaum argued that the bureau has adopted new de-escalation and procedural justice training and use-of-force policies. He called the bureau's crisis intervention training and specialized enhanced crisis intervention officers a "model" for other cities. The bureau has demonstrated it's a "learning organization," with supervisors reviewing officers' use of force, inspectors conducting audits of police force, police leaders tracking complaints against officers and internal affairs conducting more timely investigations into alleged police misconduct, he said. He also called the community oversight group a "legitimate body" for community engagement.

Dan Handelman of the police watchdog group Portland Copwatch called the compliance findings just "checking the boxes" and "not worrying about the substantive meaning of the requirements." As fatal police shootings of people in crisis continue to add up, the bureau's "obligations to engage the community are not evaluated for their success," he said.

The police chief said officers seek to avoid using force but sometimes must to protect themselves or others.

"A common misconception is that substantial compliance will result in zero officer-involved shootings. Being in compliance means we have done everything to minimize using force on those experiencing mental illness," Resch said. "We will continue to seek ways to minimize the use of deadly force, and we share the community's desire to reduce and ideally avoid all uses of deadly force."

She added, "Police officers must be prepared to protect others and themselves in dangerous, dynamic and chaotic situations."

Drury couldn't convince the 12-member citizen committee he leads to support a resolution that would have challenged the "substantial compliance" findings and required the police chief and mayor to come up with a more meaningful way to measure the impact of reforms. It failed in October, with five members voting against it, four in support and three abstaining.

But the community group agreed that one significant part of the settlement has not been addressed: creation of one or more walk-in, or drop-off centers in Portland for people in crisis or suffering addictions.

On Friday, Drury declined further comment, saying the committee will discuss the Justice Department's findings at its meeting Tuesday. It will be at 5:30 p.m. in the NARA Wellness Center at 12360 E. Burnside St.

Willamette Week

Looking to Buy Some Property in Portland? The Water Bureau Can Help With That

*By Nigel Jaquiss
January 25, 2020*

City Council will consider selling off six surplus pieces of property next week.

Getting water to the city of Portland's more than 650,000 residents requires a lot of infrastructure: pumps, pipes and property, among other things.

But the Portland Water Bureau's needs shift. And next week, City Council will consider declaring six pieces of property surplus and putting them up for sale.

Details, including maps and photos of the six parcels, [are here](#).

And if you want further information about lot dimensions, zoning, etc, that information can be found using Portland Maps.

City Council now follows a process for land that bureaus no longer need. The surplus land is offered to other bureaus and outside government entities. If none of them want the property, the city seeks public comment and notifies neighbors and affected parties the land may be sold. Only after all that process—assuming nothing derails a sale—does the land come to council for consideration.

That's a much more thorough approach to disposing of public assets than the Water Bureau once followed. In 2013, for instance, WW reported on neighborhood concerns in Multnomah Village when the bureau sold surplus land to a developer at what appeared to be an attractive price.

The bureau has also taken flack for building—and later dumping—a \$940,000 home on bureau property.

More recently, the bureau attracted attention when it decided to buy a pricey east county property for a staging area for construction of a new filtration plant.

The council will discuss listing the properties for sale on Jan. 29.

The Portland Mercury

After Six Years of Reforms, Feds Say Portland Police Have Adequately Addressed Officers' Mistreatment of Mentally Ill

*By Alex Zielinski
January 24, 2020*

It's official: The Department of Justice has announced that the City of Portland has met all of the 190 requirements of a legal agreement made six years ago over Portland police officers' mistreatment of people with mental illnesses.

"This accomplishment represents the city taking specific, concrete steps to address community concerns about use of force training, management, and accountability," said Mayor Ted Wheeler at an afternoon press conference. Wheeler said the city had just received a letter from the DOJ signaling this compliance.

The DOJ was first drawn to Portland in 2011, after the city witnessed an unprecedented and sustained increase in the number of mentally ill Portlanders dying at the hands of the the police. After conducting an investigation into the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) related to these deaths, the DOJ concluded that the city had violated the constitution by allowing its officers to engage in "a pattern or practice of using excessive force" against people who had (or were perceived to have) some kind of mental illness. The DOJ sued the City of Portland over these claims in September 2012.

It took the city two more years to hammer out a settlement agreement with the feds, one that required the city to create a walk-in emergency mental health medical center, form a Behavioral Health Unit within the PPB, accelerate the process of investigating officer misconduct

complaints, expand mental health training for cops, and allow quarterly use-of-force audits within the PPB, among other things.

Every year, the City of Portland has stood before US District Judge Michael H. Simon to deliver a mandatory update on these reforms, slowing checking off boxes. At the latest check-in, which took place in June 2019, Simon said the city had met all but one of the lingering requirements: Forming a successful community-led group that oversaw the city's reforms.

While that group, called the Portland Committee on Community Engaged Policing (PCCEP), had been meeting monthly since November 2018, Simon was hesitant to deem the program a success—especially since he'd watched PCCEP's predecessor unravel a few years earlier.

With its letter of approval, the DOJ has confirmed that PCCEP has provided legitimate community oversight, and deemed Portland's years of federally-tailored police reform a success. The city must remain in compliance with the settlement agreement for one year, however, before the process formally comes to an end. The next court check-in with Judge Simon will be on February 25.

PPB's reforms are viewed a bit differently outside the federal justice system.

At PCCEP's October meeting, where the group discussed the fed's looming stamp of approval, committee members and other attendees struggled to see improvements.

"Forty percent of people killed by police in the last year were having a mental health crisis," said Elliott Young, a member PCCEP. "How is that compliance?"

The numbers make it hard for some to see how PPB's improved. In 2019, Portland saw the highest number of fatal shootings of people in a mental health crisis since 2010, the year that inspired the DOJ investigation.

"The settlement agreement addresses outputs... but until we know what their outcomes are, how are we even able to assess what's being done?" asked Lakayana Drury, PCCEP co-chair. "Yeah, there's new police training, but is it leading to officers using less force?"

PCCEP plans to discuss the DOJ's latest findings at its January 28 meeting.

At today's press conference, Wheeler said that while the DOJ announcement was a "major milestone," the city's work to help people with a mental illness wasn't over.

"We need to collectively provide more services and more support to people experiencing mental illness and we need to continue to explore ways to reduce uses of force," said Wheeler, "including deadly force."

Later on, Wheeler added: "This is not a guarantee that there will be no use of force or that that there will be no mistakes made by the Portland Police Bureau in carrying out the important work that they do in the community."

Police Chief Jami Resch echoed Wheeler's message.

"A common misconception is that compliance with the settlement agreement will result in zero officer-involved shootings," said Resch. "Being in compliance means that we have done everything to minimize using force on those experiencing mental illness. We will continue to seek ways to minimize the use of deadly force, particularly against those with mental illness."

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Speed bumps arise for senior living facility

By Chuck Slothower

January 24, 2020

The Portland Design Commission on Thursday returned a design proposal for a five-story senior memory-care facility for facade changes and other refinements.

MorningStar at Laurelhurst would provide 114 units for seniors in a massive structure bordered by Northeast Sandy Boulevard, 31st Avenue and Hassalo Street. The building would stretch approximately 300 feet along Sandy Boulevard – 100 feet longer than envisioned in city design guidelines – with a largely unbroken facade.

“It’s not blending into the neighborhood,” Commissioner Chandra Robinson said. “It’s giant – super long.”

The design is by Portland’s Ankrom Moisan Architects for Denver-based owner MorningStar Senior Living. The Northeast Portland project is part of a major expansion push for MorningStar, which has opened senior living facilities in Beaverton and Happy Valley in recent months.

This new project received its first design review hearing on Thursday, and design commissioners said strides have been made, but changes are needed to break up the facade and improve articulation.

One aspect commissioners hammered on was exterior vents that function as ornamental design elements. Architects typically seek to quietly incorporate mechanical systems into the façade.

“A vent that is expressed in this way and is styled as an ornament is as close to a nonstarter as it can be,” Chairwoman Julie Livingston said.

Livingston expressed concern that if the Design Commission were to approve the vent system, other design teams would copy it.

“It would reappear again and again in the hearing room,” she said. “It’s a precedent-setting expression of the mechanical system.”

Commissioner Jessica Molinar said she has issues with the proposed facade length.

“Overall, the design isn’t meeting the intent to break these superblocks up, because this building feels huge,” she said. “It’s too homogenous for such a large building, and that’s leading to this weird feeling of scale.”

The proposed white brick and dark stucco façade, described in a previous design advice hearing as too busy and complex, has swung too far the other way, Robinson said.

“It’s oversimplified now, and it’s way less interesting than it was before,” she said.

Commissioners complimented the building’s south elevation as well as the ground-floor experience for pedestrians on Sandy Boulevard. Plans call for the fifth story to feature a rooftop terrace for residents.

The building incorporates a lobby, a bistro, offices, a salon and a theater, along with indoor and outdoor amenity spaces with landscaping. Structured parking with approximately 70 spaces would be accessible from Hassalo Street. Loading would be located midblock on Sandy Boulevard at the building’s northeast corner.

The project comes amid a building boom on Sandy Boulevard – a rapidly gentrifying four-lane thoroughfare. Nearby, Innovative Housing Inc., a nonprofit developer, plans to convert the historic Mann House into 88 units of affordable housing with help from Portland’s affordable housing bond. Excavation and building permits are under review for a four-story Lexus dealership at Northeast 31st Avenue and Sandy Boulevard; the Design Commission approved plans in February 2019. A 206-unit multifamily project is under construction at 2869 N.E. Sandy Blvd. And close behind are a pair of large multifamily projects on separate properties that were formerly occupied by PepsiCo and Sunshine Dairy.

The MorningStar at Laurelhurst project team will return Feb. 20 for a second design review hearing. Bureau of Development Services staffer Tim Heron said the project could be approved at next month’s meeting.

“I think they’re at the 5-yard line and ready to go,” he said.

Also on Thursday:

Pearl District hotel project advances

The Design Commission voted 4-0 to approve the Proper Hotel proposal. The nine-story, 170,000-square-foot hotel is planned at 1202 N.W. Irving St. in the Pearl District. ZGF Architects is designing the project for Santa Monica, California-based Proper Hospitality.

OPB

Ed Carpenter On The Art Of Safe Passage

*By Tracy MacDonald
January 23, 2020*

Although Ed Carpenter’s monumental, graceful art enhances public spaces around the world, he remains rooted in his local community. In this spirit, Ed designed the Barbara Walker Crossing, a soaring pedestrian bridge spanning West Burnside to connect the two sides of the Wildwood Trail.

The bridge appears as a natural extension of the trail itself, blending seamlessly into its surroundings as it curves into the forest over one of Portland’s major thoroughfares. The ease and grace of its form, however, offers no hint of the long, complex process to bring this project to fruition.

Plans for the bridge began back in 2012. Carpenter worked with multiple collaborators, including the City of Portland, Portland Parks Foundation, Portland Bureau of Transportation, Metro, contractors, fabricators, structural engineers, architects and a variety of community members and organizations.

Many people worked pro bono on this effort, and more than 900 individuals and organizations donated funds for the bridge. A handful of years and more than 100 meetings later, Carpenter feels deeply satisfied in seeing this particular public art design become a reality.

“This project was unique for me because I initiated, promoted, and recruited partners for it,” Carpenter said, “whereas I’m usually responding to a (project) initiated by a public agency.”

The bridge is named for Barbara Walker, a longtime advocate of Portland’s natural spaces and of the Wildwood Trail in particular. Walker passed away in 2014.

Public art enriches community spaces. This bridge does double duty. It not only echoes the beauty of the iconic Wildwood Trail, but it simultaneously addresses the long-standing issue of a tremendously hazardous intersection.

Family friendly and accessible year-round, the Barbara Walker Crossing is located on West Burnside, waiting to make your Wildwood Trail hike seamless.

DOJ Finds Portland Police To Be In 'Substantial Compliance' With 2014 Settlement Agreement

By Rebecca Ellis

January 24, 2020

The Portland Police Bureau has reached a significant milestone in its six-year-old settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice.

On Friday, the bureau announced that the DOJ had found the police force to be in “substantial compliance” with the 2014 agreement intended to reform how the force responded to people with “actual or perceived mental illness.”

The Justice Department reached the agreement with the Portland Police after the DOJ found officers exhibited a pattern of using excessive force on people experiencing mental illnesses. The settlement laid out in detail the changes the bureau needed to make to its use of force procedures.

According to Portland city attorney Tracy Reeve, the term “substantial compliance” is a lawyerly way of saying the city has met all the terms laid out in the 77-page agreement – while leaving a tiny bit of wiggle room.

“It means the city has, in essence, complied with its obligations under the settlement agreement,” Reeve said at a news conference Friday announcing the finding. “It could be you’re 99.5 percent compliant with something, but in some ways, there’s some very minor technical noncompliance.”

The compliance finding doesn’t end the DOJ’s oversight of the Portland Police Bureau. The bureau still has to prove it can maintain all the reforms it’s made for one year.

Mayor Ted Wheeler applauded the police bureau Friday for the work they’d done to reach this point.

“The true test of any organization or any person for that matter is how they respond to the challenges at hand, especially one that can be difficult to hear or to acknowledge when challenged to do better, be better and evolve,” he said.

“The Portland Police Bureau answered the call.”

But police reform activist Dan Handelman, who runs Portland Copwatch, said while the bureau may have answered the call regarding technical aspects of the agreement – like the rules regarding policies and training, data collection and analysis – the bureau had ignored the “thrust” of the document: rebuilding trust between police officers and the community.

“We did what we’d said we’d do, minimally to the letter of what’s being written down,” he said. “Not to the spirit of it.”

He added that he felt the finding of compliance did not wholly square with the fact that fatal police shootings of people with mental illness have continued in Portland. Koben Henriksen, a 51-year-old man who suffered from schizophrenia, was shot by police last month.

At Friday's news conference, Chief Jami Resch said the agreement is about officers knowing how to minimize these kinds of shootings - not to eliminate them altogether.

"A common misconception is that substantial compliance with the settlement agreement will result in zero officer-involved shootings," she said. "Being in compliance means that we have done everything to minimize using force on those experiencing mental illness. We will continue to seek ways to minimize the use of deadly force."