



2001 OMBUDSMAN REPORT

AUDITOR'S OFFICE, CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON

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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The Office of the Ombudsman serves the people of Portland, not as an advocate for individuals, but as a voice of the public interest. We help government become more transparent and, as a result, more accountable for its actions and responsive to potential improvements. We have an obligation to make ourselves accessible to the public and to let the public know of the types of issues that have been addressed on their behalf. One of the means to accomplish these objectives is the Annual Report. The Annual Report is required (PCC 3.77.170) in order to advise the Auditor and City Council of the Office's activities and the types of concerns being raised about City services. It serves as a management tool for improving public services as well as helps to evaluate the performance and value of the Office of the Ombudsman. Given our July opening, this first report will be a slightly abridged 6-month version of an Annual Report.

OFFICE OPENED JULY 1, 2001

A Message from Michael Mills, Ombudsman

When Mayor Katz entered office in 1993 she began the first ombudsman services for the citizens of Portland. She believed there was a need for the City government to provide a greater level of attention to citizen concerns. While the Mayor's ombudsman served a useful service by addressing the public's concerns and opinions, the work was more closely related to constituent services than to ombudsman investigations.

In 2000, the elected City Auditor, Gary Blackmer, proposed to create a more independent ombudsman. He believed that the ombudsman function was an essential City service to provide citizens a more neutral path to have their complaints addressed, particularly when existing avenues fail to resolve their concerns. In July 2001 the Office of the Ombudsman gained its independence and permanence within the City structure through the adoption of Code Chapter 3.77 by the City Council, Ordinance 175568. Most significant in the change was the placement of the Office of the Ombudsman within the Auditor's Office. The move has enabled the Ombudsman to functionally fit

within our commission form of government. The Ombudsman service compliments the Mission of the Auditor's Office, which is "To promote open and accountable government by providing independent and impartial reviews, public access to information, and service for City government and the public."

The Portland Ombudsman Code adopted for the new office was based primarily on the Model Ombudsman Act prepared by the United States Ombudsman Association for public sector Ombudsman, taking into consideration our City Charter provisions.

The Office of the Ombudsman has the responsibility to investigate complaints, to criticize government agencies and to recommend changes. The Ombudsman has no enforcement powers and cannot issue mandates. The Office of the Ombudsman must have a sense of the public's interest and be persuasive in presenting its recommendations; and may issue public reports when differences of opinion exist or when the issue is of interest to the greater public. There

is value in increasing the transparency of government.

It is important to remember the Ombudsman's role is not to become an advocate for the complainant or the City. The Ombudsman is to be impartial in evaluating the concern and determine if the complaint is justified or not. Based upon the results of a review, the Ombudsman may advocate for a recommendation to change an existing policy. However, if a review determines a policy is sound, the Ombudsman will support that policy.

The start-up efforts in 2001 included: crafting and redrafting the ordinance until its passage, establishing a staff of three, developing procedures, selecting a case management system and beginning to provide assistance to citizens. This year has been a time to establish trust and build relationships with the agencies under our jurisdiction and to conduct outreach to the people we serve. So far, we have met, or are in the process of meeting all our initial objectives. Outreach efforts to under-represented communities will be a priority in the coming year.

MISSION STATEMENT

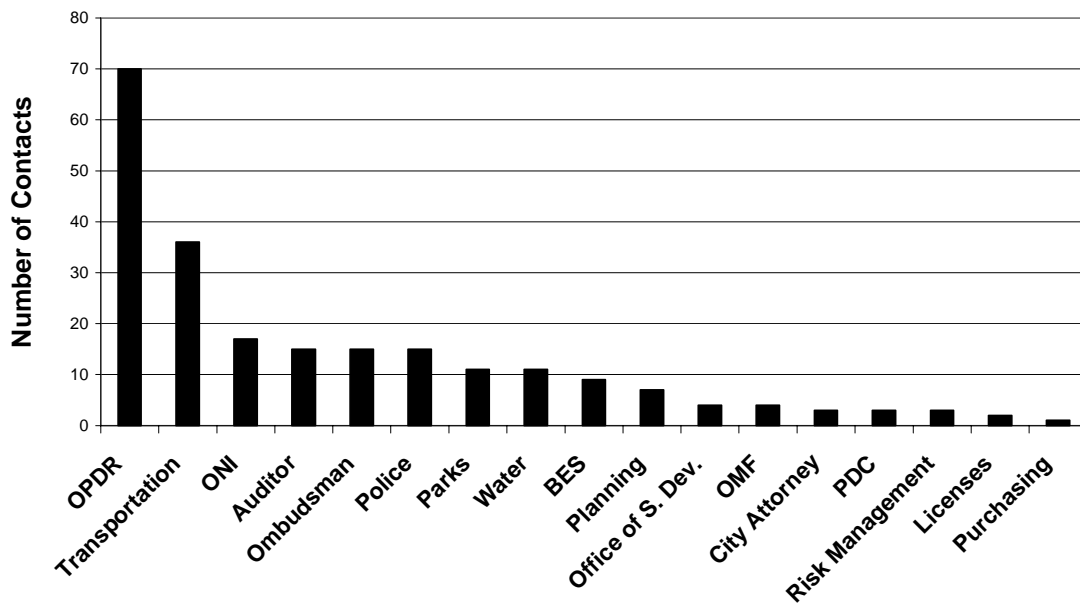
To receive complaints, conduct independent, impartial investigations of the administrative acts of City agencies and recommend appropriate changes to safeguard the rights of persons and promote higher standards of competency, efficiency and justice in the provision of City services.

Contacts by Bureau - 2001

This graph shows all contacts per bureau including complaints and information requests.

The following abbreviations were used:

- OPDR = Office of Planning and Development Review
- ONI = Office of Neighborhood Involvement
- BES = Bureau of Environmental Services
- Office of S. Dev = Office of Sustainable Development
- OMF = Office of Management and Finance
- PDC = Portland Development Commission



OMBUDSMAN CASE TYPES

Cases are initially categorized as jurisdictional or non-jurisdictional. Non-jurisdictional cases are complaints not related to actions by the City of Portland. Employment discrimination complaints, complaints about elected officials and complaints which are the subject of current litigation are outside of our jurisdiction. The categories for jurisdictional calls are as follows:

Information Requests—when a person is either seeking information or assistance but does not actually have a complaint. We can refer individuals to resources to obtain information or assistance in pursuing their concerns.

Refer and Monitor—when a complainant has not first contacted the appropriate City staff who might be able to resolve an issue. There is often good reason to monitor the response to insure the referral was appropriate and the matter was addressed. The Office of the Ombudsman may make a referral to a particular staff person or bureau with a request that they advise us of the outcome.

Assist—in the many cases, we provide assistance to the complainant either through research or communication with City staff without making a positive or negative finding on their complaint.

Investigations—due to the complexity of the case, or the policy implications, investigation is necessary. We will make a finding of Sustained, Partially Sustained, or Not Sustained. Public summaries may be issued when the public interest is best served by so doing. In some cases rather than doing the investigation ourselves, we may suggest that further investigation be done by bureau management internally or conducted through an independent group such as Audit Services.

Discontinued—some cases are discontinued after they have been opened, for example, in situations where the complainant does not stay in contact with our office or does not provide the necessary information.

Declined by Ombudsman—some complaints about City offices and bureaus are declined for investigation for reasons such as being untimely filed, an investigation is beyond the Office resources, or if the complaint is made in bad faith.

TWO SIDES OF ONE CASE

**“I WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR
‘BEING THERE’ ON THIS...”**
DN (Citizen Complainant)

**“I APPRECIATE YOUR HELP AND
KIND WORDS. THANKS”**
BC (Agency Respondent)

HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT

The Office of the Ombudsman receives complaints by mail, telephone, fax, e-mail and in person. Our staff is available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. If the complainant has not yet tried to deal directly with the relevant bureau, we recommend they first seek help from the bureau staff. Most often, the bureau will be able to help more quickly than the Office of the Ombudsman. If the person is not sure which bureau to call, they can call us or the Information and Referral Line, (503) 823-4000. If the complainant cannot resolve the issue with the bureau, they should then contact the Office of the Ombudsman.

When someone contacts the Office of the Ombudsman, they work with a designated staff person who will follow through with the case by gathering information and discussing the situation with them. The staff person may ask questions to clarify exactly what happened. It is helpful if the complainant can provide as many details as possible, such as the names of any staff they have contacted, dates of the events in question, options they have already tried, and copies of any documents or correspondence.

The staff person will conduct additional research and speak with the City officials involved to get a more complete overview of the situation, as well as solutions that might be available. When the staff person has gathered all the relevant information, and has a complete understanding of the situation, they will contact the complainant as to their findings and possible resolutions. When warranted, the Office of the Ombudsman will make a recommendation to a bureau.

How to contact us:

Phone: (503) 823-0144
Fax: (503) 823-3530
E-mail: ombudsman@ci.portland.or.us
Website: www.ci.portland.or.us/auditor/ombudsman
Address: 1221 SW 4th Avenue, Room 320
Portland, OR. 97204

Our office is located on the third floor of City Hall, which is downtown between SW 4th and SW 5th Avenues and SW Madison and SW Jefferson Streets.

CAN WE TALK?

We would like to introduce ourselves to your organization or group. We are available to give talks about our services, the kinds of complaints and problems we deal with, or any specific subject in which your group or organization might be interested. We also have copies of our brochures and reports available. Please contact us using the information listed above.

A Quick “How To” Guide for dealing with City Bureaus

Write it down

Whether you are seeking service or filing a complaint, it’s a good idea to keep records of the contact you have with a bureau. Try to get the names of the staff people with whom you speak and be sure to include the date of your conversation. Keep copies of any documents you get from, or give to, the bureau. A chronological sequence of contacts and dates is helpful in explaining your problem to the bureau.

Ask questions

Some good questions to ask include:

Why was my request denied?
What law or policy applies?

Was the law or policy applied consistently?
What appeal process (if any) is available?

Persistence and clarity can get you what you need.

Before you contact a bureau, it’s smart to decide exactly what the problem is and what remedy you are seeking. Pleasantly state the issue and what you want. Persist. Ask if a supervisor is available with whom you may speak.

Pleasantness makes a big difference

Public employees, like most of us, respond favorably when a positive and courteous approach is used.

2001 City Cases and Information Calls

Agency	Info Request	Refer and Monitor	Assisted	Sustained	Partially Sustained	Not Sustained	Discontinued by Complainant	Declined by Ombudsman	Pending Cases	Total Cases	Total Contacts
Auditor	13		1	1					2	15	
Environmental Svc.	2		6				1		7	9	
City Attorney	3								0	3	
Licenses			2						2	2	
Mgmt. & Finance	2							2	2	4	
Sustainable Dev.	1	1	2						3	4	
Ombudsman	15								0	15	
Neighborhood Invol.	12	2	1	1			1		5	17	
Plan. & Develop. Rev	23	3	12	1	3	3	3	22	47	70	
Parks	4		4	2			1		7	11	
Ptld. Develop. Comm	2					1			1	3	
Planning	3	2		1	1				4	7	
Police	13		1					1	2	15	
Purchasing							1		1	1	
Risk Management			1		2				3	3	
Transportation	11	1	15		5	1		3	25	36	
Water	3	1	3	1	1			2	8	11	
Total	107	10	48	1	6	12	5	7	30	119	226

SIX MONTH REVIEW

Since opening July 1, 2001, we tracked all requests for assistance in order to break down our contacts by office or bureau and by case type. During the first six months we took 152 information requests. Due to the fact some contacts required referrals to several entities, we made 107 referrals to City bureaus and 103 referrals to other agencies, for a total of 210 referrals.

Some of the cases attributed to a particular office or bureau were not complaints about bureau staff but rather complaints about something in the community within the realm of that office. For example, two cases regarding complaints about criminal activity in neighborhoods were referred to ONI crime-prevention specialists. They were not complaints about ONI but rather situations where the crime-prevention specialists are the most appropriate people to try to help the individual. In some cases an individual's complaint is really about a business or a neighbor but he or she wants the City to help. When there is a dispute between neighbors we often refer the complainant to the Neighborhood Mediation Center where differences can often be resolved constructively.

WHAT HAVE WE HEARD ABOUT?

There are three entities: the Portland Development Commission (PDC), the Police and the Purchasing Department with only one closed case. The Auditor's Office and the Bureau of Licenses each had two closed cases in our first six-month period. There were three closed complaints regarding issues related to Risk Management and the Office of Sustainable Development. Planning had four and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) had five. The Water Bureau had six and both the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) and Parks had seven closed cases. Over half of our closed cases concerned two City offices: the Office of Transportation and the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR). OPDR had 25 closed cases. Transportation had 22 closed cases.

As of December 31, 2001 we had 30 open cases still pending. One had to do with the Police Bureau. There were two cases related each to the Office of Management and Finance and the Water Bureau. There were three pending Transportation cases. At the end of 2001 there were 22 cases related to OPDR pending.

WORKING WITH OMBUDSMAN OVERSIGHT

Special recognition goes to the Office of Transportation. Towing vehicles was the source of most of their complaints, but there were various street and sidewalk issues that came to our attention as well. Balancing the attractiveness of sidewalk dining and pedestrian sidewalk access in several popular neighborhoods was among the issues. The staff members we contacted were prompt and helpful in their responses to our inquiries. In five cases we found that the complaints were not sustained, primarily on the basis of Transportation's explanations and documentation of their policies. In 15 cases we were able to provide some type of assistance in coordination with Transportation. Overall, the Office of Transportation proved to be open to feedback from our office and is generally able to explain the basis of their decision making. We valued the Maintenance Bureau field day and were impressed with their work with Dignity Village.

FACING CHALLENGES

Our working relationship with the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR) has been the most challenging. In particular, the enforcement branches, as opposed to the permitting side, are where most concerns have arisen. The nature of their regulatory and enforcement functions makes the bureau the natural lightning rod for complaints. That in itself is a reflection of the complexity of their responsibilities rather than a reflection on their employees. That being said, this bureau bears a great responsibility to respond to concerns from those with complaints concerning enforcement and regulation.

The system for addressing complaints in a timely manner often proved inadequate by the bureau's standards as well as ours. The role of the Ombudsman, particularly the responsibility to investigate rather than simply act as a conduit of information, remained unclear during this period. Contact with bureau staff directly involved with the complaints proved difficult. Investigations without contact with the staff involved have proven ineffectual from both an efficiency and an accuracy standpoint. The January issuance of a public report on one case where extensive delays occurred and where recommendations were not accepted, heightened awareness of the need to improve how complaints were addressed. Since the report, the bureau has been working closely with the Office of the Ombudsman to improve the complaint systems and review enforcement policies and procedures.

"I felt that there was someone who cared enough to listen to my concern."

Comment from satisfaction survey

SELECTED CASE STORIES

TRAFFIC CALMING DENIAL AFFIRMED

*Review confirms denial of improvements
was based on objective criteria*

A man complained that NE Wasco Street should have been included in the NE Peerless/Hassalo traffic calming project completed in 1998. He was concerned about danger to children and pets on the street from speeding cars. He felt the traffic issues on NE Wasco were similar to those of NE Multnomah, which was included in the project.

Upon review of the project documentation, and a briefing by the Office of Transportation staff person who worked on the project, the Deputy Ombudsman concluded that the decision to undertake traffic calming measures on NE Multnomah and not on NE Wasco was justified. The traffic on NE Wasco was not part of the traffic flowing between NE 33rd and NE 39th that the project was intended to address. Further, measurements taken after the project was completed did not show that the calming measures on NE Multnomah and NE Hassalo created an increase in traffic on NE Wasco.

The complainant was informed of this finding. Although some vehicles travel above the speed limit it is unlikely that a new calming project would be approved for NE Wasco anytime in the near future due to budget constraints. The complainant was informed of this and was given information about the ability of neighborhoods to purchase their own speed bumps.

In at least two other cases regarding transportation projects, the Ombudsman found that bureau staff did evaluate and respond to a request for service, but that the project did not meet the established threshold to qualify for a commitment of resources. Budget issues seem to underlie these types of complaints and the investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman does not make the complainant less frustrated.

RENOVATION WAIVER GRANTED FORMER STORE

*Zoning does not always provide clear path
to changing use*

In 1994, a woman and her husband bought an old vacant house in the Overlook neighborhood that had been converted into a store which went out of business. They intended to renovate the property and use it as their residence. They moved in in 1995. Their Realtor told them when they purchased the house that the property was zoned residential. They did not realize that a change of occupancy permit was required to convert the use of building from commercial to residential.

They commenced remodeling the property, with the husband acting as the general contractor for the job. Five years later, in July, 2000, after a Fire Marshall inspection, they received a notice of violation from the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR) for illegally occupying a commercial building. The fine for failing to comply with the inspector's orders

within 30 days was set at the commercial rate of \$220/month rising to \$440/month after six months. In November, 2000, the woman sought an administrative review of the enforcement fees, specifically the fact that they were being charged the higher commercial rate. Their request was denied as untimely and there was a finding that no errors were made. It was stated that commercial properties could not qualify for renovation waivers. It does not appear that there were life-safety issues at stake.

After six months, they paid the fines, in conjunction with getting a new mortgage, but new fines continued to be added at the rate of \$440 per month because there was more remodeling to do. In May, 2001 the husband was diagnosed with cancer. The side effects from the treatment made him so ill that he was unable to continue his work supervising the renovation work.

Toward the end of July, 2001, the woman applied again to Neighborhood Inspections for an administrative review and a waiver of the enforcement fees. She also contacted the Office of the Ombudsman. We informed both OPDR and Commissioner Hales of her complaint that the enforcement fees were too high and that she had problems communicating with the bureau. The Director's Office of OPDR was in the process of conducting a review of the case to determine if a residential waiver was an option. On August 15, 2001 an administrative assistant who was not aware that the Director's Office was looking into the matter sent a letter again denying the woman's request for review and a waiver of fees. Two weeks later, on August 31, the Director's Office announced a decision that since the property was zoned residential and was being used as a residence, the fines could be billed at the residential rate, and that the couple could qualify for a residential renovation waiver. They received a refund of a portion of the fines they had paid.

HEARING OFFICER CANCELS FEES

*Fees resulting from code enforcement
cancelled by Hearings Officer*

A man called our office regarding a lien that was placed on his property. A Notice of Violation was issued by the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR) in response to a complaint that a homeless man was sleeping in a car in the man's driveway. The man had indeed allowed a homeless friend to sleep in his car. He would have let him sleep in the house if he would agree to not drink, but the friend opted to keep drinking and sleep in the car. The Notice stated that the man had 30 days to correct the violation or else incur penalties. There was a number to call for an inspection once the violation was corrected. In response to the Notice of Violation the man told his friend that he could no longer sleep in the car. About a week before the deadline, the man called OPDR to request an inspection. He was told the inspector was not in, but he left a message and made a written note of the day and the name of the person to whom he spoke. The man considered the matter resolved until he received a bill from the assessment and liens division for a code enforcement fee. He called

OPDR to explain that he had in fact cured the violation and called for an inspection. He was told that they had no record of his call. The man investigated the possibility of obtaining records of his outgoing calls from the phone company but found that the cost was too high. He was given an Administrative Review Form which he submitted. His request for an administrative review was denied. The denial mentioned the option to appeal the denial to the Code Hearing Officer without an explanation of the details. He then called our office. We suggested that he quickly seek a hearing with the Code Hearing Officer since there is normally a 10-day time limit. He did and provided evidence that his friend vacated the car (having the friend testify) and the notation of his call to the inspector. The Hearing Officer overturned the fine. We closed the case without receiving a response to the complaint from OPDR.

FINDING THE SOURCE

*Persistence aids City in identifying leaky
fire hydrant*

A man called on a Wednesday to report a leak of fresh water running into the street for several months from a hole in the curb. He could tell that it was not rain water and assumed that it was related to a nearby fire hydrant. He said that had tried to find someone in the City to respond but didn't know whether to contact the Fire Department, the Water Bureau or Street Maintenance. We were referred to the appropriate person at the Water Bureau by Commissioner Sten's office. A crew investigated that same day. They found a leaking valve and turned it off. Unfortunately Thursday evening the man saw the water was running again. On Friday the man provided the Office of the Ombudsman with more specific information about the location of the leak which was passed on to the Water Bureau. A crew went out again that day and found the hydrant leak. An inspection revealed that the hydrant was broken. The Water Bureau repaired the hydrant and thanked the man for his persistence.

(Case Stories continued on next page)

OMBUDSMAN, THE WORD

This Office uses the original Swedish word Ombudsman in order to conform to the national and international standards for a governmental ombudsman. "Ombudsman" is a gender-neutral term, recognized throughout the world by women and men who hold the office.

HOW WE'RE DOING

As the Office of the Ombudsman was completing its first six months in operation, we conducted a survey to find out what people thought of our services, and what changes or improvements might be helpful. A questionnaire, with space for additional comments, was prepared and mailed to 62 people. These people had previously filed complaints with the Office of the Ombudsman, their complaints had been researched and were now closed. The surveys were anonymous, so respondents could feel free to express themselves. Of those surveys sent, we received 26 replies, and three surveys were returned as undeliverable. The pie charts below summarize the responses we received.

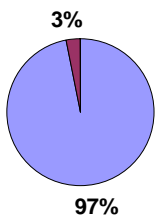
Three respondents gave us very low rankings for every question. Two of these people had voluntarily identified themselves on the survey form. We contacted them directly to clarify their responses and comments. These complainants indicated they were not specifically dissatisfied with the service of the Office of the Ombudsman, but were dissatisfied that the result they sought was not obtained.

Several survey respondents also made suggestions as to how to improve our service. Some thought we should better publicize our office so people had an easier time finding it. Another suggested doing more outreach to the community. Increasing our visibility and access to our services is a valid concern, one we are working to improve upon.

“Every contact with this office was professional, courteous, knowledgeable and helpful.”

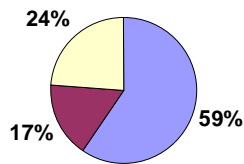
Comment from satisfaction survey

Were you treated courteously?



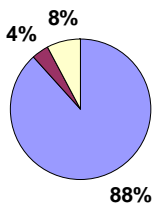
■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neither/Don't Know

Was the Ombudsman's staff knowledgeable?



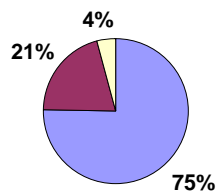
■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neither/Don't Know

Did Ombudsman staff respond in a timely manner?



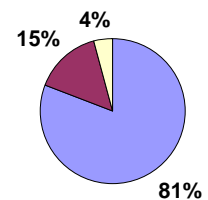
■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neither/Don't Know

Was the information and/or referral useful?



■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neither/Don't Know

How would you rate the service you received?



■ Satisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neither/Don't Know

WITH OUR THANKS

The Office of the Ombudsman would not have reached a place of permanence within the City structure were it not for Auditor Gary Blackmer championing the cause and the support he received from Mayor Vera Katz, and Commissioners Jim Francesconi, Charlie Hales, Dan Saltzman and Erik Sten. The support of the City's elected officials clearly demonstrates a commitment to responsive government. The staff of the Auditor's Office has also been of immeasurable assistance in the office getting off the ground in 2001. Robert Cowan's assistance in publishing this report was awesome.

Many Ombudsman in the profession have assisted our office during our formation year. Special recognition goes out to those who offered exceptional advice or assistance along the way. They are:
Duncan Fowler, Ombudsman, King County Office of Citizen Complaints (Washington)
Bill Angrick, Ombudsman, Citizens' Aide/Ombudsman Office, State of Iowa
Ruth Cooperidder, Deputy and Legal Counsel, Citizens' Aide/Ombudsman Office, State of Iowa
Patrick Shannahan, Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman/Citizens' Aide, State of Arizona
Dean Gotterher, International Consultant
Robin Matsunaga, Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman, State of Hawaii
The United States Ombudsman Association

THE ELUSIVE TRASH CAN

Coordination and persistence results in installation of trash receptacle to curb garbage

The owner of a relatively new medical practice at North Lombard and North Fenwick called seeking assistance in his quest for a trash receptacle at the Tri-Met bus stop where discarded garbage had become a daily problem. He was attempting to help beautify the area, and was spending time picking up garbage since there was no receptacle. Despite his numerous attempts with Tri-Met to address this bus stop, he said he had no success. At one time, he was advised that if the receptacle were installed, that he would have to assume liability for it.

Since the Ombudsman Office has no jurisdiction over Tri-Met, we worked with the North Portland Neighborhood Services office (part of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement) to seek their help in addressing the need with Tri-Met. They agreed to work on the issue, and after several months, a trash receptacle was installed which improved the area.

SECOND SINK MAKES WAVES

Bureau agrees to develop alternative to covenant that will not unduly restrict property rights

A homeowner complained about a requirement of the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR) being added to his permit application to construct an addition to his single family home. His application was filed in March, 2001. He received a preliminary Life Safety Checksheet recheck the same month and completed the work required. In August he received Life Safety Recheck #2, adding a new requirement. The Recheck #2 stated, "A second sink requirement agreement is required for the new bar sink. Please sign the enclosed covenant, have it recorded with County Records and return a copy of the recorded covenant to Document Services." The intent of the covenant was to prevent the unauthorized conversion of the single family dwelling into a two family dwelling now that plumbing was present that could facilitate a second dwelling unit.

His objection to the covenant requirement was that it would unfairly limit the lawful use of his property and that requiring it was delaying his contractor from continuing with the project as designed and approved. Even though the property was developed with a single family home, it was

in an R-2.5 zone that allows for a second independent dwelling unit. All that is required is a "Change of Occupancy" review and approval. The Office of the Ombudsman found the complaint justified. The Office of Planning and Development Review was also unhappy with the second sink agreements and covenants, and removed the requirement from the permit for this property.

The Office of the Ombudsman recommended the bureau re-evaluate the need for the covenant in other than single family zones. The bureau agreed to work on the issue. A work group of supervisors (OPDR Planning, Building Inspection, Housing, Code Compliance and Plan Review) developed a draft alternate to the Second Sink Agreement. One of the OPDR Planning Team Leaders has been "road testing" the approach on cases as they come in. They plan to review the "road test results" in March or April, and expect that several months after that they could replace the Second Sink Agreements with the "Limited Use" approach. The Office of the Ombudsman found the bureau to be responsive in addressing this complaint and in initiating action to improve the policy.

ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The current annual budget for the Office of the Ombudsman is \$235,000. The majority of the budget supports the three program staff. Michael P. Mills, Ombudsman, was the first to assume such a role for the City under an executive model. He served 6 ½ years in the office of Mayor Vera Katz. He previously served 8 years as a legislative Ombudsman for the Municipality of Anchorage. Becky Chiao is Deputy Ombudsman. She graduated from Reed College before obtaining a Law Degree from City University of New York Law School, Queens College. She practiced law at a project of the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, focusing on the rights of immigrants. Margaret "Peg" Genne is Assistant Ombudsman. Peg has extensive knowledge of the City of Portland based on her 6 years working in the Office of Neighborhood Involvement. She has also worked in title insurance and in social services, and has a Law Degree.

The Ombudsman community is still a small one, affording limited but focused training opportunities for staff development. Two of three members of the staff are members of the United States Ombudsman Association and attended the Annual Training Conference in the Fall of 2001. Staff subscribes to the USOA listserve that provides evaluation opportunities of various current issues. We also participate in periodic meetings of ombudsman from the Northwest region and hold an individual membership with the International Ombudsman Institute.

The office staff independently maintains affiliations with the Association of Conflict Resolution (formally SPIDR), the Oregon Mediation Association, the Oregon Dispute Resolution Commission Advisory Committee, the Oregon State Bar, and the National Lawyers Guild.

A WORD FROM THE AUDITOR

The Office of the Ombudsman is another way to hold Portland government accountable. Historically, the independently elected auditor has been the watchdog over City money but with the addition of the Office of the Ombudsman, we are also ensuring that the City treats people fairly.

An office that reviews complaints in an objective manner can improve public satisfaction with City services, and make recommendations to prevent similar complaints in the future. The Office of the Ombudsman is an important tool for tuning up the machinery of Portland government and I am convinced it will have a lasting positive influence on our public services.

Michael Mills, Becky Chiao, and Peg Genne should be extremely proud with the progress and results from the work they have already accomplished.

Gary Blackmer, Portland City Auditor

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Passing the Ombudsman Ordinance, creating and filling staff positions, drafting policies and procedures and installing a case management system were major milestones for the new office. As we look to the future, outreach, increased knowledge about City functions and strong working relationships with bureau staff are key areas of focus.

A critical need is to continue outreach efforts to make a broader range of community members aware of our services. In 2001, our outreach included 16 meetings with community organizations, meetings with all city bureaus under the office's jurisdiction and development of a brochure and website. Our plans for 2002 include the use of this report as an outreach tool and expanded efforts to reach under-represented or disenfranchised members of our community.

The response to our survey question "Was the Ombudsman's staff knowledgeable" received only a 59% satisfaction rating. Becoming more knowledgeable about City operations is a goal. We will seek out information about common areas of concern, attend available trainings and continue to invite knowledgeable bureau staff to attend our monthly brown bag lunches.

We are appreciative of the responses we received to our survey and plan to conduct surveys on a regular basis to monitor our performance and gather suggestions on ways to improve our services. Of course feedback at any time is welcome. We trust that in the coming year by responding to public concerns and working with City staff we will become increasingly effective in reviewing and resolving complaints.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Information about our office, including the City Ombudsman Code, a printable brochure and current news and updates can be found at:

www.ci.portland.or.us/auditor/ombudsman

For information about the Public Sector Ombudsman, go to:

www.usombudsman.org