

Portland City Council Agenda Written Testimony  
 Document Number 2025-010

	Name or Organization	Position	Comments	Attachment	Created
1	Terry Harris, Amy Randal, Juliet Hyams	Support	In summary, we support your nine-twelfths agenda item 2025-010, but we would emphasize that the work in establishing committees is not complete until rules are established as well. Attached are comments and context for this work, in addition to, and consistent with, recommendations from GTAC.	Yes	01/14/25 2:34 PM
2	Marianne Fitzgerald		I just saw this agenda item to establish committees, which is the first proposal I've seen regarding city council committees. It is not clear how the city council committees will interact with the community members they were elected to represent. In fact, under "Community Impacts and Community Involvement" it says "This matter is internal to the City, so there is no community impact and there was no community involvement." I disagree with that statement. I don't understand how they will fulfill their duty to "be the primary place to promote public engagement and input..." without involving the public in their deliberations in policies and proposals that affect people in the community. Will these city council committees supersede all other civic engagement processes and committees in Portland? It also appears that the committee topics overlap some service areas, so how will the city council committees resolve potential future conflicting recommendations that affect bureaus and programs? I hope there will be more community engagement about how the community will engage with these City Council Committees and City Bureaus and Programs.	No	01/14/25 3:08 PM
3	Anonymous	Support with changes	I support a homelessness and housing committee, but I propose the description of the committee be expanded to encompass overseeing policy making on renters' rights and the rental services office, which has been neglected by the previous council and mayor. Also, I cannot support Candace Avalos leading this committee; her views on addressing homelessness aren't supported by the voters.	No	01/14/25 3:53 PM
4	Zef Wagner	Oppose	I am a resident of District 2. I was surprised and disappointed to see that the committee rules do not require at least one member from each Council District, as I believe was previously proposed. As a result, the listed initial membership in Transportation & Infrastructure, for example, does not have any representation from District 2. I strongly believe that this will tend to mean that on certain topics, one or more districts will not have their interests represented and will have a harder time getting City Council to address issues of that topic specific to the district without a Councilmember on the committee, and the districts that do have representation will be more well-served. This seems to subvert the very idea of district representation. I think the committees should each have at least one member from each district, and that this proposal should be opposed unless it is reworked to address this issue.	No	01/15/25 7:39 AM
5	Government Transition Advisory Committee Co-Chairs Jose Gamero-Georgeson & Fred Neal	Support with changes		Yes	01/15/25 2:06 PM
6	Portland Metro Chamber, Oregon Smart Growth, Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors®, Multifamily NW, and Home Building Association of Greater Portland			Yes	01/15/25 4:25 PM

To: Council President Elana Pirtle-Guiney  
Council Vice President Tiffany Koyama Lane  
Members of the Portland City Council

From: Terry J. Harris  
Amy Randal  
Juliet Hyams

Subject: Council Committees

January 14, 2025

The three of us currently serve on the Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC). As you know, GTAC has had some opportunity over the last year to research, consider, and discuss how committees might work in the new, expanded, charter-reformed Portland City Council. And in September, GTAC issued recommendations that include recommendations around council committees. We are pleased that your draft proposal incorporates many of the recommendations.

However, because this particular item comes before the Council without much advance notice and because GTAC has not discussed it, *we are offering these comments strictly in our own personal capacity*. Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and context which we hope might assist you with your important decision-making around bringing committees to the new council. **In summary, we support your nine-twelfths agenda item 2025-010, but we would emphasize that the work in establishing committees is not complete until rules are established as well.**

### **1. Regarding Council Capacity and Council Committees**

As you know, GTAC has been outspoken on the inadequate staffing and budget for your incoming council.<sup>1</sup> The previous council simply failed to budget for adequate staffing for your individual offices, for the shared council operations staff, and for the legislative and administrative responsibilities in the Council President's office. Based on GTAC's research, Portland's current council staffing levels are an extreme outlier compared to peer cities.

And as you are recognizing, the new, expanded legislative City Council has some new distinct unmet staffing needs that the previous form of government did not. The need for legislative counsel, for example, but also the need for committee and policy and budget staff. We strongly support staffing resolutions and budget amendments to bring Portland's council to a functional level sufficient to meet the needs and spirit of the charter reforms. The basic capacity to provide basic governance is not optional.

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<sup>1</sup>GTAC issued a [memo on Council staffing](#) in February 2024. GTAC members raised the issue with the previous council numerous times in public hearings, budget hearings, and work sessions.

That said, the issue of the Council's capacity is now entirely this Council's responsibility. The lack of the Council's capacity cannot be used as an excuse when capacity is within your power to supply it. Other than transitional and short-term limitations, restrictions on capacity will likely be considered self-imposed. Because this Council will be setting the baseline for future Councils, and because the previous Council failed so badly, we would urge that you not skimp on the necessities of governance.

## **2. Committees will make the need for more robust council rules more urgent**

The composition and jurisdiction of Council committees is important, but the framework for how those committees will operate will be even more important. How legislation flows to and from committees, and how committees operate while considering legislation remain somewhat open questions. In particular, new and improved rules will be necessary sooner rather than later to facilitate and expedite movement of legislation through committee, and to create necessary space for more meaningful public involvement.

As a general rule, legislating with a strong committee process will take more time than it did with the prior Council. And to be clear, this is a good thing: it allows the Council to dig deeper into the issues and provide the community with time to participate more fully. It will take some getting used to. And it will take a commitment by the Council to the process - to resist efforts to force legislation into consent agendas and emergency ordinances. Capacity problems notwithstanding, a system of rules that can guarantee that legislation can move through committees in a timely and efficient manner will be necessary.

## **3. Committee composition and leadership will require careful balancing across districts**

In the process of developing GTAC's recommendations on committees, we heard in our community engagement that residents worried about how committees would distribute and balance power across districts, across councilors within districts, and across committee jurisdictions. GTAC's recommendations are intended to be consistent with this balancing, along with a balancing of the respective workloads for each Committee and each Councilor.<sup>2</sup>

Of specific concern to community members was that no committee should be hearing and deciding legislative items without representation from their district. Indeed, community members were enthusiastic that the charter-reformed Council could take advantage of the new districts (and multiple councilors per district) to be sure that district-specific concerns could be heard across the committee system. District representation on committees is a key

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<sup>2</sup> Although GTAC's recommendations did not extend to this specific proposal, the 12-member Council maps extremely well to a constellation of 6 standing committees of six members each. The six members would include four councilors – one each from the four council districts – and a chair and a vice chair. This would guarantee that each district would be represented on each committee, each councilor would serve as a chair or vice chair of a committee, each councilor would serve on the same number of committees.

recommendation from GTAC, and we urge its following whether it remains in the code or not. Constituents want it and expect it.

#### **4. By rule, every legislative item should find jurisdiction in at least one standing committee**

The formal descriptions of committee jurisdiction are unlikely to be specific enough or detailed enough to predictably govern all referrals of every possible legislative item that might come before the Council. But the default should still be that most legislation may be referred to *some* committee with jurisdiction to hold a public hearing and deliberate on the topic.<sup>3</sup> We would recommend a rule that would establish explicitly that “every policy matter has a council committee that may review the matter” or some equivalent.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the Council should consider specific catch-all jurisdiction for at least one of the standing committees (probably the Governance Committee under the President’s proposal) to include “all items not otherwise referable” or equivalent.

#### **5. Regarding the number of committees and frequency with which they meet**

There was a statement at the work session that “the work is the same” regardless of the number of committees. And while this is true in the sense that fewer committees means more legislation in each committee, the idea is that more committees can do more work, *in parallel*.

GTAC research into committee systems in peer jurisdictions showed that most cities had between five and eight standing committees. Some jurisdictions set regular meeting times for their standing committees,<sup>5</sup> while other jurisdictions’ committees meet only as often as needed.<sup>6</sup> Because of “capacity” concerns and the need to move legislation in a timely manner, the “as needed” approach is probably better for Portland for the foreseeable future.

The Council President and committee leadership, along with the auditor and facilities and support staff should establish the availability of a variety of time slots for committee work, and other than initial organizing meetings, committee meetings should be scheduled only as needed. Some committee meetings could be one-hour slots. Other committee hearings could be all afternoon and into the evenings. And although there seems to be a working assumption

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<sup>3</sup> See, For example, San Jose Resolution 79870, Rule 9(i) “Except for budget matters, which are considered by the Council as a whole, most matters to come before the Council must go through one of the Standing Committees for a public hearing.”

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Austin City Code § 2-5-103(A) “It is the intent of the council that the listing of subjects assigned to council committees be construed broadly and be illustrative, so that every policy matter before the City has a council committee that may review the matter.”

<sup>5</sup> Seattle, for example, sets committee schedules in advance by resolution and are typically twice per month.

<sup>6</sup> Baltimore, for example, schedules committee hearings only when legislation has been referred to the committee.

that all committee meetings will occur in Council Chambers, if scheduling bottlenecks occur, the Council should consider activating alternate locations for parallel committee meetings.

#### **6. A “committee of the whole” is a useful tool and should be specifically retained in the rules.**

As the City Attorney described in your recent work session, Robert’s Rules of Order has a “Committee of the Whole” provision that can be used in large assemblies and as such may not be quite appropriate for a smaller council. But Robert’s Rules only govern the Council *in the absence* of a provision in the charter, code, or council rule that would take precedence. Many peer jurisdictions maintain a “Committee of the Whole” provision in their rules so that the entire council might be able to discuss a legislative item in a committee format separate from the usual council meeting format. It is the typical format for budget considerations in many jurisdictions, but it is also a way to procedurally manage standing or ad hoc committees with a membership larger than a Council quorum.<sup>7</sup> Under the rules, the “committee of the whole” would be explicitly limited as to what it can and cannot do while meeting. Specifically, a “committee of the whole” may NOT transact Council business, because the rules would limit its authority to issuing recommendations on a particular legislative item, like any other committee.

#### **7. Finally, committee rules for public involvement should be more expansive**

Because the primary driver of a committee system is to improve the Council’s deliberations, Council committee rules should fortify and improve the basic framework for public involvement in council committee decision-making beyond historic practice. The basics obviously include adequate notice to the public and a reasonable opportunity to provide meaningful comment. Practices and procedures for notice of committee hearings should be improved, and opportunities for input in committees should be expanded.

A forgotten fundamental in Portland, however, has been that for a comment to be meaningful, the comment must be heard BEFORE the Council begins deliberating. Council rules governing committees should reinforce that committees represent the vehicle for the earliest and best opportunity for public involvement. This means public hearings on items should be held prior to work sessions on items. And committee work sessions should not necessarily be limited to city staff and councilors, because helpful stakeholders and individuals representative of the public’s interests should be invited to participate and assist in forging the committee recommendations. The most important lesson of charter reform is that we can do things differently now, with a reinvigorated focus on community. You should use committees to prove it.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Austin allows councilmembers to choose for themselves the standing committees on which they want to serve. If more than a council quorum signs up for a particular committee, that committee is designated as a “committee of the whole” for the standing committee’s purposes.

**Government Transition Advisory Committee Co-Chair Written Testimony**  
**Related to Establish City Council Committees Agenda Item 2025-010**  
**January 15, 2024**

In September 2024, the Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) released [Recommendations for City Leaders of the New Government](#). The recommendations represent 18 months of GTAC service, working alongside City staff, engaging Portlanders where they are, and asking for innovative solutions to barriers in effectively engaging the public across the City.

The GTAC recommendations related to establishing and composing council committees are relevant to this council agenda item and are copied below.

- Set the number and composition of standing council committees to distribute power and workload as equally as possible across the council districts and membership. For example, committees include councilors from each district, a similar number of committees per councilor, and similar leadership roles as committee chairs and vice-chairs.
  - Peer cities average around five councilors per committee with different levels of participation among committee members.<sup>1</sup>
  - Peer cities have five to eight standing council committees.<sup>2</sup> And based on peer city research<sup>3</sup>, Portland could consider committee topics such as: Committee of the Whole; Government Performance & Finance; Public Health & Public Safety; Transportation & Infrastructure; Community Development; Sustainability & Climate; Housing & Homelessness; and Community Engagement, Equity, and Communications.
- Establish ad hoc council committees.
- Provide sufficient funding and staffing for council committees.<sup>4</sup> According to City staff, current budget allocations for staffing the future council will support only four council committees.
- Set the topic areas of standing committees to reflect legislative priorities, as distinct from executive functions, and align them to strategic priorities.
  - While there are some pros and cons to aligning topics to the initial service areas identified by council, maintaining committee topical areas distinct from pre-existing service areas will allow council more latitude with the City's priorities holistically and help mitigate the silos among bureaus that remain from the commission form of government.
  - This structure will support the new council's legislative policy duties beyond budgeting and the oversight of service areas, especially as the new form of government evolves over time.

The GTAC has not had an opportunity to discuss the proposed council resolution because the agenda item was published one day before the council session.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on research from 20 cities: Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Fe, Seattle, Tacoma, and Washington DC.

<sup>2</sup> Based on research from 20 cities: Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Fe, Seattle, Tacoma, and Washington DC.

<sup>3</sup> Based on research from 20 cities: Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Fe, Seattle, Tacoma, and Washington DC, common council committees in other cities include Committee of the Whole, Governance, Public Health and Safety, Transportation and Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability, Community Development, Education, Arts and Culture, Housing and Homelessness.

<sup>4</sup> The GTAC sent council staffing recommendations to City leaders in the transition. See online [here](#).

We can note that some elements of the proposed resolution align with the GTAC's work:

- The proposed number of councilors per committee aligns with the peer cities' average of five councilors per committee.
- The proposed committee topical areas align with the GTAC's recommendation that standing committees reflect legislative priorities as distinct from executive functions.

The proposed number of council committees is on the high end of the peer cities' average of five to eight standing council committees and, according to City staff, is twice the number that current budget allocations for council staffing can support.

The proposed composition of council committees does not appear to align with the GTAC's recommendation to distribute power and workload as equally as possible across the council districts.

- Three proposed council committees do not include councilors from each district: Transportation & Infrastructure lacks District 2 representation; Arts & Economy lacks District 3 representation; and Climate, Resilience, and Land Use lacks District 4 representation.
- Districts vary in leadership roles from a low of three council committee leadership roles for District 1 (chair and vice chair of Homelessness & Housing; and chair of Labor & Workforce Development) to a high of five council committee leadership roles plus the council vice president role for District 3 (vice chair of Transportation & Infrastructure; two chairs of Climate, Resilience, and Land Use; chair of Community & Public Safety; and chair of Governance).

We are available to answer any questions you may have about the GTAC's recommendations regarding council committees.

Sincerely,

Government Transition Advisory Committee Co-Chairs Jose Gamero-Georgeson & Fred Neal



January 14, 2025

To: Council President Elana Pirtle-Guiney  
Council Vice President Tiffany Koyama Lane  
Councilors Candace Avalos, Olivia Clark, Jamie Dunphy, Mitch Green, Sameer Kanal, Angelita Morillo, Steve Novick, Dan Ryan, Loretta Smith, and Eric Zimmerman

CC: Mayor Keith Wilson

Re: Portland City Council Committee Structure and Housing Production

Dear Council President Pirtle-Guiney and Councilors,

We are writing on behalf of thousands of businesses and individuals seeking to address our region's biggest issues by building the housing, infrastructure, and jobs that make Portland livable and economically vibrant.

Over the past several months, the City of Portland has sharpened its focus on increasing housing production as a critical strategy to address our housing affordability crisis, reduce homelessness, and enhance our city and region's economic prosperity.

**However, we are deeply concerned that the proposed City Council committee structure will hamper our already too-slow progress to meet our ambitious housing supply goals and needs.**

**First, the proposed committee structure ignores the thoughtful work—and significant public input—that went into the City's service areas.** That structure positioned Planning and Sustainability, Housing, Prosper Portland, and Development Services in a united portfolio, recognizing the significant crossover amongst these bureaus, particularly as it relates to reducing unnecessary regulations, delays, and bureaucracy that deters much-needed investment in housing. That structure also recognizes the economic impact of housing and community development. It's a thoughtfully and strategically designed service area that has already produced results. We would strongly advocate that this council continues the promising work to dismantle City of Portland silos that have unequivocally contributed to our housing supply and affordability crisis.



The City also recently bifurcated the Planning and Sustainability Commission into two entities, with the re-formed Planning Commission more focused on issues related to housing and development. The proposed Council committee structure separates zoning and land use issues from housing and puts it back with climate and resiliency, a pairing we know from experience muddled both important issues.

To that end, we strongly encourage the City Council to **re-think this committee structure—or, at a minimum, commit to re-evaluating it in three to six months** to see what modifications are needed, particularly to address our housing supply crisis.

**Second, the proposed committee structure combines Homelessness and Housing, two distinctly different areas that both require a high degree of attention from our local policy makers, and does not give the critical issue of housing production the attention it desperately needs.**

We are now over a decade into Portland's officially declared housing crisis. We must work with increased urgency to address our entire housing deficit, which means both public investments in regulated affordable housing, and policies and practices that encourage meaningful investment in market-rate housing. And we cannot afford to continue giving this issue short-shrift. Portland needs an additional 120,560 units of housing by 2045 to meet the needs of our growing population, yet only a few hundred units were permitted in 2024.

While improved from an initial draft of proposed committees, the subject matter listed for this committee underscores our concern—it is focused almost entirely on shelter, homeless services, and homelessness. And to the degree the committee's subject matter is related to housing, it is focused largely on public investments in affordable housing—an important issue, but one that is distinctly different from creating the conditions Portland needs to attract capital investment and build a sufficient supply of market-rate housing at all levels. We welcome the specific attention on permitting and homeownership, but there is no mention of housing supply or production.

Given this imbalance in the committee's focus at the outset, we are extremely concerned that little time or attention will be devoted to implementing Portland's housing production strategy, and continuing to pursue additional (and more impactful) strategies to address our supply crisis.

**At a minimum, this committee needs three distinct subcommittees**, with one focused on homelessness (shelters and services), one focused on public investments and policies related to regulated affordable housing, and one focused on housing production of all types.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of how best to set up Portland's new form of government. Please also take into consideration the many things that are working well, or have promise to work well, with regards to the City's newfound attention on housing production and

supply. **Structuring housing-related committees to maintain that focus will serve as an enthusiastic acknowledgement that Portland is fully committed to building out an equitable future with abundant housing for all.**

Name or Organization	Position	Comments	Attachment	Created
7 Anonymous	Oppose	Reading the proposed appointments for those committees is pretty disturbing, when considering that the co-chair of the public safety committee is Sameer Kanal, a vowed enemy of law enforcement who ran his campaign highlighting the support and connection he was getting from Joanne Hardesty. As a publicly paid employee by the city to facilitate the Police Accountability Commission, he displayed a complete disregard for community voices that disagreed with his project. He just proposed an 8% cut encompassing the 4 public safety bureaus (including Portland Fire, which will cut the budget for Portland Street Response!!!). He can not be trusted to lead a committee impartially or fairly. He only represents the loud minority and not average tax payers who do NOT want their 911 center to take yet another 8% cut. Putting an advocate of the defund the police movement at the helm of this committee is a very poor first move for the council president. One we won't forget.	No	01/15/25 4:42 PM

Portland City Council Meeting  
Wednesday, January 15, 2025 - 6:00 p.m.  
Verbal Testimony

	Agenda Item	Name
1	2025-010	Terry Harris
2	2025-010	Dan Handelman Portland Copwatch