

## Contract fiasco a cautionary tale for camera policy

Unveiled only a few weeks ago, the new Portland police union contract was lambasted almost immediately for its secret negotiations and shortcomings – loudly – right up until the City Council's 3-1 vote to ratify it on Oct. 12.

While the City Council was able to keep the protests against the contract outside of the council chambers - the commissioners moved into another room to cast their votes with only a televised audience - it could not keep the demonstrations, anger and disgust out of the

public eye. All across the news and social media, the scenes played out, arrests were made, protesters were pepper-sprayed.

That's a lousy way to conduct business, specifically around a police department under a federal agreement to reform its actions when engaging with the public, notably with people of color and those dealing with a mental illness. The ACLU of Oregon, The Mental Health Association of Portland, the City Auditor and the head of the Independent Police Review all spoke out against the contract.

So did the people, whose response was answered by dozens of officers in riot gear. It was a total breakdown in the relationship between City Hall and the police, and the people they serve.

The expediency – negotiated a full eight months before it even expires – was credited to the urgency of raising compensation for officers to correct a staffing crisis. Indeed, the bureau is looking at 90 vacancies by the end of this month. That doesn't explain the process that transpired.

Was it worth it? Did it have to be this way? It may be expedient for an outgoing mayor, free to burn through his political capital, but what of the officers? What does this do for the relationship between the public and the men and women in uniform who are out there on the front lines? How much of a setback will this process have on the progress made on our streets?

While the contract with the Portland Police Association is one for the record books, at least until 2020, the city's policy around body-worn cameras is not. Mayor Charlie Hales promises the process will engage stakeholders in an open dialogue over time and due diligence. Given this past week, we need more than promises.

There's been a considerable amount of confusion around the relationship between the police union contract and the proposed camera policy. The two came out in tandem, tethered by a tentative agreement between the city and the police union to negotiate the camera policy.

That draft policy says police officers may review video of an incident before writing a report, with the exception of those incidents involving deadly use-of-force or in-custody death. And if they did so, they are entitled to watch the video again before being investigated, if the case comes to that.

Advocates for police reform and accountability have maintained that cameras should be a tool for transparency and truth, not to advantage one side over the other.

In that vein, we agree with a proposal from City Commissioner Steve Novick that the viewing privileges apply to all, not just officers. Otherwise, you give officers an advantage.

If one can view it and one cannot, than one will look more credible, even if there is no intent to deceive, he said.

Novick, who cited funding concerns for the increased salaries, was the lone dissenting vote on the contract.

The ACLU echoes the camera concern: "Just as police do not show video evidence to other subjects or witnesses before taking their statements, officers should be required to first make statements based on memory," the ACLU said in a statement.

The public has as much stake in the policy as the police. One could argue even more.

In the wake of the contract negotiation fiasco, questions, doubts and distrust are in the streets. There are calls to investigate violations of public meeting requirements, and questions around whether the viewing by officers is a mandatory bargaining item that would give the police union final say on the policy. It's difficult to know what to believe.

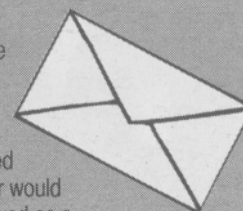
The previous round of public meetings on the camera policy, hosted by the police, were many months ago. Stakeholder meetings around the policy, as the mayor has promised, can't wait – and they need to be plentiful and reach deep into our community. It takes work to engage, from all sides – and yes, it's worth it.

Let's not make the same mistake again.

That's a statement not under threat of protest, but under threat of failure.

### Write in

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