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## Form of Government Glossary

Information



What is a city administrator? What is a council committee? Learn more about the City of Portland's future form of government with these definitions for key roles and processes.

### Councilor / Council/ Legislative Council

Councilors are elected to be the city's legislators, or law makers. Together, councilors constitute the legislative body known as city council that is given the authority to make local laws. A few of Portland's 2025 city council roles include creating bureaus and departments, adopting city codes, setting salaries, approving the city's budget, and applying quasi-judicial authority to laws and policies.

### Mayor / Executive Mayor

The mayor is elected to be the chief executive officer of the city and is responsible for managing all of the city's administrative functions. They have executive and administrative power to execute the laws adopted by city council, to administer the bureaus, employees, and facilities of the city, and to ensure that the city is using budgeted funds appropriately. Starting in 2025, Portland's mayor will propose the budget for city council

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consideration and also has the power to adopt administrative rules (Portland Policy Documents) to manage the activities and programs of the city.

## **City Administrator**

A non-elected professional who serves under the mayor and helps to supervise, monitor, and coordinate the activities and functions of the city. They typically serve as a conduit between the mayor, city council, and city staff. Starting in 2025, Portland's city administrator will develop the city budget under the direction of the mayor.

## **Auditor**

An elected official responsible for providing independent and impartial audits of city functions. In Portland, they are also responsible for maintaining the city's archives and records management, working with the state of Oregon, Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington Counties to oversee City elections, certify candidates and measures to the ballot, and certify election results. Additionally, under the Portland Auditor's supervision is city's campaign finance and lobbying regulations team, the city's Ombudsman, and the Council Clerk.

## **Council Clerk**

A non-elected professional who administers City Council business, including publishing city council agendas and maintaining the public record of city council meetings. In Portland, they report to the Auditor and supervise a team that maintains the central repository for council contracts, City Code and Charter, and Portland Policy Documents.

## **Deputy City Administrator**

A non-elected professional who reports to the City Administrator. In Portland, the six Deputy City Administrators are each responsible for leading a service area made up of bureaus and offices with similar or related programs. The Deputy City Administrators will be expected to work as a leadership team to coordinate the work of the city.

## **Assistant City Administrator**

A non-elected professional who reports to the City Administrator. In Portland, the Assistant City Administrator will be responsible for managing the office of the City Administrator and directly overseeing the work of several key offices whose work spans across multiple city service areas.

## **Council President / Council Vice President**

A councilor elected by a vote of the other councilors to lead council. The election of the council president and vice president must occur at the first council meeting of each year. Portland's council president, and in their absence the vice president, will preside over council meetings, recommends what agenda items are referred to a committee or the full council, assigns seats in council chambers, sets limits for public testimony at meetings, and votes last on any item before council. In accordance with Portland City Code, the council president and vice president cannot be from the same district.

## **Legislation / Legislative**

The preparation and enactment of laws by a legislative body through its lawmaking process. The legislative process includes proposing, evaluating, amending, and voting on proposed laws. In Portland, legislation comes in three general forms: ordinance, resolution, and report. Ordinances generally establish laws or rules of the City. Resolutions generally express the will, opinion, or intent of the council and can help to clarify or establish procedures, processes, or administrative actions. Reports are formal communication from City staff or advisory bodies to Council, which provides information, transmits other documents, or makes recommendations.

## **Policy**

Policy is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions. Policy decisions are frequently reflected in resource allocations through the City budget.

## **Quasi-Judicial**

A proceeding or decision-making process conducted by officials based on record of evidence and facts presented. While it is similar to a court proceeding, the decision makers are administrative officials, not law judges. Quasi-judicial action may be appealed to a court of law.

## **City Charter**

The guiding document that establishes the government system and structure of the city. It defines how the government is set up, how city leaders are elected, and the roles and responsibilities of those leaders. The City Charter functions as the city's constitution – it creates the city as a legal entity, authorizes city powers, and outlines the broad basic fundamentals of city government. Portland's city charter can be amended ONLY by a vote of the people. The Portland City Charter requires that every 10 years (at minimum), the Council convenes a Charter review commission to review and recommend amendments to the Charter.

## **City Code**

The collection of laws adopted by City Council. It clarifies and provides additional context to the roles and responsibilities defined in city charter. City Code include things like building, plumbing, fire or land use regulations, rules for taxes or licenses, or descriptions of what duties a particular bureau may have. Portland's city code can be approved or amended by the city council.

## **Portland Policy Documents (aka Administrative Policies)**

Contains the collection of internal policies, procedures, and practices of city operations. Portland Policy Documents can be approved or amended by the mayor, auditor, or the city council.

## **Council Committee**

Committees are small groups of city councilors who develop and maintain a deeper level of knowledge on specific topics in order to enhance communication between city council, staff, and the public, explore new policy recommendations, and develop recommendations for the full Council.

## **Scheduling Calendar**

The scheduling calendar, also known as the introduction calendar or the referral calendar, outlines the council president's recommendations for whether an agenda item will be reviewed by a committee (or committees) or the full council. This calendar will be included with all council agendas and approved by council when they vote to approve or amend the meeting agenda.

## **Types of Council Meetings**

### **Regular Meetings**

The ordinary routine meeting of the full city council. In Portland, council is required to hold regular meetings at least twice per month, with one of those meetings held in the evening. However, they can meet as often as they deem necessary.

### **Special Meeting**

A meeting that is called outside of the regular schedule would be a "special meeting." State regulation, council procedures and/or bylaws may specify who may call a "special meeting" and how much notice is required. In Portland, special meetings may be called by written request of seven councilors or the mayor plus six councilors and the meeting notice must be posted by the auditor at least 24 hours before the meeting.

## **Executive Session**

A term customarily used to describe a secret or closed meeting. This type of meeting is open only to council members and, if desired, invited staff or guests. There are times in any organization when executive session is appropriate and necessary. Your state will likely limit what actions can be taken. Members are prohibited from disclosing the content of executive session. Minutes from executive sessions, if any, are approved during executive session and are kept separate from the minutes of regular sessions.

## **Work Sessions**

Many councils schedule “work sessions” or “study sessions,” that provide the opportunity to explore problems or proposed legislation in greater depth, with staff input. Actions may not be taken at a work session, and usually public comment is not allowed.

## **Committee of the Whole**

This rather strange term is used when a council or other body is meeting “as a committee” – usually, it is a type of study or work session. The whole group is considered to be a committee, which allows for greater informality, and sometimes a more conversational style of discussion. Final decisions may not be made during a meeting of the Committee of the Whole.

## **Emergency Meetings**

State regulations may allow for emergency meetings, which can be called without observing the usual notice requirements. Sometimes fewer than usual members are present at an emergency meeting. If such is the case, it may be required that actions taken at an emergency meeting be “ratified” (approved) by the whole body at its next regular session – and if such approval were not given, the people who took the action would be individually liable for any ill consequences of their action. In Portland, emergency meetings may be called by the council president, council vice president, any four councilors or the mayor but only under specific circumstances such as a disaster or imminent disaster, war or hostile enemy action, or an emergency declaration by the Governor or President of the United States.

## **Public hearings**

Public hearings are held for the purpose of obtaining input from the public. They differ from the types of meetings listed above in that the purpose is to hear from citizens and residents, not to act. Public hearings are subject to the requirements of the state and Portland’s city code.