

Audit Critical of Police during Protests

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

There were several areas that “hindered the city’s ability to hold officers accountable,” the report states, including the fact that the amount of force used by Portland officers was “unprecedented,” force incidents were inadequately documented, lack of access to Police Bureau records, and crowd management policies were seen as misconduct by citizens.

The use of tear gas was a flash point for protestors, and a report by Physicians for Human Rights claims that local and federal law enforcement specifically targeted volunteer medics.

When Mayor Ted Wheeler directed the police bureau to stop using tear gas for crowd control in September of 2020, law enforcement leaders claimed they were deprived of a “valuable tool,” the report states, but that “Oregon legislators were unmoved” and in their 2021 session, the state lawmakers passed bills limiting the use of tear gas for crowd control.

Officers documented more than 6,000 uses of force during the protests, according to the report, but “struggled to build criminal cases” and officer actions often swept up and arrested innocent bystanders and collected and stored surveillance information on them.

Those actions led to a main criticism of the report, that police collected information about



A George Floyd mural graces the outside of the Apple store at Pioneer Place during a period of daily protests in July 2020. (Photo by Emma Berger/Wikipedia Commons.)

protestors not connected to any crimes, and “kept some private information for too long,” Hull Caballero said citizen complaints that prompted the report “were valid.”

Chris Bushick, director of PDX Privacy, is calling for regulations by way of a new city surveillance ordinance.

“You shouldn’t have your name, photo and license number on a secret database just because you stood on a corner holding a sign,” Bushnick said.

Police collected information on people with no claim of criminal activity that included photos, videos, license plate numbers and social media posts, and some of that information could still be in police records, Hull Caballero said, and

she didn’t know if those records have been purged or not.

The lack of directives on how police should gather information is a major problem, the report states. It makes six recommendations to ensure better police accountability during protests, including better procedures and training, learning de-escalation techniques, adapting better record keeping and reviews of force incidents and adapting crowd control management techniques.

City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, the City Council’s first Black female member, added that more work is needed to keep police from abusing their power.

“This audit shows that problematic behavior from PPB’s past relating to the unconstitutional sur-

veillance of activists is continuing and that is unacceptable,” Hardesty said in response to a question from the Portland Observer.

“This emphasizes the importance of our work to pass the strongest ban on facial recognition technology in the nation,” she said. “This audit highlights that PPB is using 21 types of surveillance technology governed by no written policy, so clearly we have more work to do. I’m calling for a work session with my colleagues to examine this audit and create a game plan for constitutional policing that respects our basic rights, which is imperative to building the trust that is the cornerstone of community safety.”

Teressa Raiford, Black founder and executive director of Don’t

Shoot Portland, told the Portland Observer that she has worked with Hull Caballero in promoting information on the report and plans to hold meetings on the report for the public.

“I want to present a workshop so people can look at the report and ask questions of the auditor directly, and have been working on a plan in bringing it to the public in a town hall presentation,” she said. “We will soon get a date set so people can hear directly from them.”

In a letter to Hull Caballero attached to the report, Police Chief Charles Lovell laid out plans to work with an independent consultant on a critical assessment of police actions during the protests, which he anticipates will lead to “recommendations to policy and training.” He wrote that several other reviews, including one by the Citizen Review Committee, would help with the assessment. Lovell wrote that although he agrees “in principal” with the auditor’s report, he didn’t commit to concrete actions.

“As we don’t currently have a full-time crowd control team, we are going to defer to the results of upcoming critical assessment before we commit to any specific actions,” he wrote. “This will ensure we use our valuable training resources most efficiently be minimizing the number of times we make changes to our policies.”

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