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Dan Saltzman gets oversight of Portland Police Bureau

The choice defuses a standoff but leaves reform on the table

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A compromise pick for Portland police commissioner gives the department a new boss known for behind-the-scenes politicking rather than the overt bulldog approach of the man who almost had the job.

Mayor-elect Sam Adams announced Monday that City Commissioner Dan Saltzman will oversee the Police Bureau starting in January instead of City Commissioner Randy Leonard.

Leonard was clearly Adams' first choice. But in Saltzman, Adams will get the steady and diplomatic hand of a 10-year City Hall veteran who righted the Portland Water Bureau after a new computer system lost more than \$30 million in billings and who spearheaded long-needed reforms to the Portland police and fire disability system.

Unlike Leonard, who rarely lacks an opinion, Saltzman usually doesn't weigh in until the last minute. His even temperament may serve well an agency that has been buffeted by lagging recruitment and past criticism over officers using too much force.

Saltzman said he takes the job with some trepidation.

"I'm up for the challenge," he said. "I've got a lot to learn, but I train well."

Saltzman's appointment ends a political melodrama between Leonard and Police Chief Rosie Sizer that included a public battle during the summer as Leonard began a study of police operations at Adams' request. Leonard and Sizer's personal styles and ideas for the bureau were far apart.

The clash put Adams on the spot even before he took office, forcing him to pick between Leonard, a tough, reform-minded colleague, and Sizer, a leader popular with the public and rank-and-file officers who has brought relative calm to the agency since she was appointed in April 2006.

Leonard made the decision easier for Adams when he took himself out of consideration last week, saying the chief's office was leaking information about him in a "back-channel

effort" to create controversy. Sizer is working on a report to Mayor Tom Potter about the accusations.

Sizer is seen by most City Hall insiders as the winner in the power struggle.

At a City Hall news conference with Adams and Saltzman, Sizer said she appreciated Leonard's interest in public safety and she pledged to work with Saltzman on needed reforms, such as improving the bureau's hiring practices. It now takes an average of 18 months to hire a new officer because of background checks and other rules, meaning the city often loses good candidates to other agencies

But don't count out Leonard. Much of the groundwork for reform is his, and Saltzman said he'll be working closely with Leonard.

Leonard also said his summer of ride-alongs and conversations with police officers and bureau employees means he's now in a better position to make judgments about the operation. Though scorned, he isn't one to hold back. His message to Sizer: "Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it."

The bureau has vacancies in 56 funded positions, a figure that's contributing to burnout and poor morale among officers, Leonard said.

"There will be a lot of internal resistance to the changes I've called for," Leonard said. "That's where Dan needs to have a bowl of Wheaties in the morning and be prepared for the onslaught that will come at him. The resistance will be firm and, in some cases, hostile."

In appointing Saltzman, Adams bucks tradition of having the mayor oversee the Police Bureau. But with crime at a 20-year low, Adams said he wants to focus on education, the economy and livability.

"I am not going to be a traditional mayor and I'm going to focus on those issues only a mayor can focus on," Adams said. Mark Larabee: 503-294-7664; marklarabee@news.oregonian.com %%endby%%