

Report to the Mayor
from the
Mayor's Advisory Team on Long Range Planning

April 9, 1999

The Advisory Team has completed the first phase of its work. Based upon our experience and our review of the ideas generated by citizens with professional and civic interests in planning, we have developed recommendations regarding the scope of the City's planning function and how it should be organized. This report conveys those recommendations to you, together with a Public Outreach Report. We recommend that you ask interested citizens for comments on this report prior to making a formal proposal to City Council.

Preface

Portland and planning. These words are spoken or written together so often that they are almost synonymous. National news articles and feature stories almost always describe Portland's planning success story. Portland is the envy of cities across the country.

Planning in Portland is built upon a strong foundation. Since the early seventies, the City has developed and implemented a series of policies and plans that have shaped the community and preserved our livability: the 1972 Downtown Plan; design standards for downtown and other areas; protection of environmental resources; the Albina Community Plan; the River District Plan; and numerous neighborhood plans. The City has also demonstrated an unwavering commitment to regional planning. The City has survived and preserved its livability in the face of five years of rapid regional growth, in large part because the Metro 2040 plan recognizes the importance of keeping the City of Portland a strong and vital center of the region's economy, retail market and cultural attractions. The City of Portland worked hard to develop standards for the region that leveled the playing field with the suburbs. The results of that effort are little known because our success lies in what has not happened.

Planning is different here than in many other places. Many cities use planning to promote growth and change. Their primary concern is that growth is orderly, and properly served by public services. Portland is not so opportunistic. Yes, we use planning to promote change, but not for the sake of change. Instead, we plan for change to help breathe new life into once vital retail streets in Northeast Portland or abandoned rail yards in downtown. We plan to strengthen communities. We also plan to preserve the built and natural environment that is our community heritage. In Portland, we believe good planning is the way to preserve and enhance the elements of community we value the most.

Planning is also about thinking ahead, preparing ourselves for a rapidly changing world. As a location for high technology and creative service companies, the City is increasingly tied to a global marketplace. We are influenced by national demographic trends and the changes that are the result of a strong economy. Not many Portlanders wake up in the morning thinking about these changes; we expect city government to do that thinking and work with citizens to preserve community values in the face of change.

Portland's citizens want a visionary city government that is thinking about the future as it helps preserve the best values of the past and present. Vision planning should provide the blueprint for the community and City staff to follow in its key decisions. Citizens don't see that vision now, or they see many, sometimes conflicting visions at the Council and Bureau level.

To be fair, the City Council is actively engaged in some of the elements of vision planning. Ten years ago, the Council participated in Future Focus, a strategic planning effort that did identify a long list of policies and implementing actions. Since then, the Council has used an annual community survey to identify community priorities. The information is used in setting Council goals that are, in turn, used to craft the budget. The Council has also strongly supported benchmarks as a way to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of City services and programs. Other elements of vision planning, especially those outside the reach of city government such as technology and demographics, are not being adequately addressed—but should be.

Even if the City had a well articulated vision for its future, the Advisory Team is concerned that the City lacks the ability to deliver upon it. Communication and coordination are a challenge in any organization. This is particularly true in the Commission form of government, where formal accountability and central authority is largely absent. Our form of government fosters "silo" approaches to policy making and problem solving. Seven different City bureaus often work independently on seven different planning tasks. In this organizational context, the Bureau of Planning and Planning Commission have worked hard to encourage cross-organization thinking about planning problems, but they lack authority to ensure that the City's multiple planning efforts are well coordinated.

As we face a new century, city government has a unique opportunity to invigorate planning and build upon the City's planning successes. The Blueprint 2000 process has resulted in a shift of development review responsibilities to the Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR). This shift means the Planning Director is now free of responsibility for review of proposed development for compliance with zoning rules and can focus on other planning tasks. This is a major change in organization and makes this a good time to evaluate how the City's planning activities should be organized.

Background

In January, the City Council, with Commissioner Hales' leadership, adopted the recommendations of a citizen committee appointed to help streamline the City's development review process. Known as Blueprint 2000, these reforms will significantly improve services for all of the City's stakeholders and customers—homeowners, developers and neighborhoods. In February, Council passed an ordinance effective on March 19, implementing a key recommendation of the committee, the creation of a new Office of Planning and Development Review (OPDR).

One of the recommendations of the Blueprint 2000 citizen committee was to incorporate the City's long range planning function into OPDR and to make the Planning Director a subordinate of the Director of OPDR. This recommendation caused concern for citizens and some Council members. Mayor Vera Katz and Commissioner Jim Francesconi proposed an amendment to the resolution accepting the Blueprint 2000 Phase II Stakeholder Report and directing the Mayor to return to the Council by May 12 with a recommendation on the placement and organization of long range planning functions of the City of Portland and its bureaus.

Today, the Bureau of Planning consists of approximately 60 staff persons dedicated to land use policy development including neighborhood plans, environmental protection policies, zoning code changes and similar comprehensive planning activities. Planners who carry out development review functions have been transferred to OPDR.

Process

To assist in preparing a response to the Council's directive, the Mayor appointed an Advisory Team consisting of some of the region's top planners: Ethan Seltzer (Portland State University), Brian Scott (Livable Oregon) , John Fregonese (Fregonese Calthorpe) and David Knowles (Director of Planning), together with Felicia Trader (Director, Portland Development Commission) and Tim Grewe (Director, Office of Finance and Administration).

The assessment began with a set of interviews by David Knowles with each of the Council members and the managers of City bureaus with planning or infrastructure responsibilities. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how the City's managers and elected officials view planning and how the City's planning function could be improved.

The next step was to ask Portland's citizens to help define what planning the City needs to do and how it should be organized. To frame and stimulate that discussion, the Advisory Team developed an "issues list" and set of questions to ask a variety of stakeholder groups.

These issues and questions were used in a series of stakeholder group discussions. Elaine Cogan, of the consulting firm Cogan Owens Cogan, facilitated the group discussions. The discussion groups included representatives from a wide variety of stakeholders:

- Representatives of Neighborhood Organizations (3 sessions)
- City Club Growth Management and Density Committees
- American Institute of Architects (Portland Chapter)
- American Planning Association (Oregon Chapter)
- Portland Planning Commission
- Portland Landmarks Commission
- Portland Design Commission
- Bureau of Planning Staff
- Planning staff in the Bureaus of Water, Parks and Environmental Services, the Office of Transportation, the Office of Finance and Administration, and the Office of Planning and Development Review.

Public Outreach

While stakeholder group participants expressed a wide range of ideas and suggestions about the future function, priorities and organization of long range planning for the City, there was a general consensus on some key issues. The Outreach Report includes this summary of areas of consensus:

- *“Coordination among all bureaus is essential. There was general agreement that the scope of long range planning should be broadened to be more than the City’s current long range land use planning responsibilities. It should include the efforts of nearly every bureau, as well as the Portland Development Commission. Coordinating long range planning efforts, avoiding duplication and assigning clear lines of authority should be priorities.”*
- *“A separate office, whose director has bureau-head status, should be created. The Director should be responsible to the Mayor who serves as the Commissioner in Charge. There was also discussion of whether the office and director could be responsible to the entire Council. Most concluded that in our commission form of government, this was not a possibility. It must have adequate status and authority to conduct the above coordination of planning efforts among all bureaus, including long range land use planning.”*
- *“Work toward a coherent, cohesive vision. City programs and policies suffer from the lack of a vision that is well articulated to the various bureaus and the public. Leading the development of this vision and implementation actions should be a priority for the new director.”*

- *“Coordination between policy development and policy implementation decisions needs to be strengthened.* It is very important to provide strong, formal linkages between policy development, long range planning and current planning decisions. This includes neighborhood and community plans, and the policies and development actions of other bureaus.”
- *“Hire a strong director.* The director of the new office or bureau must have exceptional leadership capabilities and the confidence of the City Council to effectively carry out the functions noted above. S/he should be a good manager, with the ability to communicate with and inspire a wide variety of people and interests in the greater community as well as among City bureaus.”

The stakeholder discussions demonstrated the deep commitment of our citizens to a strong planning program. Portlanders expect a lot from planning. In fact, most stakeholders said we were not doing enough planning. Stakeholders want planners to help the City create a cohesive vision, coordinate planning and implementation, and ensure high quality urban design. The stakeholder comments reflected frustration with Portland’s unique, but unwieldy form of government. There is much to be said in favor of the Commission form of government—but coordination and common vision are more difficult to achieve and maintain than in other forms of governance.

It is up to the City Council to develop a vision for the city and coordinate the implementation of that vision through planning. However, the Council needs the advocacy of a Planning Director and staff who have the responsibility to formulate this vision and the authority to carry it out. Now is an opportune time to expand the responsibility of the City’s planning organization and grant it the authority and the resources to be successful.

Discussion

The threshold issue is what planning the City needs to do. The stakeholders used a number of different terms to answer this question. For example, participants in the stakeholder groups agreed that there is a basic difference between long range and strategic planning, though some disagreed over which is the “umbrella” or overarching function and which one is concerned primarily with implementation. The Advisory Team believes a more useful way to respond to the question is to define the functions the City’s planners should perform instead of trying to define terms.

The Advisory Team believes the City must be much more encompassing in its planning and vigorously carry out the following responsibilities:

- *Vision Planning:* The uniform message from stakeholders was that City government lacked a cohesive vision. Planners can help Council members ask the community where we as a city need to be heading. We need planning that looks to the future and gets us, as a community, ready for changes in such areas as demographics and technology that are beyond the reach of city government. Any vision must be based on the needs of a broad range of “stakeholders”, including those not actively involved in the process and those not yet born.

Vision planning, the over-arching planning function, should provide the blueprint for the City. The resulting plan and its strategic goals should guide Council's key decision making processes as well as bureau planning and operations.

Vision planning can also help define a community's most fundamental values. For example, quality K through 12 education appears to be an important value. But the City of Portland lacks guideposts for how it should respond to the funding crisis in our public schools. It has given millions of dollars to schools in the last four years, but there is no cohesive rationale for the transfer of City funds to the city's school districts. A more strategic approach, based upon a definition of community values, would be to strengthen our schools because good schools are the cornerstones of healthy and safe neighborhoods and provide a workforce that will attract and retain those companies that provide living wage jobs. This "big picture" planning is inadequate in the City today.

- *Comprehensive Planning:* For the past 20 years, this has been the domain of the Bureau of Planning. Prior to the division of the Bureau as part of Blueprint 2000, the Bureau's responsibility included development of Comprehensive Plan policies and maps and the implementation of those policies through the Zoning Code and the review of proposed development. Blueprint 2000 assigned the development review responsibilities to the new Office of Planning and Development Review, leaving a staff of approximately 60 FTE responsible for policy development, code writing and other planning activities of a legislative nature.

The Portland Comprehensive Plan reflects the community's values—affordable housing, jobs, green spaces, clean water, clean air, diverse and vital neighborhoods. Yet, the Comprehensive Plan is infrequently used to evaluate the success or failure of City policies and programs. Why? Because no one person or agency is accountable for those policies. The responsibility for the development and implementation of those policies is dispersed throughout city government. The Advisory Team believes it is time to re-establish the City's Comprehensive Plan as a living document that has the status and credibility to drive development and actions within the City. It needs to serve as a guidepost for City programs and services. New City policies should be evaluated for consistency against the Comprehensive Plan.

- *The 2040 Plan:* Portland has demonstrated its commitment to the region's growth management plans. The Planning Director is the City's primary connection with our regional partners and is responsible for local implementation of the functional plan performance standards through code amendments and Comprehensive Plan policy changes.
- *Coordination:* Communication and coordination are a challenge in the City's unique form of government. There are two aspects to the problem. The first centers around the "silo" nature of planning in the City of Portland. No one is fully responsible and in charge of planning in Portland. For example, a major problem for City planners working with the community during the last five years of rapid growth has been the lack of connection between community planning and the

planning of infrastructure to serve those communities. Regardless of organizational structure, “service” delivery must appear seamless to the public. Transportation, land use, environment, economic development, and other City agencies, programs and projects must be coordinated and integrated—from problem definition, policy, budget and outreach to implementation.

The Planning Director must have the authority to get agencies together at the planning table and to review the proposals of other bureaus for consistency with adopted policies. Similarly, the biennial budget process should be strategically used to coordinate bureau budgets and work programs for upcoming years, all in alignment with a common vision.

The other aspect of coordination involves implementation of plans. Plans don’t mean much unless they are implemented correctly. Comprehensive Plan policies are primarily implemented through private development and investments in infrastructure and other public services or programs. Until now, the Planning Bureau has had direct responsibility for the review of proposed development for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Code. The Bureau has not had formal review responsibilities for the provision of infrastructure or other City services. Planners should not be solely responsible for implementation, but someone with authority must monitor the implementation of plans and advise Council about the consistency of services and programs with adopted policy.

Finally, the City benefits from collaboration, not just coordination, between staff charged with formulating policy and regulations and staff charged with implementing them. It will be critical for the City’s long range planners to maintain close ties with OPDR staff to ensure that any new policies or regulations can and will be effectively administered. And, a formal feedback mechanism between implementers and long range planners can ensure that regulations are serving their intended purpose.

- *Quality Urban Design:* Portland is a planning success story in large part because we plan as if people matter. Nowhere is that more true than in the City’s urban design standards. The City’s insistence on a high standard of performance for public and private projects demonstrates its commitment to protect the public realm. The City must have an advocate and a watchdog for quality urban design.
- *Data Collection and Emerging Issues:* A number of different bureaus collect data for their own business purposes, but no agency takes responsibility for evaluating this information and using it to tell us where we have been as a community and where we are going. This type of “think tank” function is very important if the City is going to maintain its edge. This function will be enhanced by the increasing sophistication of the City’s GIS system. In addition, planning in different bureaus has, at times, been based upon different assumptions about future growth and current trends.
- *Review Budget and Policy Proposals:* Presently there is no review of the City budget or proposed ordinances and resolutions for consistency with existing City policy.

There should be an evaluation, similar to OFA's budget impact statements, that informs the Council about the relationship of its actions to the policies in the Comprehensive Plan and other City policies.

- *Relationships with the Citizenry:* Planners and other City staff need to build long-term relationships with citizens and citizen groups, not just request input on a particular project once it's underway.

These are the planning functions the City must perform. The constraints of Portland's decentralized government structure present a challenge in deciding how these functions should be organized.

Organizational Options

The Advisory Team has reviewed the stakeholder discussions and evaluated a number of different options. We measured the options primarily for success in performing each of the functions listed above. Because we are convinced that the City's planning functions, and the people who perform them, require more authority than they have now, this criterion was also influential in our thinking.

There are two critical components of any organizational option. The first is the creation of a Planning Coordination Team, chaired by the Planning Director. The team should include the Executive Director of the Portland Development Commission and the bureau managers of the following agencies: the Portland Office of Transportation, the Office of Finance and Administration, the Bureau of Housing and Community Development, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, the Bureau of Parks and Recreation, the Bureau of Environmental Services, the Water Bureau, and the Office of Planning and Development Review.

The Planning Coordination Team should convene on a regular basis for the purpose of jointly coordinating and integrating policy development and implementation. The meetings would provide a forum to enhance communication and cooperation among City bureaus as well as federal, state and regional agencies. A particular priority for the team should be coordinating and evaluating the City's efforts to implement the region's growth management objectives. The team should also develop the City's Public Facilities Plan and review the City's annual capital improvement program for consistency with adopted City policies.

The second essential component is the staff necessary to perform the key functions outlined above. It is not possible to perform these functions within existing staff levels. Existing staff is primarily dedicated to land use and infrastructure planning. The demand on the City's planners already exceeds their capacity. Council must be willing to make funding for additional staff a priority to enable the organization to take on an expanded role in city-wide visioning, coordination and corporate strategic planning.

Precise calculation of the number of staff, and the funding needed, is a matter best left to the City's managers and the City Council. However, it appears, based upon our experience, that somewhere between three and six positions need to be added to existing staff levels to adequately perform all of these functions.

These two components are fundamental to the success of any of the options described below. These options appear to us to be the best, though the second one, a renewed Bureau of Planning, is superior to the others. These options are consistent with the ideas most commonly expressed by the stakeholder groups.

Option 1: Create a City Planning Office in the Office of the Mayor

The office would be responsible for the City’s vision planning and for the central coordination of the City’s planning activities. The City Planning Director would head the office and have authority over a broad range of planning and coordination activities. The staff would be small. The functions now performed by the Bureau of Planning would be incorporated into OPDR, in accordance with the recommendations of the Blueprint 2000 stakeholders.

An advantage of this option is that the Planning Director would not be saddled with management responsibilities and could more easily fulfill the role of visionary planner for the City. The assignment to the Mayor’s office is important to give the position status if not actual authority over the planning activities of other agencies and fulfill the coordinating responsibilities. This office could also track emerging issues and prepare policy impact statements for the Council.

The small size of the office is a disadvantage. There is the ever-present danger of budget cuts—more damaging to a small operation than a bigger bureau with more flexibility. Of greater concern is that the Planning Director would not have direct authority over the comprehensive planning staff that would be in OPDR. These staff planners are responsible for the City’s comprehensive land use planning, including neighborhood plans, Zoning Code provisions and design guidelines. These projects make up the bulk of the work of the Planning Commission. Under this organizational model, the Planning Director might, in effect, be disconnected from the Planning Commission, the City’s primary policy making group.

An advantage of this option is that reuniting long range and development review staff would create intra-bureau opportunities for collaboration between policy and implementation, easier to facilitate than inter-bureau relationships. However, the Advisory Team is concerned that despite the best of intentions, comprehensive planning would not be the priority of OPDR because of its focus on development review activities.

Option 2: Maintain the Planning Bureau and Increase the Responsibility of the Planning Director

This model takes the City’s existing Planning organization and increases its responsibility and authority. The Bureau of Planning now consists of approximately 60 staff, all of whom are engaged in comprehensive planning or the support of those activities. (All development review staff has been assigned to OPDR). The Bureau would be assigned additional responsibility to perform all the functions identified above—vision

planning, coordination, comprehensive planning, urban design, emerging issues and the preparation of policy impact statements. The Director would have the legal authority attached to comprehensive planning activities.

This option creates a complete planning organization for the City, providing formal and informal authority for a full range of planning functions. It keeps the Planning Bureau intact and retains the status of the Planning Director as a Bureau Manager reporting to the Commissioner in Charge and accountable to the City Council. A major improvement over Option 1 is that the Planning Director continues to staff the Planning Commission. The Commission is a valuable component of the City's planning function. By having a broader set of responsibilities, the Planning Director can work with the Commission to make vision planning a high priority in its work program.

Like the other options, this model presumes that the Council would create a planning coordination team and provide additional staff. If this happens, coordination will dramatically improve, even though the Planning Director will not manage every planner in the City or formally manage every work program.

The larger size of the organization under this option presents both advantages and disadvantages. A larger staff provides a greater range of expertise and flexibility in the event of budget reductions. Yet, the Advisory Team believes the Planning Director should, to the maximum extent possible, be free of the responsibility for the operations of a large bureau. This is harder to do in a larger organization. However, the current Bureau's executive team consists of managers who are very competent managers as well as planners. If this model is chosen, this team should be delegated maximum authority for administrative matters in order to free up the Planning Director for planning.

A disadvantage of this option is that coordination of policy development and implementation is more difficult than under the first model because the comprehensive land use planners would not be within the same organization as the development review planners. This disadvantage can be mitigated by ensuring that the cross function teams created by the Bureau of Planning remain in place and serve as the forum for good communication between planners making policy and planners implementing policy through development review. Over the last five years, the Bureau's managers and staff have created an organizational culture that encourages and rewards good communication. We are confident this tradition will continue even when planners are in two different organizations.

Option 3: Consolidate all Planning Activities in the City into a New Bureau of Planning

This is similar to the second option except staff in planning positions now located in the Office of Transportation and the Bureaus of Water, Environmental Services and Parks and Recreation—a total of approximately 25 additional staff—would be transferred to the Bureau of

Planning. The Bureau would have complete responsibility for direction or coordination of all the City's long range planning functions. The Bureau Director would report to the Commissioner in Charge as assigned by the Mayor.

The principal advantage of this option is that it would give the Director of Planning direct authority for vision planning, comprehensive planning, infrastructure planning and all other City long range planning activities. This model would work best in fulfilling the need for coordination and communication because it consolidates the full array of long range planning functions within one organization.

A major disadvantage of this option is that it would disconnect planners from the operations of important City services. The Advisory Team believes the presence of planners in PDOT and other bureaus has helped to make those organizations more innovative, more concerned about urban design and more responsive to the needs identified through neighborhood and community planning projects.

Planning Director Qualifications

The public outreach process also produced ideas on the qualifications for the City's new Planning Director. The Advisory Team recommends that no action be taken on hiring a Planning Director until the City Council adopts an organizational structure for the City's long range planning program. At that time, we would be pleased to provide you with our recommendations on qualifications for the position.

Recommendation

The Advisory Team recommends selection of Option 2. Clearly, each option has advantages and disadvantages, and each responds to issues and concerns raised by the public in the focus group discussions. Option 2 is recommended because, on balance, it would best achieve the following:

- Creating a planning organization with enhanced responsibility and adequate staff to perform the City's planning functions;
- Enabling better coordination between bureaus by enhancing the authority of the Planning Director to monitor the implementation of plans and advise city Council about the consistency of services and programs with adopted policy;
- Providing the Planning Director with status and influence by maintaining a direct reporting relationship between the Director and the Mayor or Commissioner in Charge;
- Providing the Planning Director with the responsibility of working with the community to develop a coherent, cohesive, city-wide vision;
- Creating a large enough organization to provide operational flexibility and greater ability to weather budget fluctuations; and

- Allowing for critical collaboration and coordination between long range planners and other City staff responsible for implementation, through interagency agreements and continuation of operating systems that are well established between long range and development review planning staff.

Conclusion

The organizational choice is important because it will help facilitate achievement of the City's goals. In the end, however, the test of any of the options will be the commitment of the Council to adequately fund and fully support a complete planning program for the City—a program that encompasses vision, coordination, urban design and all of the other elements of a well planned city.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist you in evaluating the City's long range planning needs. We look forward to reviewing public comments on this proposal.