



CITY OF

PORTLAND, OREGON

OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

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Portland City Council

Re: Workgroup Report on Police Towing Policies and Practices

During a period of a year and a half, The Citizen Review Committee (CRC) Tow Policy Workgroup held public hearings on Portland Police Bureau tow policies and procedures and had an opportunity to review complaints on police tows received by the Independent Police Review. The Workgroup worked with the Independent Police Review Division to prepare the attached report and recommendations.

During our process the workgroup identified several concerns which, though not specific to police towing policies and practices, we felt should be addressed either by city government or the Portland Police Bureau:

Police Bureau Policy Numbering – We observed that the numbering system for PPB policies is confusing. More than one policy or procedure may be listed under one policy number. For example: Directive 630.60 Vehicle Disposition contains 19 distinct policies. Quickly identifying a single policy is impossible and page numbering differs between the printed policy manual and the directives available on-line. We would recommend that PPB develop a consistent, user-friendly method of numbering directives.

Predatory Tow Practices – Many of the citizens testifying before our workgroup were troubled and upset about predatory practices by tow companies and operators. These predatory practices were almost always committed during private tows over which the police bureau has no control. Responsibility for addressing these concerns rests with the City Council. We would recommend that the Council hold tow operators to the same standards and requirements for private tows as for city requested tows.

Sliding Scale – The workgroup also heard concerns that the largest burden for tow costs is borne by those least able to afford it. Although not a recommendation in this report, City Council or the Police Bureau may want to consider whether a sliding scale based on the value of the impounded vehicle would be appropriate for PPB towing fees.

Overall, the workgroup is pleased that Chief Sizer has accepted most of our recommendations, but we are disappointed that she had not accepted our recommendation to analyze the use of vehicle impounds to determine any patterns of impounds that may be based on economic status, race, neighborhoods or officers involved. A vehicle impound is a powerful and useful tool for police officers, but as with any tool, there may be a possibility of abuse. Monitoring of police tows is an essential component of police management and we would hope that Chief Sizer would reconsider her rejection of this recommendation.

We would like to thank IPR Director Stevens and her staff for their invaluable assistance in this project. Without it, we could not have completed our work.

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