



CITY OF TROUTDALE

Citizens Advisory Committee

MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday, June 3, 2020 | 7:00 p.m.

Troutdale Police Community Center – Kellogg Room

234 SW Kendall Ct – Troutdale, OR 97060

Public comments are welcome at any time during the meeting.

1. **Call to Order, Roll Call, & Pledge of Allegiance**
2. **Public Comment**
3. **Discussion Items**
 - i. Review CAC Meeting Minutes from May 6, 2020 meeting.
 - ii. Council Appointed Task - Election Reform
5. **Department Report**
 - i. CAC Project Updates: Event Permitting, Public Comment, Community Survey
6. **Committee Comments**
7. **Adjourn**

Next Regular Meeting:

Wednesday, July 1, 2020 | 7:00 p.m. | Troutdale Police Department

This meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodations for persons with disabilities should be made at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to the Planning Division (planning@troutdaleoregon.gov or 503-665-5175)

Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

Wednesday, May 6, 2020 | 7:00 p.m.

Held virtually via Zoom

Public comments are welcome at any time during the meeting.

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, & Pledge of Allegiance

Present: Will Knight (Chair)
Timothy Erich
Alexander Lumiere
Shelly Reynolds
Kyle Schwab
Chris Barney
Heidi Hinshaw
Diane Castillo-White
Victoria Rizzo

Excused: None

Staff: Arini Farrell, Associate Planner
Amber Shackelford, Administrative Assistant
Melissa Bocarde, Independent Contractor/Transcriptionist

Members of
the Public: Zach Hudson
Dave Ripma
Paul Wilcox

The Meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Vice Chair Schwab and Roll Call was held. The Pledge of Allegiance was tabled since the meeting was being held remotely via Zoom.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Discussion Items

- A. Council Appointed Task - Election Reform
 - i. Presentation by Dr. Jim Moore, Pacific University

Dr. Moore presented information about Plurality Voting. In this system, the winner is someone with 50% of the vote plus one. In Oregon, the voting norm is that there is a primary election for nonpartisan races and that if there are more than 2 candidates, the top 2 move forward to the November election unless one gets 50% + 1 vote in the primary election.

Mr. Hudson explained that the current election system in Troutdale is that there are 6 City Council positions but that they do not represent districts. All members are at large and 3 seats are open during

each voting cycle. Interested candidates must declare which position they are seeking and are voted on by all of the City's electorate.

The City Council has asked the CAC to address whether to entertain a motion to move to a new system of voting, a "Top 3 System" where all candidates run in a pool. Citizens vote for 3 candidates and the top 3 are elected to the open positions. Dr. Moore said he would address the effects of this system of voting which also happens to be the form used by Forest Grove.

First, it does not seem to bring new people in to run for public office. The people who win tend to be well-known and incumbents. The third and fourth candidates are the people who are newer to the system. In political science, this voting system is intended to create a multimember single district which has a much better chance of getting other points of view into the system. However, it's not clear that this works in reality. For example, Portland uses this system in its Neighborhood Associations but it seems to attract the same people who would have been involved regardless. Instead, people recruit candidates either people in office or community groups.

Dave Ripma was recognized by Vice Chair Schwab to speak regarding the issue. Mr. Ripma has been a City Council member since 1993. He explained that Troutdale adopted its current election system in a charter amendment in 1976 and before that, it had used a Top 3 System. He is a staunch advocate for the current election system. He believes that it is under review because some citizens are concerned that sometimes a candidate has no opponent and does not need to spend money and time on an election. However, he does not feel that citizens are being short-changed since it means that the incumbent candidate is seen as doing a good job and no one wants to oppose him or her. Changing this system would require candidates to run expensive campaigns each time. This also attracts big money and outside interests that oppose the incumbent candidate.

He also doesn't think that the counselors are as accountable to the voters if they aren't able to be directly opposed. If someone wants a person to lose office, they can run against that person to try to replace them. As a result, all of the counselors are much more accountable to voters. Top 3 Voting is more of a popularity contest. Therefore, he encouraged the CAC not to move forward with recommending voting reform.

Dr. Moore added that Multnomah County did find that Top 3 elections were as Mr. Ripma described—expensive and competitive. However, when someone was elected, that person had a better sense of who the electorate was as a result of campaigning. It did not tend to attract new people to run for office, so if this is the intent of changing to this system, the City will still need to attract candidates willing to run against the incumbent. He suggested that the CAC consider the end goal of whatever election system they decide to use before making changes. For example, are they seeking better representation of community members or a better council?

Ms. Castillo-White said that the City Council has 5 first-termers so new candidates are being elected. For some reason, the Mayor is not included in this mix.

Mr. Barnett stated that he didn't think it was necessary to fix something that isn't broken. He pointed out that both counselors are firmly supported and will continue to be, and he predicts this will punish someone financially who is forced to run against opponents that are a long shot. He asked if anyone remembered why the City returned to traditional elections in 1976. He understands Mr. Wilcox's viewpoint that no one should run unopposed, but he feels this is because they're doing a good job and the citizens realize it. He suggested not wasting the Council's time with a recommendation for a change.

Vice Chair Schwab recognized Mr. Hudson to present his slide presentation and support for Top 3 Elections.

Mr. Hudson stated that while he did not know why the election system changed in 1976, he feels that implementing Top 3 Voting—also known as Plurality at Large or Block Voting --will provide more choice to voters. Troutdale's City Council has defined seats even though the city isn't divided into districts to be represented. As a result, these separate races limit voter choice and encourage rivalry and negativity.

For example, in Top 3 Voting, a person puts their name forward without choosing who they will run against. In the current election system, the challenger has more control than the incumbent to shape what the future City Council will look like by deciding who to run against rather than allowing voters to select their top candidates.

Also, if multiple challengers can have one unopposed incumbent, it limits choice since more candidates are stacked up for one seat. Conversely, in a second scenario when there are 3 incumbents and 3 challengers, this encourages candidates to build coalitions. There can be 3 different races with pairs of candidates who team up with each other or fall into ideological camps and exacerbate tensions while limiting voter choice. Third, there could be one open seat which everyone lines up for instead of running against Incumbents A and B who are harder to challenge.

In each scenario, the voter isn't able to pick their favorite 3 people to elect since the candidates decide who their opponents are rather than voters deciding who they like most. Also, under the current system, there are only 8 possible combinations of councilors that can be elected rather than 20 different combinations possible as a result of Top 3 Voting.

Finally, if no one runs, the Council would need to appoint someone to fill the vacancy. Top 3 Voting addresses this issue.

Top 3 Voting is used throughout Oregon including in Forest Grove. It is tried and tested. Paul Wilcox collected more than 500 signatures for a ballot to introduce the topic to a vote, so there is definitely community support for it.

Mr. Hudson pointed out that special interests could influence an election however, this is also possible in the current voting model in which big spenders can back candidates. However, Top 3 Voting prevents an opponent from being targeted by someone who wants that person out. As a result, Counselors won't need to worry as much about being voted off when they make an unpopular decision.

Also, he does not believe that an incumbent running unopposed necessarily means that all agree this person is doing a good job. There might be people who need to be replaced, but the voters are never able to get an opportunity to vote to replace them.

In summary, Top 3 Voting offers voters more choices and does not create any problems that don't already exist in the current voting system, which he feels is popular because it protects incumbents, not voters.

Ms. Farrell recognized Mr. Ripma to speak in support of the current voting system. He explained that he felt most of the possible voting scenarios were theoretical and that there is not a problem with voter choice. He disagrees that this system is less negative and less competitive. It's important that someone interested in being on the City Council gets to know the electorate and the issues confronting the community. Also, in reality you do know who you run against, and this means that someone can be specifically targeted by people who disagree with them, which is a good thing.

He also felt that changing to the Top 3 system would favor big financial interests in running a slate. In 2014, he defeated a well-financed opponent by running a hard race, but he would not have been able to compete with the type of funding a slate can offer.

He also feels that letting the 4th choice win if no one else runs is not a good solution. Instead, if the Council needs to appoint someone, that person would still need to run in the next election so they would ultimately be responsible to the electorate. Finally, he commented that the current slate is a very strong Council and he is happy to be part of it.

Dr. Moore commented that accountability is crucial for both models. He feels that Mr. Hudson had a lot of interesting iterations but there would probably never be 20 possible voter choices. He suggested that the CAC members decide what they hope to accomplish. He suggested they ask whether things are working because of or in spite of the voting system.

Mr. Hudson said that candidates don't know who they will run against because they don't know who will declare after they declare. In 2010, he and Rich Allen faced off against each other totally unintentionally and he bowed out of the race to endorse him, but it was too late for Mr. Hudson to run for a different seat. Why shouldn't the voters have been able to vote for them both instead of only one of them?

Mr. Lumiere asked Dr. Moore if in his experience, he has seen changing from one election system to another to be overwhelmingly beneficial. He also pointed out that the voters of 2020 are very different from those voting in 1976. Dr. Moore answered that since people don't personally know the candidates any more, this can be a reason to move to voting by seat. However, in terms of whether it makes any beneficial differences, he feels that while the change is happening it's possible to get someone new elected, but after an election cycle, it all settles down to the same people in the system.

Mr. Allen commented that he can see the truth in Mr. Hudson's presentation but that it misses the bigger picture. People don't tend to be passionate about a single issue in Troutdale. They often run because they benefit from the city in some financial way such as having business with the City. Since there are no campaign funding limits, someone can spend a great deal of money to influence an election, and he feels that introducing this new system would create a popularity contest.

Dr. Moore remarked that Top 3 voting offers a better chance for minority opponents to turn out because they don't need to compete for a single seat. However, he suggested that if inclusivity is the issue, there are better ways to accomplish this goal than changing to Top 3 Voting.

Ms. Castillo-White commented that all of the cities in Multnomah County use the same system as Troutdale except for Maywood Park. She also has attended the League of Cities meetings and asked Happy Valley why they use Top 3 Voting, and she learned that they switched because the population is growing and it seemed like a good idea, but they are thinking of switching back. She feels that negativity and rivalry are going to happen in any type of election, but she agrees with Mr. Allen that since it's no longer a question of campaigning door to door, candidates can use social media to promote a slate of candidates. She feels it's important to continue voting for individuals instead.

Mr. Barnett said that he doesn't feel the benefits of changing the systems outweigh the disruption it would cause.

Mr. Erich asked about candidate psychology. 2 people going against each other seems more confrontational and he wondered if having a top 3 system would encourage people who are more

introverted to get involved. Mr. Erich stated that he became involved because he remembered City Council meetings had been very controversial and he wanted to add some peace to the proceedings.

Ms. Hinshaw asked Mr. Hudson his main reason for championing changing voting systems. He answered that unlike Mr. Wilcox, who wants to end having unopposed candidates, it's about allowing voter choice. He sees this would allow people to vote for their top 3 candidates.

Mr. Allen commented that as the City's budget gets larger and there is more money at stake, the campaigns are less about individual personalities and more about what is at stake.

Mr. Erich thanked the presenters. He suggested that since there are good arguments on both sides, why not let the voters decide whether or not to change systems.

Mr. Ripma said that was fine, but Mr. Wilcox wasn't able to get the number of signatures required in order to put it on the ballot. This is why he's taken it directly to the City Council. Mr. Ripma doesn't think that changing processes is a good idea unless it's a very good idea since Top 3 voting is harmful for the reasons he stated earlier. However, if the CAC thinks it's a good idea for the Council to pursue it, he accepts that. He stated again that the fix is worse than having an occasional unopposed councilor.

Ms. Rizzo commented that she does not think changing voting systems is a good idea, particularly if the City is headed towards an economic recession due to Covid. However, she is willing to put it to the voters.

Ms. Castillo-White noticed that this has already been discussed in the Council on 4 occasions and that the minutes document substantive conversations. She does not recommend that the Council consider this change.

Mr. Barney said that this has been brought up many times and shot down which speaks volumes. If people wanted voting to change, it would have happened a long time ago.

Mr. Hudson replied that Top 3 Voting was only voted on 2 years ago as part of a slate of changes. There was never a referendum on Top 3 Voting. This is the first time it has been truly discussed.

Mr. Brown asked what the difference is between it being discussed at the Council and recommended for discussion by the CAC at Council. Mr. Ripma said it hasn't been included because the Councilors didn't think it was a good idea to recommend it to voters. Mr. Hudson replied that it has only been on the agenda twice and that the reason it hasn't moved forward for more discussion is because the Council has suppressed it.

Ms. Reynolds asked if Mr. Wilcox could continue to collect signatures for a ballot initiative. Mr. Hudson said it would be impossible for him to visit enough households during Covid isolation to collect 1100 signatures.

It was agreed that discussion would continue at the June meeting.

B. Review CAC Meeting Minutes from March 4, 2020 meeting.

Heidi Hinshaw's name was spelled incorrectly. Chair Knight clarified that on page 2, the federal definition of broadband is 25 down and 3 up.

Mr. Erich moved to accept the minutes as amended and Ms. Rizzo seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Census Bus Event Planning

The discussion has been tabled and the event is canceled due to Covid.

4. Department Report

Ms. Farrell reported that Staff have been working remotely since Governor Brown declared a State of Emergency due to Covid. However, this has not interfered with their operations, and they have received several building and land use permit applications.

The Parks Advisory committee will be discussing whether to meet next week and move forward with the Master Plan. They will discuss with the architects how to move forward with the URA site since the funding will be different than what was originally budgeted.

The City is not disconnecting or charging late fees on utility payments during the State of Emergency.

Ms. Rizzo said that the Parks Committee would like to hold a joint meeting with the CAC. Ms. Farrell said that this has been postponed. Ms. Rizzo also mentioned that when the Census Outreach event is rescheduled it will not need to be at Sam Cox Elementary since there won't be a bus, and it can be held in the Kellogg Room if that is more convenient.

5. Committee Comments

Mr. Wheaton thanked Mr. Hudson and Mr. Ripma for their discussion and said it clarified some items for him. He also appreciates their service. He personally has issues with how the Council votes but does not think that changing to Top 3 voting would be helpful. Ms. Hinshaw said that she would be happy to brainstorm ideas remotely with other CAC members about future projects. Mr. Brown announced that volunteers are needed to distribute food on Tuesdays from 1-5 p.m. at Reynolds High School. Interested volunteers should arrive wearing a mask and gloves. Ms. Castillo-White reported that she had Covid and it lasted for about 45 days but that she is recovered now. Mr. Lumiere and Mr. Erich thanked Dr. Moore and Mr. Hudson for their presentations. Chair Knight reported that it was good to see everyone and that he appreciated Vice Chair Schwab facilitating the first Zoom meeting. Ms. Rizzo reported that Summerfest had been canceled due to Covid.

6. Adjourn

Ms. Rizzo moved to adjourn the meeting and Chris seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

Next Regular Meeting:

Wednesday, June 3, 2020 | 7:00 p.m. | Troutdale Police Department

Due to safety precautions regarding COVID-19, the meeting will be held virtually via zoom, if the public wish to join, please email arini.farrell@troutdaleoregon.gov for a link to the meeting.