

Portland's new ombudsman will enter political mix as landscape shifts: Portland City Hall roundup

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Hall on reforms to the citizen review of police.



By Beth Slovic, The Oregonian



Faith Cathcart / The Oregonian City Auditor LaVonne Griffin-Valade speaks during a meeting at City

Portland's elected auditor has hired a new city ombudsman:
Margie Sollinger, a 30-year-old visiting associate
professor of law at Georgetown University who grew up in Corvallis.

Sollinger, who was admitted to the Oregon State Bar in November 2006, will start work Jan. 3 and will earn about \$88,000 a year.

She'll enter Portland City Hall as the city prepares for an historic 2012 election in which three out of five seats on the Portland City Council could shift, ushering in huge change. And while the city ombudsman -- who responds to citizens' complaints about city agencies and employees, not elected leaders -- generally observes Portland's political process from a remove, the position is not

entirely apolitical. In 2008, for example, **the former ombudsman launched an investigation of Portland's former parking manager**, **Ellis McCoy**. Federal authorities then picked up the trail, raiding McCoy's city office and Hillsboro home as part of **their pending probe**.

In May, the Portland City Council approved a significant switch, **making the city ombudsman an at-will position** rather than a civil-service one. That means it's easier for the city's auditor to both hire and fire the ombudsman now.

Here's the auditor's announcement, which was emailed to the Portland City Council on Tuesday:

I am pleased to share the news that after a fairly intense recruitment and interview period, Margie Sollinger accepted my offer to become the next City Ombudsman. She will join the Auditor's Office on January 3, 2012, giving her time to complete her commitment to Georgetown University in Washington DC and transition to Portland.

Margie is currently a visiting Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law Center's Institute for Public Representation. She also served as a teaching fellow at the Institute before being hired as a visiting Professor. Prior to that, she worked as a staff attorney for Bread in the City in Washington DC, where she provided direct civil legal services to a diverse group of low and no-income clients, carried out fact finding investigations, and provided dispute resolution and mediation for clients.

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Margie is a native Oregonian and grew up in Corvallis. She received her BA from Carleton College and her JD from the University of Minnesota Law School. She was a law intern for the Better Government Association, a state watchdog group in Chicago IL, and she also interned with the Pine State Legal Assistance Program in Bangor ME. She served as Judicial Clerk for Maine Supreme Court Judge Warren Silver for a year before being hired at Bread in the City.

Margie brings new insights and experience to the role of the City Ombudsman, and she will make a great addition to my office and the City. I look forward to introducing you to her in early January.

Regards,

LaVonne Griffin-Valade

City Auditor

Michael Mills, the former ombudsman, resigned from the post in August, leaving the city for a job at Portland State University's Oregon Consensus.

In one other bit of news about comings and goings, neither Commissioner Randy Leonard's chief of staff, Ty Kovatch, nor Portland Development Commission Deputy Director Keith Witcosky is **leaving Portland to be Bend's assistant city manager**. Kovatch this week said Bend officials let him and the other finalists know that the city had decided not to fill the position.

Reading:

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Willamette Week: Mike Reese asks to be included in labor council forum for mayoral candidates

The Oregonian: Police say crimes has increased downtown near Occupy Portland

The Oregonian: Portland considers extension on dedicated affordable housing money

-- Beth Slovic

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