



# City of Portland Oral History Program

## Police Accountability and the Independent Police Review Oral History

---

Gary Blackmer  
Transcript  
2023

**CONTENT WARNING:** This interview discusses sensitive subjects including police violence and death. Statements made in this interview are the recollections and views of the interviewee, not the City of Portland Archives.



# City of Portland Oral History Program

---

## Gary Blackmer Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Gary Blackmer

Interviewer: Morgen Young

Date: February 9, 2023

Location: City of Portland Archives and Records Center, Portland, Oregon

Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

Morgen Young: My name is Morgen Young. I'm with Devin Busby. We are interviewing Gary Blackmer for the City of Portland Oral History Program. It is February 9, 2023. We're in the Portland Archives and Record Center in downtown Portland. Thanks for being with us this afternoon.

Gary Blackmer: It's my pleasure.

MY: I want to start with you telling me a bit about citizen oversight of police accountability when you became city auditor in 1999.

GB: Sure. I came to the city from the county. And what I had seen in the city, I had worked as a staff auditor before I was elected county auditor. Came back as elected city auditor. And I saw a real set of problems there in the city. But I also was trying to understand what the Auditor's Office did. So, I went through and put together kind of my vision of the office. And I call it the role and duties of the auditor. And there are certain things that the auditor did. There were probably eight or nine programs in it. And two or three of them really didn't belong. And I thought a couple more needed to be put in there. And the basis for it was kind of two dimensions. One was independence, because the auditor's independently elected, and the second was accountability. That the auditor holds the city accountable for its services to the public.

So, with those two dimensions, it made sense to move some of the programs out, which took a couple of years, but were successful. But I also proposed to the mayor an ombudsman program. And I got back positive signals. But when I thought about it, I thought well, it really is complaints about city employees and police are one of the key complaint generators in the city as far as employees. And it ought to be something that goes along with it. So, I thought about it a good deal and I thought, well maybe an auditor model would work here. And what I envisioned was something that was not anything that had been done in the country before.

So, I talked to the mayor. And she was more than happy to get rid of the PIIAC, which was the predecessor. That is a program that had been kicking around literally among the commissioners and the mayor for at least ten years. And there's actually a humorous, well, I consider it a humorous story in the *Oregonian* about how Commissioner Blumenauer lost in the hot potato contest and he

got PIIAC. So, none of the commissioners wanted it because it was a major headache. There were never any good solutions that could be devised from it. So, I didn't think there'd be a problem. And she actually offloaded it to me as soon as she could.

So, what I did then was I started kind of devising what I thought that program should look like. But I wanted to get some real assistance with it. So, I asked the audit services to go through it to come up with an alternative. And they said, well, you ought to participate in that audit.

So, Ken Gavette and I went to a number of other cities. We went to Minneapolis, San Jose, and San Francisco to look at the programs they had, because they were supposedly some of the best in the country. Which was kind of ironic, because Portland was renowned as one of the best police oversight systems in the country. And it really wasn't. I mean, there weren't any good systems in the country to speak of. I had been following the police for a number of years. And I had a real sense that it wasn't making any difference at all. And the Auditor's Office for a while, when I was a staff auditor, was right next to the person who worked for PIIAC. And occasionally I'd kind of get a sense of what was going on in that office. And it was pretty awkward and clumsy. And the citizens were not supported in a way that helped them fulfill what I thought was the important role of citizens in police oversight.

So, I had a lot of ideas. We went to those other cities. And sure enough, we went to Minneapolis and it happened that they were being defunded when we were there. The police union had won a battle and City Council was going to cut them out of the budget. I think they relented toward the end. But I mean, you know about all the issues that have happened in Minneapolis in the last year or two. Well, it was going on back then. And there was kind of a smirk on the officers' faces when they talked about police oversight to us. And we were just trying to get an objective view. But it was pretty clear that it wasn't accomplishing anything there.

We went to San Francisco. And it was one of those that was touted as very good. But again, it was all on paper. It was really people reading a description of it. But in fact, it wasn't really accomplishing much. It was a program that, when we talked to them, they had a fulltime lawyer who was still trying to get access to the police records of complaints. And they'd been in operation for eight or ten years, I believe. So, they weren't even able to do their job without getting what the police reports were. So, we saw that as not particularly effective.

Ironically, the director of the program was great at marketing and spin control. And we wanted to interview the staff individually. And she wouldn't allow that. But we had a big roundtable sit-down and we would ask questions. And a few of the staff would answer the question. Then she would spin it afterwards. And so, once we put our report out, the City Council got a number of nasty emails, or nasty toward me, about how awful that report was and how it didn't paint a good picture. But we were actually pretty soft in terms of the issues. Much softer than I would have been if I'd wanted to talk publicly about how ineffective it was.

San Jose, on the other hand, was close to an auditor model. And we felt like that was really good. It was Cris Beamud who was the auditor there. And she was investigating cases, she was looking at the complaints, doing follow-up investigations, and then basically kind of working with the police department to make change. So, we saw that as kind of a little support for an auditor model.

So that was kind of where we were going with this. But because Portland is so community-oriented, the idea about not having citizens involved in the police oversight was something that wasn't going to fly. So, we had to kind of put that together.

And the way I conceived it was that it really was three parts. That one part was essentially the Citizen Review Committee, which was a group of citizens who could express the values and priorities that they wanted in their community about the police. The second was IPR, which was a group of professionals who could actually effect change in the Police Bureau. Because having been

an auditor, I kind of knew the places to push, the pressure points, the strategies for change in an organization. And I felt like with the data that we could gather and analyze and present to the citizens, that we could actually start spotting problem officers. We could start spotting problem policies. We could start making recommendations with their assistance. And then ultimately the Police Bureau needed to be a partner in that. So, it was really an interdependent system was kind of how I described it. So that was kind of where it started.

And the report that we put out, the audit report, I mean, just one of the funny things. We were trying to write it and I got a call right, you know, as I was drafting it with Ken Gavette from the mayor. And she wanted me to come right down into City Council. Well, they were having a hearing about a woman who basically was dragged out of her car window—an elderly woman—by the police. And she had appealed the discipline that was imposed on the officer to City Council, which was the way, that was the final authority in PIIAC.

So, the mayor kind of leaned back in her chair while I was talking to her and she said, “So, what are the protocols for conducting a hearing?”

And I said, “There are none.” I mean, it was just by the seat of the pants. And this was six or eight years after PIIAC had been created. They really didn’t have any systems in place. The citizens themselves were, you know, they were, I guess, committed citizens. But they really lacked the, I guess, the depth and perseverance to work through change with the Police Bureau. There was an impatience to them. They were prone to be, I guess, agitated by activists. So that there was an impatience in everything. And a thousand-member organization isn’t going to turn on a dime. It’s working through it bit by bit. And that was kind of, you know, I felt like it would take five or ten years for change.

Now I should say, one of the sentences in that audit report in creating IPR said, “There’s no research out there that says that citizen oversight can change the activities in a police department.” So, we kind of acknowledge either no one’s done the research or it’s not possible. So, and I’m still kind of balancing between those two, I think I saw some change there. But I think it can be short-lived, also. So that’s kind of how I got into it.

I should also mention a couple other things in my background. In 1978, I worked for a year as a contractor in the Portland Police Bureau, in the crime prevention unit, neighborhood crime prevention. It was LEAA-funded program, Law Enforcement something Administration. And my boss actually was Tom Potter, who later became mayor. Then I went to work for the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office for six years. And it was quite a difference. I had interactions with the captains and so forth in the Police Bureau. And they were dinosaurs. I mean, they were really from the 1930s. That’s the only way I can describe them. They really were not well-educated, they weren’t good leaders, they weren’t smart managers, they weren’t any of that. But they were the captains. That was their rank.

The chief at that time was Bruce Baker, who had come from, I think, Berkeley. And he was a good chief. He tried really hard to make changes there. But there were things like the possum incident, where the police threw a possum in front of, I think it was a restaurant, a Black-owned restaurant. Lloyd Tony Stevenson was another horrible incident where a chokehold killed a do-gooder who was actually trying to intervene in a fight. He was African American. He died. Mike Schunk did a grand jury hearing that I believe was televised, I’m pretty sure. There was one hearing that was televised. I think it was Lloyd Tony Stevenson. I watched it. And it was a difficult thing to watch. But it was also unsatisfying for the community, I thought. I mean, it was not a good example of what could be done even when you have a hearing, a public hearing on an incident like that.

So, I had been watching police issues since I worked in the Police Bureau. And I kind of had low expectations for the Police Bureau. But the Sheriff’s Office was very different. At the time I was there, it was three years under an appointed director of public safety. And it was very progressive.

Shootings rarely, rarely happened. Officers all had college degrees. The sergeants were good leaders. The lieutenants and captains were good. There was a real community orientation. They actually introduced something called neighborhood team policing, which was a predecessor of community policing in the Sheriff's Office.

So, I was in the planning and research unit there. And I kind of got to know a lot of the people there. And had a lot of respect for the work they were doing. I went on ride-alongs. I did the budget. I did a lot of operations analysis. And so that's kind of how I got into auditing, because we were audited by the county auditor. But that's another story.

Anyway, I had a real abiding interest in police services and how they could be better. Which is why I took the chance to tackle IPR. So that's a very long introduction, but I think gives good grounding of how I got into it and why.

MY: Absolutely. And I want to just define PIIAC as the Police Internal Investigation Auditing Committee.

GB: That's correct.

MY: And I believe it's 1982 and it was a citywide vote. So, it was voter—

GB: Mm hmm.

MY: Brought together. Because you provided me with some great background articles. So, it's my understanding that PIIAC was City Council?

GB: That's correct. Actually technically, PIIAC was City Council. And they delegated, they selected their representatives for it. And a lot of times it was someone walking through the door that wanted to volunteer for something. They'd say, "Well, how about PIIAC?" So, it wasn't where people really had an abiding interest in it. I mean, everyone, I think, has an interest. But it wasn't like they came with a criminal justice background or they had a sense of management approach to change in an organization or, it was more that they really just wanted to volunteer somewhere. And some of them had a strong interest in police services or developed it. I mean, that was good. But again, there wasn't any kind of a sense of you know, can we get the best people on this. When we converted to IPR, we converted from PIIAC to Citizen Review Committee. And we opened up, we basically recruited for members. And we advertised everywhere. Everyone could apply. And I think we brought over three or four PIIAC members.

MY: Yeah, three.

GB: And added others. So, I felt like it was a pretty good group to start with. And there was some excitement and positive, I think, optimism when this all started. And one of the things I was able to do is ramp up the staff there. Vera had a halftime person who was doing all the support. And that isn't hardly enough to support a citizen committee, let alone oversee and push on the Police Bureau to make changes.

So, we ended up getting a group of people, one being a data analyst, a director, a deputy director, call takers. Because we took over the intake of complaints from the citizens, which was a big change, because we ended up getting, I think, greater credibility from the public when we pursued those. And we were able to kind of be confident. When someone called up and we'd talk



through what had happened to them and say, “Well actually, you know, they put people in handcuffs in the police car because that’s required of anyone getting in a police car. And that’s the rule, so.”

So, a lot of times giving them that kind of sympathetic and clear explanation could help, because it wouldn’t be a complaint against the police for police doing something clearly within their procedures. So, we were able to feel more confident in the complaints that were coming in. And able to kind of robe and get as much as we could from the citizen about other possible violations of procedures so that we were able to kind of get a good handle on the numbers. So that was a big change and that took more staff to accomplish that. So.

MY: We talked to Constantin Severe earlier this morning. And he mentioned changing city code over time that enabled IPR to do more investigations.

GB: Mm hmm.

MY: But when you first envisioned it, I believe it was more of a complaint intake and monitoring, rather than the focus on investigations? Is that accurate?

GB: Well, exactly. Yeah. Because investigations are a management responsibility. I mean, meaning that you’re actually, you’re getting involved in the management of an organization when you’re doing personnel investigations, when out of that comes policy recommendations and you’re recommending discipline. And there’s a lot of human resources and statutory limitations on what you can do with that. But ultimately, it does come back to being an auditor. That our view was, we had the power to investigate. And we kind of held that over the police. But we said, we are going to monitor the quality of your investigations.

And one of the best things we did was hired someone who wandered in the door named Pete Sandrock, who is the deputy IPR director. And he was a retired Benton County, the Benton County district attorney. And a very impressive guy. And when we first set it up, we had a lot of cooperation with Internal Affairs. And they actually made all of their investigation file folders available to us in IPR. So, Pete would monitor, literally he would be able to go into investigation files and look at them. And he would write notes to the investigators saying, “You asked these questions of this witness but you didn’t ask that one. You need to go back and do that.” And they would do it.

After a while they started calling him Professor Pete. And they would send him their draft investigation notes or reports and say, “Am I missing anything here?” So, he made them into better investigations in general. But it also raised the quality investigations. Because what we saw was poor investigations didn’t necessarily lead to sound discipline. It was easier to appeal it. It was easier to miss things. The evidence looked weaker. So, to the degree that we were able to bump up the quality of those investigations, that made a big difference in terms of disciplinary action. Though not as much as we wanted.

That was pushing against the activists. Because they felt like independent investigations were the only way to go. It was the only way to get credibility. I had this fantasy that an objective independent auditor could bring credibility. That was a fantasy. It didn’t fly that well over the long run. But ultimately, I mean, I think that you want an objective, independent person to be the one to do the investigation if you don’t have quality investigations. But we could send them back or we could do our own investigations. And we ended up hiring some really good people that were call takers who were actually good investigators, also. I mean, one of the ironies, a sergeant retired from the Sheriff’s Office, Judy Taylor, was one of the people we hired. She was wonderful. She was really good at empathizing with the complaint maker, the caller that came in making the complaints. She was good at kind of calling the officers out when there were problems. And so, we had high-quality

people. And ironically, Darrel Schenk was the IAD director when I was, not the first one, but the second one. And he worked in the Sheriff's Office when I was there. A lot of the people—there was a big annexation program in 1983 to 1990, and a lot of deputies got transferred over to the Police Bureau. And a lot of them got promoted up to top ranks in the Police Bureau just because they were better than a lot of their competing candidates for promotion. So, we were able to tap some of those folks. But we also found other highly qualified people that could come in and do those interviews and intake and threaten investigations.

And when I put it together, I envisioned that it wasn't going to be static. That it was kind of like we'll try this. If it doesn't work, we can do investigations. If that doesn't work, I don't know what after that. But it was, for me it was kind of let's start with this, the simplest notion.

And I always have the philosophy that, well, I think there's problems with outsiders telling an organization what to do, especially a police organization. Because they will say, "You don't know my job. You don't understand the situation I was in in this particular case. You're not hearing what my side of the story and giving it equal credibility as the complainant. And you don't understand our policies and procedures, and this is allowed," and so forth. And there's a little bit of bluff in that and a little bit of pushback.

But if the investigation is done by Portland investigators, there's a greater sense of credibility. And I think there's an acknowledgement in the organization that, yeah, well, Lucy did this investigation and she's a credible person and she said this officer was wrong. So, I think that cultural change needed to happen where they were all trying to be better officers. And they were all kind of taking complaints as a constructive process.

So, we introduced mediation, which was a huge success. We had officers coming in kind of reluctant at first, but word spread that it was a very effective way, a great alternative to dealing with a disciplinary hearing on certain, the lower-level kinds of complaints. But the complainants themselves were grateful. And they loved the officer at the end of the interaction because they didn't understand the perspective that the officer had going into that incident. So, it was a way to kind of build that community-police connection that I thought was really, really great. And it was one of those that we touted, and we tried to push people toward mediation as much as we could. So, I kind of wandered off a little bit there.

MY: No, it's great. I want to talk a bit about the IPR staff themselves. And you hired your first director and it was Richard Rosenthal. So, share some memories of him and some of his predecessors. Or successors, sorry.

GB: Richard was great at taking kind of the vision I had along with the city code that we had gotten the City Council to pass and turning it into the office. So, in terms of kind of putting together the pieces of and the protocols and the processes for handling complaints, for appeals, for the roles of the CRC versus IPR and working with the Police Bureau, he was very good at kind of putting those pieces together into something. In fact, he went from Portland to Denver to do the same thing there. And I suspect that Denver looks a lot like Portland in terms of its system. So, I really valued what he brought.

It was funny because he left to go to Denver. And I was like well, now what am I going to do? And we went through a big national search and we hired a woman named Leslie Stevens who just blew me away. She was a city attorney. I'm trying to think if it was Eugene or Corvallis or someplace like that. And she brought a whole different feel to the office. She was gregarious. She had a loud laugh. She was engaging. She was warm. But she was also tough. And I remember walking into her office once. And she was on the phone. And she kind of motioned me in. She was sitting there and she said, "Well, you know, Sergeant, I'm reading this report that your officer wrote.

And in it he said he did this use of force. And I'm wondering do you train your officers to do that? Because this is nothing that the training division allows officers to do or trains them to do. So, you signed off on it. So, what was going on here?"

And I could almost hear the spluttering on the other end of the line. And what she was doing was telling that sergeant A, that officer was way out of bounds with the use of force he used. B, you let this report go by without saying anything to him. And C, you need to go talk to him now and make sure he doesn't do it again. I mean, she got right down at the patrol level in the organization. And she was able to kind of engage at every level. She was liked. She was just a likable person that was hard to say no to.

And one of the big challenges, you know, I'll talk a little later about shootings. But one of her big challenges was the use of physical force. And one of the stories that she told was she went out to Camp Withycombe, which is where they went to do their police training. And she watched the force training that they went through. So, this is an iron bar, and this is a takedown. She saw all this stuff.

And so, she said to the trainer afterwards, "So, they know about all these force strategies. When do you teach them about when to use it?" And she just got a blank stare from him. Because they didn't think about teaching that. Which is the most important thing. When do you use this, and what circumstances, and when don't you use it? And what are the alternatives in terms of de-escalation. So, it was to me another kind of a lightbulb that came on. When I hear about, you know, they're talking right now about building a training facility, I think, in Memphis in response that that's going to make things better. It's a building. It's not what goes on inside the building. So that's the important part. So, she was so good.

Well, to get back, the force policy was even more difficult to deal with than the deadly force policy. Because I guess it's so frequently used by the officers, and it's nebulous. And the idea about the phrase "minimal force necessary" is a common one among police. But the commanders and the sergeants and the officers that were on this committee that she and Chief Rosie Sizer put together refused to accept. And she was pushing and pushing, ten meetings and no progress.

And Rosie Sizer saw Leslie and said, "So how's it going?"

And she said, "Not well."

And so, Rosie said, "I'll show up at the next meeting." So, they're all sitting there. Rosie comes in. She goes, "So where are we?"

And the captain or whoever was leading their side kind of talked through where they were. Leslie went through. And Rosie said, "We're going to do minimum force necessary," and "We're going to do this, and this and this." So, I had huge respect for Rosie Sizer. I think she was the best police chief since Bruce Baker. So. Hopefully she'll hear that someday from me.

So that was kind of Leslie. And then from Leslie we went to Mary-Beth Baptista. And she was good in a whole different way. Oh, I should say, the lowest point in my IPR time was when Leslie said, "Rosie hired me to be the deputy," or whatever it was, the administrative services chief. And I lost her. Because I mean, I thought she could still do well there. But I really wished she could have done more within IPR. And Rosie lasted another year after that and just kind of ran out of oxygen and left. And I think Leslie was gone the next day. So, it was too bad.

Mary-Beth Baptista was next. And she brought something entirely different. She was an activist on the environmental side. And somehow, she managed to kind of calm the waters with Copwatch and all the activist groups out there. And she was able to kind of let us have a little more space to do things. And I think it helped. But we were definitely on a trajectory where the Police Bureau was getting more frustrated with the citizens, with kind of our push that, there's kind of, I felt like I was a shock absorber. I think the chief is a professional shock absorber. And you know, between unions and activists and citizens at large and editorials and City Council, there's just a lot of



push and pull around police services. And trying to make change requires kind of all those shock absorbers to stay connected. But to also not lose perspective and to maintain communications and to listen and to kind of figure out solutions that can work. So, it was a tough spot to be in. I mean, I felt like I was in it. The IPR director was in it. Obviously, the chief's always in it. So those were kind of the challenges that I think come with police oversight is there's not, there's not a happy place ever. You know, you're always getting pushed and pulled in different directions.

But it was interesting to see three different people. I mean, they were all attorneys. But they all approached it with a real different view. And in some ways, I think it helped IPR evolve. The Citizen Review Committee, that was a challenge. I just struggled with them because their expectations were high. Their patience was low. There was a tendency to say we know the problem, so just solve it. And you know, having been an auditor, it's easy to find problems in the world. It's hard to solve them. But the citizens really, one of the things Pete did was he worked with them to say okay, let's go through these kinds of complaints and see if we can come up with recommendations for policy changes. And it was a real eye-opener for the citizens that worked with him. Because they realized if you word it this way, you're going to have these adverse consequences. If you word it this way, you're going to have this kind of a problem. So, there was a kind of an eye opener for them that the solutions aren't easy. And so, I hope that that would have kind of spread through the other members, but it didn't. They felt like we were kind of interfering and that they needed to tell us what to do and we needed to tell the Police Bureau what to do and that was it. So, expecting me or the IPR director to be over the police chief wasn't exactly the way it worked. It needed to be fact-based persuasion, which is essentially what an audit is. That you know, you put together the evidence. You say, this doesn't satisfy community expectations, but this is a strategy for getting closer to what they want.

So that was kind of what I wanted to see. And the citizens didn't have the patience for that. They were just kind of like throwing up their hands, saying, "Well, that just takes too long." So, it was frustrating. And the police officers at first would come to CRC hearings. But after a while, they were getting more and more frustrated and they stopped showing up. Because they didn't feel like they were being heard. That it was really always a "he said/she said." It was an adversarial situation without any evidence. Meaning that the complaint would be read. The officer would have an opportunity to explain their perspective. And the citizens would just kind of say well, I go with the citizen. Or, I go with the officer. So, it wasn't like a court system. And I don't know how you solve that. Because ultimately it really is a personnel investigation. Which means you've got to gather evidence. You've got to show this is outside of personnel rules, and this person violated them in these ways. So, I don't know how you put citizens over a hearing on officer behavior and come up with sound conclusions that officers will accept. So, yeah. That part was frustrating, also.

MY: How did IPR's relationship with the Police Bureau's Internal Affairs evolve during your time over there?

GB: It started out pretty good. There was some optimism. I think we, they were, there were worse consequences than IPR that they faced. I think they feared that it would be just a kangaroo court kind of a system. I mean, they had seen PIIAC, and they never showed up for PIIAC hearings. It was just not anything that they saw as legitimate. So, there was a sense of hope in the beginning. And they would come to mediations, because word had spread on that. They, I think our relationship in terms of investigations was good because we made them better at it. When it got to discipline I think we weren't able to, we were able to sit in the room, but we were more of what they call a potted plant, that we really didn't have, couldn't say anything. The IPR director could be there.

That evolved over time where the IPR director could sit at the table and actually vote on those things and argue the situation and the discipline that he or she thought was appropriate.

So, on a number of levels, it was pretty good in the beginning, but it did deteriorate over time. And I mean, it's gotten much worse now. And I can't even fathom how the Department of Justice consent decree interplays with that. I think it's a much worse environment for the Police Bureau than IPR ever was. And again, I don't know that created a lot of change in the Police Bureau from what I read. That the things that the Department of Justice wants the Police Bureau to do aren't necessarily happening. And that was only around a small area of mental health interactions. It could have been much larger. Because there were a lot of issues around race and shootings when I first started. It was really a nightmare. When we were trying to put together our report, there were, you know, a series of shootings before that. And then, what was her name, Kendra James?

MY: Kendra James.

GB: Literally that was during the time that we were introducing IPR. And there was a lot of pressure around racism involved with that. So, it was a difficult kind of a situation to deal with. So, I can get into shootings, if you want to talk about that.

MY: Yeah, well I was going to start with, there was a, 2003 is when Kendra James was killed. And that's also when the Auditor's Office released its first annual review of officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths, which focused on 1997 to 2000 was that first report.

GB: Yeah. And that again is an auditor model, meaning that City Council wanted to add review of officer shootings into the IPR code. And I said no, I will not do that. I stood firm on that and I basically said, auditors don't do events. We do paper. And we put words and strategies together on paper, and that's how we do it.

When Richard Rosenthal came in, he said, "Well you know, there's experts out there that do shooting reviews."

And I said, "Really?" So, we started talking about it. And I said, "Well, it can't be one by one. Because you've got an 'N' of one and it's specific. What if we gave them a batch of shootings and told them look for the patterns among all of these shootings and see what needs to change."

So, we put together an RFP and Richard contacted a bunch of criminal justice consultants around the country on that. We got a number of bids in. And we had a committee that chose PARC, Police Association Research, C, I can't, Consultants, I guess. And we told them, "Okay, we don't want this just to be, we want this to be multiple. And we don't want this to be pie in the sky. We want to have specific proven strategies for dealing with the problems and policies and procedures that you recommend, and examples of it."

So, they said, "Okay, we can do that."

And I said, "We also want you, when you've drafted the report, to sit down with the Police Bureau top commanders and talk through it with them."

And they were like, "Whoa. We've never done that before."

And I said, "Well, you're going to have to do that here." And they said okay.

So, they came on. And they started assembling, or the Police Bureau started assembling all of the case files for all the shootings for this period of time. And what was nice was, they had all ended their tort litigation, all the criminal and tort litigation out there. So, there weren't, if there was a case pending, it was not looked at. Because it just got too complicated with too many lawyers. So, there were a large number, I think like thirty-four, of these cases that we were able to get. There were more out there.

And one of the, I mean, this is kind of one of those incidents that I always found interesting. We had kept asking, we knew there were other shootings out there. But the Police Bureau wasn't delivering the files. And there were like three or four or five of them that we kept waiting for and waiting for. And finally, the mayor called us, Richard and I up one Monday morning when she met with Chief Kroeger at that time. And all of his deputies and captains in her conference room.

And she said, "So, what's taking this so long? Why aren't you able to get these consultants working?"

And we said, "Well, we're still waiting for some of the case files."

And so, she looked around the room and she said, "So, where are all the case files?"

And the chief said, "Well, we've sent over all of them we've got. All of them I've signed."

And Vera said, "Well, are there some that you haven't investigated?" And all of them are kind of looking around at the ceiling. And Rosie's kind of nodding her head and she's saying yeah, there are some that we never investigated.

And so that was kind of an eye opener. Vera had a real, she supported her police. But she also had a limit for how far she would go. I think this undermined her views of what she was hearing from the police. Because they really were not doing a good job of investigating the shootings that happened. But what, I mean, the reports are out there. The first one had like eighty-nine recommendations. And it was devastating. But the irony was, no city in the country, no county, no criminal justice jurisdiction, had ever done what we'd done. They would sometimes call for consultants to come in, or DOJ would bring consultants in to do those reviews. But they never made it public. And we made it public.

So again, that's what an audit does. Lawyers, well, I could get off on lawyers a lot, but lawyers like to hide things. Auditors like to reveal things. Lawyers think that a negotiated settlement behind closed doors will solve a problem. Auditors believe that laying the problem out with a solution will solve the problem.

And that was the approach we took as a kind of basically an audit. So, we put this report together. I asked for 500 copies to be printed. And we—I and Mike Hess, one of the people there—we delivered copies to all of the precincts so officers could read them. Not just top commanders, and not just what they read in the newspaper, because they tended to discount what they read in the newspaper, but when they read these reports, and read about these incidents, it really embarrassed them. I mean, they realized that they looked like the Keystone Cops. That some of the situations were totally out of bounds. And the investigations were awful. And evidence was missed. But also, the policies were lacking. So, there were just, and the training needed to be improved. So, there were all the things that they needed to do to change the way that they interacted and used their guns.

One of the other things that I talked about was when I first started with the city, I was on the Fire and Police Disability and Retirement Board. And that board was, the majority were police officers and firefighters. There was the mayor, the city treasurer, and me. And the rest were police officers and firefighters. And we would have disability hearings. And we would hear firefighters and police officers coming in to appeal for a disability claim. Many of them were stressed. Many of them followed shootings. And many of them, their careers ended after a shooting.

So, it was very clear to me that the victims weren't always the people who were shot, but the officers. And the police officers knew that. They knew that that didn't just, you know, there's a few officers that could coldly shoot someone and move on. But most of them were ordinary people who were kind of broken by taking a life. So, that was something I think that haunted them. And the report said here's how you don't end your career prematurely by taking a life. So, I think there were a lot of issues like that out there.

Now, when I started tracking shootings, they dropped a lot. We were averaging nine or ten shootings a year. They dropped to three or four. Now there's a lot more guns out there. And I think

officers are exposed to a lot more threats. So, they've crept back up. But for a while, I kind of told people well, you know, for the time I was city auditor, twenty-eight people were not shot at by the police. It was one way to quantify that average in the past and what we actually experienced. So, it was something that was good that came out of it. But still, it's a hard thing to get people—

And when I started looking at it, I always felt like it was that last second decision that was so hard to get, to second guess. But with these experts, I realized it really is the policies, the procedures and the training and the investigations. That officers needed to know when they were doing something wrong. Training needed to know when officers did something that was okay, but they weren't trained to do it, or was not okay and they weren't trained to do it. Training needed to put some guardrails around those things. So, I think it enriched training a lot around the gun violence. Or I should say, the use of guns in the police bureau, and deaths in custody.

Because Mejía Poot was another incident that happened that was just, you know, an awful shame. And it was just, you know, you end up as a director, kind of groaning and living every one of these incidents. And trying to figure out, you know, you do it personally. It's almost a personal thing when it happens. And now I think the IPR director may go to the shooting. So, it's even more of a personal connection with what happens. So, yeah. I'm trying to think.

MY: James Chasse was another one that—

GB: Yeah.

MY: The community was really outraged when that in-custody death happened.

GB: Well, I'll say something that we, one of the things that we did was we did a lot of data analysis on use of force. And we looked at which parts of the bureau used more force than others. And Central Precinct was one of the highest uses of force. And it was not driven by the number of people they served or necessarily the demographics. But there was a certain amount of cultural stuff going on there. Just what was accepted and the leadership there. But the TriMet unit was also one that we were tracking. And that was the one that took down James Chasse. And in some ways, I think, when I think about what happened with Memphis and that group of officers, there was a little bit of that going on. Because it was a multi-jurisdictional unit, law enforcement unit, that had officers from Washington County and Troutdale and all over the region that TriMet served that were part of it. And there was really not good strong policies and procedures, because they had their own. And it was difficult for anyone to impose I guess disciplinary actions because, you know, you'd have to take it to that department for someone who was working for another supervisor. So, it was a hard one for us to get a handle on. And we were working on that when James Chasse was killed. So, it was a difficult one for us too, Leslie Stevens was the auditor, or the IPR director at that time.

MY: I imagine another challenge you experienced was this outside review that happened in 2008 of IPR.

GB: Yeah. You know, one of the things as an auditor I really try hard to understand what a department or a bureau is trying to do, and their perspective, and do a thorough professional objective job of evaluating what they're doing. We got a hatchet job on us. I mean, I was just appalled when I saw it. Because there was scant evidence. It was a lot of opinions. Tom Potter put it together. And it took a couple years off of my time as city auditor. I just, it was damaging to the office and to me. And it was kind of, it was hard for us to get back to any kind of sense that we were accomplishing something. Because it was just, it was just a cheap shot on so many levels at what we



were trying to do without any comparables around, you know, I still felt we were the best in the country in terms of what we were doing and what we were putting together. Granted, it wasn't accomplishing everything that people wanted. But if you read that report in detail and look at the methodology in it, they didn't talk to a lot of people except for community activists and a few members of the community and very few of the Police Bureau. You know, one or two people in IPR and that was it. Looking at the evidence in terms of data, looking at the progress that we had made in terms of complaint handling. The new programs we'd introduced, like mediation and how it was successful. So, yeah, it was a tough one for me to take. Just because as an auditor, well, it's kind of like, I want as an auditor to have, it's like if I were to go into a surgeon, I would want to have confidence that a surgeon was going to cut and do it well and professionally. So that's kind of what I want to do as an auditor is when I'm going to make a cut on a department, I want it to be done professionally. And this was not professional at all. It was a husband-and-wife team with very little background in doing that kind of work. And it was just, it was something that was adding insult to the pain that I was having as the IPR director that went with the job.

So, yeah, I had had a lot of frustration with Tom Potter as the mayor before that. And after that it was just, I was glad he was leaving.

MY: How much of your time as city auditor focused on IPR?

GB: Too much. Way too much. When I first proposed it, Kay Kirshner was the council clerk. And she'd been with the city Auditor's Office forever. And she was just a wonderful person and highly professional. And she came in and sat in my office and she said, "Gary, don't take on police oversight. It is not going to be good for the office. It is not going to be an easy thing to do. It's not going to be successful. And I'm not saying it because I want to insult you or anything. It's just not a good idea." And I listened. But I was convinced that I had a strategy, which was kind of the auditor model and that I knew the inside and out of law enforcement and I could make those kinds of inroads and changes. But yeah, it would end up taking probably seventy percent of my time. And one of the things that disappoints me is this archive center here was something that I would have loved to have committed more of my time to make exciting and to kind of make it a civics lesson for the community members of Portland. because it's got every record from the first ordinance passed from City Council, the original, to everything we've got today. And this was something that I thought was an exciting thing to build. But I really didn't get a chance to kind of make it that final little thing, which was to connect it with the community. I mean, here it is at Portland State, which it's a great treasure trove for students in urban studies and having the digital files that they have here, the archives that are available on the internet, make it so it's available beyond Portland State. But there were other things I wanted to do in audit services. I mean, one of the best times I had was in my six years as the audits director in the secretary of state's office at the end of my career, because I got to be an auditor again. And it was just a blast. I loved it. But you know, I had a director of audits, so I didn't have to worry about that. But still, I would have, I missed being an auditor. So, it was great to go back to that. It was a great way to end my career.

MY: What role did police oversight play in your decision to leave the office before the end of your third term?

GB: I was worn out. I really was. I had to put everything on a field that I could. And I was just kind of, you know, the tank was empty. So, yeah, I guess it was just ten years of City Hall. And, now let me take a break for a minute.

MY: When we started this interview, you commented on what the Police Bureau was like, what you had noticed when you were involved in criminal justice early in your career. And then what it was like when you took the Auditor's Office. So how did the police and the community's relationship evolve over your time in the Auditor's Office?

GB: Well, I went on a lot of ride-alongs with sheriff's deputies when I worked at the Sheriff's Office and saw how they did their work. I went on ride-alongs in the Portland Police Bureau. We did an audit of patrol deployment. And that was the one where Chief Davis got fired over that audit. So that was another interesting story about how we were trying to push the bureau to manage in a more modern way. And the chief said, "How many ride-alongs have you been on, or how many times have you been behind the wheel of a patrol car?" And you know, it was again that outsider notion that you can't tell us what to do. What we were proposing were very simple and obvious notions like match the number of officers you have to the number of calls coming in, so that the workload is more balanced. So, there was a real resistance to change. That was 1987 or 1988.

But what I also learned over the years in the Sheriff's Office, and even in the Police Bureau, dealing with those folks, whether they were a captain or a patrol officer or sergeant was what I called a bell-shaped curve. That there are some officers who are just excellent. They're exemplary. They are pillars of the community. And there's a very few number of them. That's one small end of the tail of the bell-shaped curve. And then there's the bulk of the officers are good, you know, mediocre to good. And then there's a tail of bad officers. Incompetent, evil, cruel, you name it. And to me, we want to cut that tail off. We want to get rid of those officers.

But the strategy is to move that bulk of officers toward that tail of exemplary. That small tail's where you're going to have the biggest impact on an organization. So, the idea of dealing with the problems and getting rid of them and improving the services of that bulk of the workforce, of the 700 [1,000] officers that were there when I was the city auditor, that group has a huge impact. But just dwelling on that small tail, you need to deal with it, but you can't assume that everyone is like that. You have to kind of approach them individually and understand what they know, what they don't know, what their experiences are.

So that was kind of what I saw as a way that we needed to address this organization and to make the changes that were necessary. That it's moving that bulk of the officers over bit by bit.

And so that was kind of how I saw community relations, also. That when I talked with members of the African American community, I said, "You know, it's hard for community leaders to talk about shootings in the Black community when officers are doing a lot of them. And when we can get officers to stop doing that, I think they're in a better position to work with the community about Black-on-Black shootings. That there is a serious problem in the community. But it's also the police. So, let's deal with this every way we can, but we need to also deal with it on the police side."

And I think the community relations, I mean, I don't know that any community is happy with their police. I mean, there's probably some communities that are, but I don't know which ones they are. And I think the smaller the organizations are, the more cut off they are from the community. And I think that's one of the problems that happens in large police organizations is they start talking too much to each other and the walls go up and they just cut themselves off. I think those exemplary officers are willing to listen and to try and to reach out. It's getting the bulk there to accept that well, you can do things better. Because everyone's complaining about how they do things. I mean, police, ninety percent of the time they're dealing with victims. They're not dealing with perpetrators or alleged perpetrators or anything like that. So, I think that erodes their feelings about the public. Because all they're seeing is people who have been hurt and damaged, whether it's United States or England or Canada or anything that, the culture of policing erodes the, I guess the character of officers. And it's hard for them to then accept that they've done something wrong when

they've seen so many other bad things happening in the community. And I think, I don't necessarily have an answer to that. But I think it's a struggle that every police department has.

And the more you can hire officers that represent the community but also can rise above the community and be able to say I see the situation I'm in and I can deal with it. The Sheriff's Office required bachelor's degrees for all their deputies, which was a radical idea back in 1965 when it was enacted. And they had smart, able deputies that were actually probably more competent than their bosses. They were, they had perspective. They had poise. They had a broad knowledge. And the thing that they didn't have that others had was talking to the perpetrators. They knew how to talk to victims. And they learned that side of it on the jobs.

But I think the hiring profile that Portland had and probably still has depends a lot on people who want to be police officers who may not be suitable to be police officers. I mean, one of the ironies in the Sheriff's Office was they did most of their hires during the Vietnam War when I was there. They didn't want to go to war, but they could get a deferment by being a deputy sheriff. So, you got people who didn't necessarily want to be deputy sheriffs, but they thought well, I could do that for a while. And they kind of fell in love with the job and they were good at it.

On the other hand, the Sheriff's Office never hired, or rarely hired people who qualified for the Portland Police Bureau. And the Portland Police Bureau rarely hired people who qualified for the Sheriff's Office. Portland Police Bureau was a paramilitary organization, pure and simple. The Sheriff's Office was looser. It was smaller. There was a lot more communication among the ranks. There was not that military yes, sir kind of a thing that went on in the Portland Police Bureau.

And I think there's a tendency for police departments to hire ex-military people and people who don't necessarily have that breadth of knowledge that is needed to be a good police officer. And so, I guess, you know, I got lots of individual stories, but I can't put them into any big picture. But I guess I would hope that we can have officers who are recruited from other walks than just the criminal justice programs that are out there that have a greater perspective than this is the law and I'm here to enforce it and I'm here to maintain order. Because they really are the front lines. I mean, I think they're the front lines like teachers are. That they're given impossible tasks with insufficient resources. And that mental health, alcohol and drug treatment, gun violence, all those things are challenges for police officers. And they don't have the solutions to those. They can move them around from one place to another. And usually, they drop them on the doorstep of Multnomah County here, and tell Multnomah County to solve the problem. And the county doesn't have the resources. Or we don't even have the techniques to solve a lot of mental health problems and put the concentrated effort into help people with alcohol and drug problems. So, I don't know. I guess that's my long answer to, and vague answer.

MY: So, you left the city Auditor's Office in 2009. Did you follow IPR's work once you left?

GB: To a certain degree. I really needed to get away. I really felt like the oxygen was running out for me in City Hall. Council members, I was having to make appointments two weeks in advance to meet with council members. They were taking a run at our space in City Hall. And this was the chiefs of staff that were, I just, they were, I don't know. They were acting out, to a certain degree. They were refusing to, they discontinued a weekly meeting to talk about the council agenda which was essentially for their benefit. But the city Auditor's Office is in charge of the council agenda. And it was hard, you know, we were having meetings that were going hours over because there was no coordination of what was coming on the council agenda after they'd discontinued that. And I just kind of had it. And I just said I can't take this anymore. And I decided I can retire, and I will. And so, I did.

And then a couple weeks later I got a call from Kate Brown, who wanted me to be director of audits. And it was a whole different turn in my career I didn't expect, and it was good. But I really couldn't make myself come into City Hall for six years afterwards. I just, I had dread about coming back. Because it was just not a good place. When you're an inside outsider, it's very difficult. As an auditor, you want to be able to understand what's going on and be able to make wise decisions about what to audit and when, and what's going right and what's not going right. What council is interested in that an audit could help them make decisions on. And to kind of hold council as well as all the bureaus accountable. And so that forces you into the role of an outsider while you're trying to stay inside and see what's going on. It's a difficult balancing act. And it's a hard one to be effective and to be a human being is pretty hard. I think you can be pretty mechanistic about it and pretty cold. But trying to be strong and sensitive is a hard balancing act. To be able to know and to push but also to be sensitive, to hear and to listen for legitimate problems and complaints and be able to respond to those in a positive way. So, anyway. But it's a great office. Still is. Wonderful people there. I miss them dearly. That was one of the greatest things I had was the spirit that a lot of employees wanted to work for the Auditor's Office in the city because they knew it was a positive place, a destination workplace in the city. And I tried to help make it that. So, it was successful that way.

So, ten years was a good amount of time. I would have left earlier, but I felt like there were a few things I needed to wrap up. Because about when I was thinking I needed to leave was when Leslie Stevens left. And then I got Mary-Beth Baptista back on steady feet. And then I felt I could leave, and so I did.

MY: Given the time, effort and funding invested in police accountability over what's now decades, and PIIAC and then IPR, is Portland better off because of it?

GB: I don't know. I mean, I go back to that study or that sentence from our early audit that said there's no study that said that police oversight has an impact on police services. I mean, I think it comes and goes. I don't know the public wants it, is willing to pay for it. It tends to create a more transparent police service. But boy, it's a tough one in terms of trying to figure out if it's really done better. I mean, I still wonder, we'll see how the Department of Justice does. Because I think they come in with basically "you will do this." And they've got a judge pushing the Police Bureau to do it. But again, it's been years.

And the other side of it, we'd have these experts come in to do the shooting review. And I'd chat with them. And they said, you know, one of the things with these consent decrees, and having a federal marshal, I think is what they call it that comes in to oversee a department, is when does it end? And we'll probably see that in Portland. In some of these cities, it never ends. It goes on for eight, ten years, because they feel like they're not making inroads in the organization. And I'm not sure. I mean, it has to do with who you hire, how you train them, what your policies are, what your discipline is, what the culture is in the organization. What the culture is in the community in terms of expectations and issues. So, it's a lot more dynamics than I think police oversight can really deal with. And even a police department can deal with. So, I don't know. I guess I think it's incremental in that it will do a little something, which is good. But it's not going to solve the problems. It's not going to, you know, shootings, again, have that tail where there's some really bad people that don't mind shooting. There's a lot of people who circumstances, accident, you name it, they fire their weapon and they wish they hadn't. And there's others that never fire their weapon in their whole career. And I think that's kind of what you face with every organization is you've got that range of personalities, circumstances, skills and abilities that you just have to kind of keep working at.



MY: You're a Portland voter. Any opinion on the ballot measure that came out in 2020 that now we have a different system that's coming into place with the police accountability commission?

GB: Have we got another two hours for this? I guess I saw the good things come out of the commission form of government. I thought it was, it's a very accountable form of government. Much more than a city manager form of government. Because right now, what we're facing is a government where someone will call one of three commissioners in their district and complain about something. That commissioner will call a deputy city manager who may be over transportation, for example, where the complaint is. That deputy will then call someone in the Department of Transportation and say, "Hey, I've got a complaint like this." And it doesn't have the sway of calling the commissioner in charge and having a staffer call the bureau to get the problem solved. So, I think that's part of the weakness that's going to come. But also, the three commissioners per district is just, I just don't think that's a good idea. I think it becomes parochial in that they're going to work hard to get as many transportation dollars in their district as they can, even if their streets are in better shape than the district next to them. I think their be-all, end-all is adopting policies and directives for the departments, for the bureaus, that may never have enough resources to accomplish them. That you know, if the only tool they have is a policy or a directive, and so that's all they're going to do is pass policies and directives in the budget. So, they're pretty weak in terms of what they can do. But it's also what they're going to get elected on and re-elected on, as council adopted my policy of such and such. Even if nothing ever changed because of it. So, those are my two big concerns about it is, are those two.

You know, accountability, well I guess my last thing is that I think the voters have switched to being more around policy and identity politics than good administration as criteria for judging candidates for office. That for some reason, the commission form of government worked for 110 years. And that was, it became, it created a very good city here and a very effective government. So, the idea that homelessness and gun violence are going to get solved in this new form of government when every other government in the country is having the same problems with either a strong mayor or a city manager form of government, which are the other two, are essentially kind of a fantasy that it's the form of government that's the root of the problem when it's not. And it's not even the root of the solution, I don't think. Because we've solved some pretty big things as a city in the past.

MY: Well, those are my questions. Did you have any that you wish I had asked?

GB: Nope.