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Saltzman: 'Stubborn is a great word'

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When I tracked down city Commissioner Randy Leonard on Monday morning, he was on Fifth Avenue in New York City, contemplating the Empire State Building, mixing it up with Batman in Times Square ("Which one? The real one!") and escorting Merritt Paulson to a meeting with Major League Soccer officials.

That hyperactivity and commitment to be at the center of things is precisely why Leonard would have been a memorable police commissioner . . . and arguably why he didn't get the job.

Whoever picked the new commissioner -- Mayor-elect Sam Adams or Chief Rosie Sizer - - the job went to a guy who is Leonard's polar opposite in personality, visibility and volatility.

Dan Saltzman is the most amiable member of the council and the least quotable. "He is not flashy, needless to say," Adams noted Monday, several hours after Saltzman's selection was announced. "He's not prone to getting into public arguments. He's not overly concerned about who gets the credit. But when Dan sets his mind to a goal, he is quietly unstoppable."

Leonard prefers "stubborn" -- "Dan is not a person anyone can roll" -- and Saltzman agreed that's one personality trait they have in common: "Stubborn is a great word. I will pursue my convictions about what's right and wrong. Sometimes that depends on what your gut tells you, and I'm not afraid to check my gut for a reaction."

Leonard spent most of the summer pursuing his conviction that the Portland Police Bureau needed a drastic overhaul, conclusions contained in a 16-page report that criticized, among other things, the bureau's hiring process. Leonard insists the bureau refuses to fill 85 funded positions, forcing its officers to work ridiculous hours and bill the city for scandalous amounts of overtime.

"There is internal resistance anytime you try to streamline the process," Leonard said. "The bureau is years behind the state of the art on hiring, budgeting and labor management. That leads to a dysfunctional relationship with the men and women working on the street. They don't believe management cares about them."

Before Leonard could implement changes, Sizer announced she wouldn't work with him, knowing Adams could not afford the headache of replacing her. Because Adams has no

interest in being police commissioner -- the first mayor since Neil Goldschmidt to conclude his energy is better directed elsewhere -- Saltzman was his only recourse.

Saltzman did not volunteer: "My position has always been the police chief should report to the mayor. I agreed to what I don't think philosophically should be done . . . but I'm determined to make it work."

Leonard believes Sizer may be surprised by that determination.

"Tom Potter let Rosie run the store with virtually no oversight," he said. "He didn't visit the bureau. He didn't stop in and see the troops. She may have met with him once a week, and she liked that. What she didn't like was knowing I wouldn't manage like that. What's she's hoping for is that Dan Saltzman will manage like that, like Tom Potter."

"She's going to get a more active oversight," Adams promised.

Saltzman's long history of activism and vigilance on the issues of child abuse, elder abuse and domestic violence should serve him well.

"They will be my priorities, along with gang violence, consumer fraud and neighborhood livability," he said. "One of the unique things you get to do in this form of government is to bring your own passions to the job."

"The Police Bureau is one of the most contentious and one of the most visible city bureaus in all manner and action. I do this with some trepidation. But I have the skills and ability to deal with a new set of challenges."

And, let's hope, the stubbornness necessary to deal with a bureau that hates to be second-guessed.

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