

Time to Finish the Job

Take the next logical step in police reform.

It has taken six years plus a major scandal involving sexual assaults by two police officers for Eugene to once again be on the brink of enacting meaningful civilian oversight of police misconduct complaints. It's essential for the community to speak clearly in support of police reform when the votes are counted Nov. 8.

The last time a civilian oversight measure was on the ballot in Eugene, it lost by less than 300 votes out of more than 46,000 cast. In the wake of that vote, the city did create the Eugene Police Commission to provide civilian input into police policies. The commission has done good work, prompting much-needed revisions in policies on the use of pepper spray, the handling of political demonstrations, and the use of force generally.

Now is the time to finally implement the other essential component needed to achieve meaningful police reform in Eugene – civilian oversight of misconduct complaints.

The Police Commission spent much of the past year studying a myriad of options for implementing civilian review. Measure 20-106 is the first step to implement the commission's unanimous recommendations.

To have true independence, the auditor and civilian review board should be appointed by the council, rather than the city manager.

The current public discussion about the proposed charter amendment has centered almost entirely around the question of whether it is appropriate to put the City Council – rather than the city manager – in charge of hiring the police auditor and appointing the civilian review board.

Ballot Measure 20-106 is an untraditional approach for Eugene, and one that shouldn't be taken without a close look. So let's review how we got here.

Public confidence and internal morale in the Eugene Police Department were badly shaken by the sexual assault and intimidation scandal involving former officers Roger Magaña and Juan Lara, both now serving lengthy prison terms.

In August, the city announced it has agreed to pay more than \$800,000 in out-of court settlements with three of the victims in those cases. Ten other victims reportedly have claims pending and the city is hoping to negotiate settlements in those cases as well. The final tab could be well over \$2 million. And that doesn't include the cost of the investigations and prosecutions of Magaña and Lara.

We now know that some of the victims reported the crimes to EPD even though they were frightened about their safety if they did so. Others chose not to report the crimes because they had so much to lose. We also know it took years before anyone inside EPD treated the accusations seriously.

Hiring a truly independent police auditor and allowing the auditor to accept complaints would address both of those problems. It is essential to create a climate of trust in which victims of alleged police misconduct feel safe coming forward. Having the auditor be outside the "normal" chain of command at City Hall will help encourage future victims of police misconduct to come forward. Allowing the auditor to have full access to EPD misconduct investigations will ensure that serious allegations are investigated promptly and thoroughly.

But there's more. For decades, EPD has been accused of racial profiling. Awareness of racial profiling among communities of color did not start with the stop and frisk of Cortez Jordan last year. Jordan is just one of the few who has followed up by filing a civil rights lawsuit over it.

Ask any African American, Latino or Native American man in this town between the ages of 16 and 30 about their experiences with police officers. They will tell you about being stopped by police for flimsy reasons while driving or walking because someone thought they might be up to no good. Usually, these stops, questioning and searches of people who have committed no crime are perfectly legal. That doesn't mean it's OK.

These kinds of experiences pull a community apart at its seams. If people can't trust the police to treat them fairly, they are less likely to come forward with evidence that is critical to solving crimes and less likely to want to report crimes when they are victims.

For many years, Eugene police chiefs have decried racial profiling and have expressed commitments to eliminate it from the EPD. Unfortunately, all too often the attitude of the rank and file has been that if no laws or policies are broken, no harm has occurred. It's difficult to change the internal culture of any police force. Business as usual just isn't good enough.

The Police Commission's recommendations for independent civilian oversight would also address these issues by requiring tracking of all complaints – so it would be easier to spot patterns of inappropriate behavior – and by offering a range of alternatives for pursuing complaints, including mediation as well as investigation by internal affairs and review by the police auditor and civilian review board.

Again, the independence of the police auditor and the review board are critical steps to take to show good faith to the community. To have true independence, the auditor and civilian review board should be appointed by the council, rather than the city manager.

Measure 20-106 is critical to help EPD heal and restore the bonds of trust between the community and police. Measure 20-106 will help all of us – residents and police – work together to create a community that is safe for everyone.

David Fidanque is the executive director of the ACLU of Oregon, and Henry Luvert is President of the Eugene-Springfield Chapter of the NAACP.

Goblins and Monsters scaring your pets?



We have natural remedies for stress.

THE Healthy Pet
Caring for your pet, naturally

252 West 7th Ave.
thehealthypet.net
302-6279
on 7th between
Lincoln & Charnelton

Open Daily 10am-6pm • FREE PARKING

HABITATS
Homes, Landscapes & Ecological Planning

Designing and Building Homes and Landscapes of All Scales

www.habitatsinc.com
338-7967

Balancing the needs of humans with the natural ecology

CCB# 145961 LCB# 7851

AIKIDO
INTRODUCTORY COURSE
SELF DEFENSE
SAFE, EFFECTIVE & LEGAL
"MIND • BODY • SPIRIT"

Learn How to:
Relax, Fall Safely,
Resolve Conflict,
Increase Confidence,
Find Your Center

October 24 - December 21
M & W 6:30pm-8pm
Special Price \$76

Nagare Dojo
at The Natural Arts Center

240 W. 6th Alley (at Charnelton)
338-9496

OREGON WINE WAREHOUSE

Wine Tasting Bar
Tour Oregon Wine Country in downtown Eugene

GREAT WINE, FOOD, MUSIC
Wine by the taste, glass, bottle, case.

- New tasting menu each week
- Wine-friendly appetizers
- Honest advice
- Gift shipments
- Corporate giving
- Nationwide shipping
- Case discounts
- Private events

Saturdays in October
Steve Larsen on piano

Open Tuesday-Saturday
943 OLIVE STREET
342-8598