

## Don't put our police oversight behind closed doors

Controversial changes to the city's police accountability process will be examined during a special community forum on Aug. 23.

We all should be there.

The event, hosted by the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform, will be from 6

p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Maranatha Church in Northeast Portland.

The proposed changes were unveiled publicly at an Aug. 1 town hall meeting, where critics

slammed the new policies for decreasing transparency and civilian police accountability.

Currently, the city's Independent Police Review system consists of the Police Review Board, which meets in private to review complaints and decide what, if any, action to take, and an independent Citizen Review Committee, which publicly hears appeals from citizen complainants.

Under the changes proposed by City Council members, those two bodies would be merged – and subsequently meet in private, a loss of transparency the CRC members strongly oppose, along with Street Roots and most anyone who understands the dynamics of police oversight.

State law sets the parameters that allow the police to review personnel matters behind closed doors. But the public's case must see the light of day. Trading transparency for expediency is unacceptable.

This merged body would also include a significant police presence in comparison to civilian members, which the CRC rightly believes could have a chilling effect on community complaints, testimony and CRC criticism of bureau practices. It undermines the integrity

of the process to tip the scales toward a greater police presence, diminishing the civilian's critical role.

IPR Director Constantin Severe also agrees that the secrecy of the consolidated group is not an acceptable compromise for a streamlined system.

"The CRC acts as an advisory body to IPR, from our perspective we want to make sure any changes to city code would improve the process and have more buy in from the public," Severe said, noting that the public's concerns will be noted. "Moving forward we're going to have to take that into account. Doing nothing is not an option for the city."

The changes are prompted by federal pressure to streamline the police accountability process and expedite what are now months-long appeals by citizens claiming police misconduct. The city is subject to the settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, and according to City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero, the city could be found in violation of that agreement if its appeals process isn't sped up. The federal requirement is for an appeals hearing to be held within 21 days of receiving a request. Currently, according to the auditor's office, the median number of days for a complaint to move through the appeals process is 149.

The DOJ is expected to file a written progress report in late September. City Council is scheduled to take up its first of two required hearings on the proposed changes to the IPR on Sept. 14.

The best minds in the room still need to hear from you. Let your voice be heard and demand a process that preserves transparency, and the integrity of our agreement.

### EDITORIAL

## Journalism is alive and well, and worthy of support

Quality journalism matters, especially in a time when the media industry is being turned upside down. Some will tell you that journalism is dead. That's the furthest thing from the truth. Possibly the traditional model or platform for quality journalism is suffering, but dead? Journalism? No way. It's simply evolving.

Here's the thing. Traditional news platforms didn't have anymore of a bead on the truth than the media climate we find ourselves in today. Sure, there have been times when the idea of being a watchdog and delivering a community service has shone in both our community and in our country. However, traditional

newspapers have also supported many devastating policies throughout our country's history – often times completely disconnected from the issues and people they are reporting on.

For example, how many people of color do we have in newsrooms across our state covering the issues of culturally specific communities? Where are the Latino, Native American and black voices, to name a few, on our editorial boards and in our newsrooms? Are there people of color teaching and mentoring people in our local universities? Why aren't Oregon foundations funding journalism when it's equity they seek? Maintaining quality journalism about the people, for the people, while working to make the world a more just place is the single hardest thing for any media organization to fund, including Street Roots.

Moreso, it's nearly impossible for blue collar and poor kids, from anywhere in the world, to actually make it in journalism today. If you're lucky enough to attend journalism school as a poor kid, it's almost impossible to maintain a living in your 20s to craft your profession – leaving newsrooms today covering important racial

and socio-economical issues through a lens that is almost exclusively white and privileged. It's a sad affair.

Last week, Street Roots was honored to receive the 2016 Humanitarian Award from Willamette Writers, one of the largest writers' guilds in the country. Big kudos should go to Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl, Reporter Emily Green, Editorial Assistant Monica Kwasnik and all of our freelancers. They work hard to maintain a quality newspaper every single week.

Below is a portion of the talk I gave at the award ceremony:

To quote Hunter S. Thompson, "If I'd written all the truth I knew for the past 10 years, about 600 people – including me – would be rotting in prison cells from Rio to Seattle today. Absolute truth is a very rare and dangerous commodity in the context of professional journalism."

The reality is that Street Roots isn't interested in who people are sleeping with, or what drugs you are taking to get you through the night, or your past mistakes or missteps.

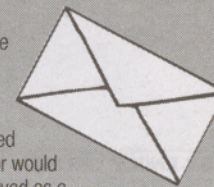
Street Roots' editorial focus is to provide quality journalism and commentary that makes the world we live in a better place. It's our goal to provide the public with road map journalism that works to tackle the complex problems facing our community and the world.

We are a small train that carries a heavy load. We work hard to highlight the many voices of the people – the commoners, the freaks, the doers, the immigrants and refugees, the homeless and the huddled masses. Our interest is trying to leave the world a better place than how we found it through writing."

Of course, Street Roots isn't the only media outlet in town providing quality journalism. There are many. Saying that, we are proud of the work we do with such a small news team and hope readers understand how much we care about the content we are maintaining.

### Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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### DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.