



## Approach to the Charter Commission

1. What do you see as the role of a city's charter? Should the charter, as the city's constitution, solely address how the city is governed, leaving policy issues such as health, labor and the environment to be addressed through ordinance? Why or why not?

**Marcques Houston:** *I see the role of the city's charter to dictate how the city is governed and ensure that there are structures put in place so that elected officials have a more efficient and effective way to push policies that address the needs of our ever-changing city, such as health, labor, environment, and racial equity.*

## Mayoral Power

2. Do you favor expanding the role of Portland's elected mayor to include the ability to hire and oversee city staff such as the police chief or public works director? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I do believe in having a stronger executive mayor that has the ability to oversee city staff. The mayor is elected by voters to carry out a vision and they should be able to make sure that the staff are in place to help them better live out that vision.*

3. Do you favor expanding the role of Portland's elected mayor to include oversight of day-to-day functions of city government, including decisions regarding paving and repairs, and city licensing? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I do think that there is a role for managers to assist with running the day-to-day operations. That could be the City Manager, or it could have another name. I am not as concerned with titles as much as I am with powers. I believe in re-democratizing City Hall by giving the Mayor more executive power, leaving policy discussions to the positions directly elected by the voters and putting power back into the hands of the people. The Charter needs to restructure the roles of City Manager and Mayor so that they can work together, better, for Portland. The mayor is elected by the people because of their vision for the city and in its current state, the Charter does not allow for the Mayor to see that vision all the way through.*

4. Do you favor allowing Portland's elected mayor to have a role in awarding contracts for city services, such as paving contracts, software agreements, or consulting services? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *When I'm talking with voters, this is not an issue that comes up as much as the overall restructuring of the mayor and city manager roles do. I am open to discussing this during the charter review process and looking at what precedents have been set by other municipalities.*

5. Do you favor allowing Portland's elected mayor having a direct role in police investigations or enforcement actions? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I believe we should empower and fund our city oversight committee to adequately do the duties that they are tasked with, given the necessary supports, and have the ability to report their findings to the mayor.*



6. Do you favor allowing Portland's elected mayor to have sole authority to appoint city councilors to city council policy committees, similar to the Maine Legislature or US Congress (currently such authority is subject to override by a majority of the Council)? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *Conceptually, I agree with this. Again, this is not something that I am hearing from Portlanders when I am talking with them. My job, as a Charter Commissioner representing District 4, is to present the people of District 4's ideas and give them a voice in the Charter Review Process. I would like to look more into what precedents have been set by other municipalities.*

### **Electoral Reform**

7. Do you favor having Portland taxpayers pay for the campaigns of candidates running for City Council, Mayor, or School Board through a clean elections system? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *Yes. We've seen big money and special interests take control of our local elections. In the 2019 municipal elections, mayoral candidates combined spent over \$300,000 and a special-interest PAC piped nearly \$50,000 into advertising. Meanwhile, many Portlanders are struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table. Instead of raising money from wealthy special interests, candidates and elected officials should have the opportunity to spend more time listening to and serving the people they represent. That's why I support re-examining the City Charter to allow for the possibility of a municipal clean elections program. By loosening the grip of wealthy donors on our City politics, representatives will be more accountable. Not only that, but our local elections can be more representative of working- and middle-class Portlanders.*

8. Should the City Council have the authority to amend citizen-initiated referendum questions passed by the voters? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I believe that the referendum process is a unique and powerful way for the people to have a voice and create change in ways that they see fit. That process should be protected and the Charter Commission should make sure that they are protecting the people's voice and allow the referendum process to occur in an efficient manner.*

### **Mayor and Council Process**

9. Do you favor giving Portland's Mayor/City Council dedicated staff to respond to constituents and research policy proposals? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I am open to discussing this topic in the charter review process. I believe that it would make sense to have dedicated staff to assist with constituent services and research policy proposals. Ultimately, we have a city council that is made up of everyday Portlanders who are elected to live out a vision that they have for the city. These people work full-time jobs and still do all of the work of being an elected official. Anything that we can do to support elected officials and assist them with making sure that they are adequately addressing the needs of Portlanders would be beneficial.*



10. Do you favor allowing city councilors direct access to city staff as part of their policymaking function? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *This is a complex topic that I have been looking into extensively. In regards to the charter review process, I would like to see the commission look into what other municipalities are doing and what precedents have been set.*

11. Do you favor increasing the number of City Councilors beyond the current nine (Mayor and eight councilors)? Why or why not?

**Houston:** *I am in favor of having a stronger executive mayor and redistricting the city's voting districts to eliminate the at-large seats on the City Council and School Board. As it pertains to the School Board, I'd like to see districts based on neighborhoods and their schools. Each school in the city has its own personality, needs, and culture. Having districts based on neighborhoods and schools will allow School Board and City Council members to be more responsive to the unique needs of our students and families in their district. Councilors and School Board members serving in the at-large seats do not have the capacity or the resources to adequately deal with the number of constituent services that they are tasked with. I am still exploring the matter of who will do the redistricting and what that might mean as far as the Charter Commission goes.*

**Candidate Cheryl Leeman did not reply to our questions, but did provide the following statement:**

**Cheryl Leeman:** *I am excited to have open discussions with no preconceived notion or political agenda as to final outcomes prior to a full "review" by Commission members to include a full vetting of the issues with transparency and full public participation, listening to all the varied opinions with civility and respectfulness -with one exception, I continue to support the hiring of a professionally qualified city manager.*

*The purpose of the Commission is a task entrusted to its members as representatives of the citizenry who should review the charter methodically and objectively without a predetermined political agenda as to the outcome. There will be differing opinions, however, diverse perspectives will be beneficial to the process and will require listening to one another's ideas. Trying to solve what is perceived to be broken local government is not a proper function of the Commission review rather to establish a framework within government for our elected representatives to address issues as policy makers in a representative government.*

*My long-time tenure in public service gives me a unique historical perspective along with the knowledge and skills to provide balance with an understanding of past practice and insight into the evolution of positive change in Portland over the years. Having lived through those changes, I understand the need to continue evaluating where we have been and where we are in making Portland the best it can be for all.*