

EUGENE CHOOSES NEW POLICE CHIEF THIS MONTH

Three candidates compete for the job in a process some say is flawed

Civil liberties experts who have been following Eugene's selection of a new police chief suggest the process is too friendly to the candidates and question how prepared the three finalists are for a community like Eugene.

The public has one more opportunity to weigh in on the choice at a community forum on March 13.

The final decision will be made by March 23 by City Manager Jon Ruiz, says Laura Hammond, the city's community relations director.

Hammond tells *EW* via email that while community feedback is not required by the charter, "this is an important position for our community and organization, and community input is critical to the process. Jon [Ruiz] will be reviewing all the feedback received from the department and the community as he makes the decision."

Public outreach events about the hire have been taking place since July 2017, according to the city's website.

The three finalists are Chris Skinner, police chief of Richland, Washington; Mike Lester, assistant police chief for Vancouver, Washington; and Bruce Marquis, previously police chief in Norfolk, Virginia, and Hartford, Connecticut, but currently training programs consultations manager for the U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security, Anti-terrorism Assistance Program.

David Fidanque, who retired as the executive director of the Oregon ACLU in 2015, says of the candidates, "They are all from out-of-state, so that means they will not be familiar with some of the things that are unusual about Eugene."

He points to Eugene's Civilian Review Board and independent police auditor as examples of things that are not common in other cities of a similar size. Hartford has a civilian review board, and *The Virginian-Pilot* reported in



POLICE CHIEF CANDIDATE MIKE LESTER

2007 that Marquis was against civilian oversight of the police when he was chief in Norfolk.

Fidanque also questions whether the candidates are aware of Oregon's 30-year-old law that forbids local and state police from investigating federal immigration violations.

"I'm assuming there's been some vetting around those issues, but that's probably not a safe assumption," he says. Fidanque does say he is confident Ruiz will take public input into account.

Joel Iboa, vice-chair of the city's Human Rights Commission, also expects that Ruiz will take public input. Ruiz told him he "will look at every piece of information that comes his way," Iboa says. "This is the best process we've had so far."

Iboa says the process was not perfect. "While this is a step

in the right direction, the city of Eugene still has a long way to go" when it comes to an inclusive decision-making process and addressing more marginalized community members, he says.

The HRC was included in the process of choosing the consultant that selected the finalists, Texas-based recruitment group Strategic Government Resources, and will be represented in the March 13 community panel.

The brochure used by Eugene and the recruiter briefly mentions Eugene's "well-established civilian oversight structure that includes a Police Auditor and Civilian Review Board."

Among other things, the brochure also says the new police chief will "provide culturally responsive training to best serve communities of color, LGBTQ communities, immigrants, Muslim and Jewish communities, residents with mental health issues, individuals experiencing addictions, and other underserved communities."

The brochure refers to Eugene as "diverse."

The new chief will "further develop and implement strategies that prioritize and reinforce the department's commitment to de-escalation," it says. March 30 is the three-year anniversary of EPD shooting death of military veteran Brian Babb.

Erin Grady of the Civil Liberties Defense Center is more critical of the process. "If the city is to really address the separation between the citizens and the police of this town," she says, "they are going to have to spend much more time and ask much deeper questions of the communities impacted by police."

Grady says questions asked at the public forums were "positive, leading questions" such as, "What do you like about the police department?"

She says, "To us that seemed very weak and substanceless," and the questions didn't give a space for communities to criticize. "It didn't feel like the intention was to address problems." ■

The community forum is 5:30 pm Tuesday, March 13, at Harris Hall, 125 E. 8th Avenue. Small group interviews with the candidates by a pre-selected community panel will take place that morning at 8:30 am. Written feedback can be provided via email to EPCrecruit@ci.eugene.or.us through 9 pm, March 17.

SLANT

• Since GateHouse Media took over *The Register-Guard* on March 1, its longtime **editorial page editor Jackman Wilson**, who reportedly retired Feb. 28, has gained the new title "editorial page editor emeritus" on the *RG* masthead. "Emeritus" is a title usually given to honor retired academics and clerics. What's it mean on Chad Drive?

For clarification we emailed Jack at his old *RG* email address. "The title means nothing, except that I've been around for a while," he replied. Is it true, as we've heard, he's still working at *The RG* part-time? "Nope." Another rumor around town is he may now wind up working nearly full time, Wilson didn't reply to an email asking if that is true.

• It was clear at the March 2 City Club of Eugene program "**Lunch with Mayor Lucy Vinis**" that the mayor is truly enjoying her full-time job, which pays about \$20,000 a year. She talked about the February goal-setting sessions where she and the City Council emphasized three critical issues: housing, homelessness and public safety. The mayor's previous professional life dealt with homelessness. "The scale of our needs outweighs the scale of our responses," she said.

• **City Councilor Chris Pryor's idea of including feral cats** in a possible city ban on feeding wildlife has the hackles up on local cat advocates. *EW* asked Pryor to clarify. "I'm interested in including feral cats in the conversation because they have a nuisance aspect," he said. "But I am not necessarily committed to pushing a ban on feeding them if an effective alternative to the nuisances can be implemented."

Pryor says wants to learn more about trap/neuter/release. While he sees cats being fed, he doesn't see anyone catching and neutering the ones in his neighborhood. "I've also not seen any of the letter writers take responsibility for the large amounts of cat poop that appear on porches, planting beds and lawns," he says.

The councilor says the poop and urine are killing his plants despite his use of deterrents. "If you want to assume the responsibility of feeding the cats, then assume the responsibility to neuter them and manage their impact on others."

According to Pryor, the language the city is exploring would not ban feeding but would give a warning and citation when the actions of the feeders damage other people's property. A City Council discussion is tentatively scheduled for noon, April 11. Cat lovers can weigh in via email at mayorcouncilandcitymanager@ci.eugene.or.us.

• **The passing of M*A*S*H star David Ogden Stiers** at age 75 at his home in Newport March 3 launched sadness and nostalgia, both for the man and for the TV series, which ran for 11 years. Stiers studied drama at Juilliard and was a lover of classical music, just like his television character Maj. Charles Emerson Winchester III. He was resident conductor of the Newport Symphony Orchestra. Locally, actor and *EW* cartoonist Dan Pegoda calls Stiers "a very very sweet man. My mom remembers meeting him at 5th Street Market years ago." Pegoda stays Stiers' aunt, Muriel Newsam, "was the premiere hair dresser, make-up artist" at Very Little Theatre. "He supported us all here in Eugene." The VLT says Stiers is an honorary member; the actor got his start there with roles in *Golden Fleecing*, *You Can't Take It With You* and *The Pleasure of His Company*.

• **All of us who care about public education in Oregon** need to listen up when the Legislature's Joint Committee for Student Success announces its schedule for travel around the state in the months ahead. This committee will listen to parents, teachers, students, educators and community partners for their ideas on improving graduation rates and other parts of public education in our state. *EW* constantly advocates for more teacher time per student. We hope that's the message the legislative roadshow hears.