

In the Middle of a Fight

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

ership Forum, the Coalition of Communities of Color, Good in the Hood, COFA Alliance National Network, Diverse and Empowered Employees of Portland, and the Native American Youth and Family Center.

Joy Davis, executive director of the Portland African American Leadership Forum, stated her support for the reforms in a letter to the mayor and city council.

She described the benefits of a

new inclusive process of decision making in Portland that “puts into the center communities that have been historically excluded and/or disproportionately impacted by decisions made in the past.”

For more than a year, a 25-member volunteer committee has worked on provisions for revising the code surrounding the city’s 94 neighborhood associations. In her online blog, Eudaly addressed a recent delay in presenting the proposal to the full city council after strong opposition by

neighborhood associations, saying a new date of Nov. 14 has been designated for its approval which would allow the council more time to consider the changes and have a “public conversation” before the council votes on the final package.

But Mapps argues that there should have been more of a public process before now.

“Clearly residents feel like they haven’t been heard and had a fair chance to participate in this discussion,” he said. “I also wor-

ry and don’t understand why the city isn’t focusing on trying to strengthen neighborhood associations instead of taking a step away from them. I’m utterly mystified by that.”

Mapps said the current process has missed opportunities to fix things in the code that are broken.

“For example, no one is happy with the grievance process for neighborhood associations and many neighborhood associations want to do creative new things, like partner with business associations that could be really exciting and innovative,” he said. “But you can’t do those because of restrictions placed in the current code. We should go in and change that so our neighborhood associations can reinvent themselves for the 21st century.”

Mapps also objects to Eudaly’s changes to the city’s former Crime Prevention Program, which oversees Neighborhood Watch programs by changing its name to Community Safety and eliminating foot patrols led by Portland police.

“Public safety is a partnership between the police, the city, the county, the district attorney and the public, and any time you say, ‘You’re not part of the safety solution,’ it’s like trying to box with one hand tied behind your back,” he said.

Mapps said pushing the police out of the discussion is similar to reducing the impact of neighborhood associations without first trying to find a consensus among all the players.

“It really does take a whole village to make a village safer,” he said. “In the meantime, when we exclude people from the table – a theme that some up over and over again at City Hall – we are literally undermining our own process here.”

The city bureau that covers neighborhood associations was called the Office of Neighborhood Involvement when it was headed by Commissioner Amanda Fritz and now is the Office of Community and Civic Life under Eudaly. The two have publicly feuded over the proposed code changes, with Eudaly accusing Fritz of “gross mismanagement” when she oversaw the bureau.

Eudaly has said that the purpose of the code change is to bring more Portlanders into the fold to influence city decisions. A one-page flyer on the city website with the heading, “The Impact of the Code Change,” states that the office “must work to fortify new avenues for communities who historically haven’t walked the path limited to those with privilege.”

The flyer states that the updated code will direct the city to invest in and work with organizations that promote the common good, establish a new foundation for a more racially and socially inclusive Portland, and empower the office of Civic Life to work more closely with other city bureaus.

Eudaly said she is building on former Mayor Tom Potter’s work to revise the neighborhood association code a decade ago. She is also responding to a 2016 audit of the bureau that said the bureau was not doing a good job of engaging all the city’s residents. Mayor Ted Wheeler assigned Eudaly the task of revamping the department.

But Mapps said the discord around the code change, which has not received support from other commissioners, has made the current effort unworkable.

“I really think we might have to start the process all over,” he said. “The process is tainted and I see a lack of trust on both sides of the table. It’s worth putting in the time to get this right. If we don’t, we run the risk of doing real harm to the public trust.”

Neighborhood associations aren’t perfect, Mapps said, but they are required to not be discriminatory and he’s concerned those protections might disappear with the proposed changes.

“If we wash our hands of the neighborhood association family, the city really loses its ability to demand that (they) are inclusive,” he said. “I think it’s important to get this right and the first step is that we begin to listen to each other again.”

Mapps said the issue has been so contentious that many people think the end result will be inadequate.

“It’s a bad process and a bad product,” he said.

Others disagree, such as Amanda Manjarrez, director of advocacy at the Latino Network.

“Latino Network supports the code change because we believe that broadening opportunities for marginalized communities to engage directly with city government is a clear starting point to making our city more welcoming and inclusive,” she said.

Marcus Mundy, another supporter and the executive director of the Coalition of Communities of Color, was a member of the committee charged with working on recommendations to the code.

“Each proposed change reflects the committee’s desire to include more residents into the process of government and, despite a surfeit of misinformation to the contrary, does not remove neighborhood associations from participation or consideration,” Mundy wrote. “What it specifically does, however, is to extend the privilege and right of civic engagement to more residents.”



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