



# Portland Charter Commission Fact Sheet

## **What is the Portland Charter Commission?**

In November 2008, Portland voters approved the establishment of a Charter Commission to investigate potential changes to Portland's City Charter. The Commission includes nine elected members and three members appointed by the City Council. Since June 2009, the Charter Commission has met at least twice per month to consider whether changes should be made to Portland's form of government.

## **What is the Charter Commission recommending?**

After extensive input from members of the public and municipal experts, the Commission issued its Preliminary Report on May 21<sup>st</sup> recommending three separate Charter changes:

- Question 1: Would allow for a popularly elected, full-time Mayor
- Question 2: Would strengthen the roles and responsibilities of the School Committee
- Question 3: Would make technical changes to clarify and update the Charter

## **Why is the Commission recommending a full-time, elected Mayor?**

Currently, Portland's City Council annually chooses one of its members to serve as mayor for a largely ceremonial one-year term. The Commission believes this system should change to permit Portland voters to directly elect our Mayor for a four-year term.

- Direct election by the voters ensures that our Mayor is directly accountable to the people.
- Direct election establishes the Mayor as the policy and political leader of Portland both locally and on the regional and national level.
- A directly elected mayor provides the leadership needed to enable Portland to respond to change in an increasingly complex and fast-moving world.

## **The elected Mayor will be Portland's political leader.**

The elected Mayor will be Portland's political leader and chief representative. The Mayor will articulate and further the city's vision; give an annual State of the City address; continue to chair Council meetings and vote as a member of the Council; oversee implementation of City policies; direct preparation and facilitate adoption of City budgets; lead the process for hiring, dismissal and evaluation of the City Manager, Corporation Counsel, and City Clerk; and be responsible for appointing City Council and ad hoc committees.

## **The City Manager will continue to manage Portland's day-to-day operations.**

Portland's City Manager will remain as the City's chief executive officer. The Manager will continue to draft the City budget and oversee day-to-day operations in Portland. Across the United States, nearly two-thirds of all City Manager forms of government allow for direct election of their mayor.

## **The Mayor's salary will be benchmarked to median household income.**

As proposed, the Mayor's salary would be set by the City Council at a level at least equal to 1.5 times Portland's median household income, plus customary City benefits. If the election were held today, the minimum salary would be \$67,359.

## **The Mayoral term will be four years, starting November 2011.**

The Mayor would assume the at-large City Council seat up for election in November 2011. The Mayor's term would be for four years and be limited to two consecutive four-year terms. With a four-year term, the Mayor will have enough time to implement the vision articulated to voters during the mayoral election.

## **Election of the Mayor will require a majority vote of the people.**

The Mayor should speak for a majority (at least 50%) of Portland voters. The Commission determined that the best way to accomplish this was to elect the Mayor through “Ranked Choice Voting.” Under RCV, voters rank the mayoral candidates on the ballot in order of preference. If one candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, that person is the winner. If no candidate receives 50%, then the last place candidate is automatically dropped off and that candidate’s second-choice votes are redistributed to the remaining candidates. This process continues until one candidate receives a majority of the vote. RCV avoids the need for time-consuming and expensive runoff elections, and promotes greater civility in campaigns.

## **What recommendations are being made concerning the School Committee?**

The Commission focused on improving the relationship between the School Committee and City Council, particularly with regard to the School Budget process. Recommendations include adding “sound fiscal management” to the School Committee’s responsibilities; requiring regular budgetary meetings between the two organizations; requiring a regular address to the City Council on the State of the School system; establishing parity between the pay scales of the City Council and the School Committee; and changing the name of the School Committee to the “Board of Public Education.”

## **What technical changes to the Charter are being recommended?**

Since the Charter has not been reviewed in almost 25 years, many details are out of date or require clarification. Based on suggestions submitted by all city departments, the Commission recommends various language and administrative changes to the Charter. Most changes are technical. The primary substantive change is to modify the recall process for district councilors and school committee members by requiring: (1) signatures to recall a district member come only from voters in that member’s district; (2) the number of petition signatures required to recall a district member be one-half of that required for at-large members; and (3) only district voters may vote in a recall election for a district member.

## **How can I comment on the Commission’s recommendations?**

On *May 21, 2010*, the Commission published a Preliminary Report on its recommendations, copies of which are available at <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/charter/chartercommission.asp>, at City Hall, and the Portland Public Library. The public is invited to comment on the recommendations. On *June 10*, there will be a public hearing on this Preliminary Report in City Council chambers, and by *July 8*, the Commission will pass its final set of recommendations and submit them to the City Council. The public will then vote on those recommendations at the November 2010 election.

### **Members of the Portland Charter Commission**

Pamela Plumb, Appointed, Chair  
James Cohen, At-Large, Vice Chair  
James Gooch, At-Large, Secretary  
Benjamin Chipman, District One

Robert O’Brien, District 2  
Laurie Davis, District 3  
John Spritz, District 4  
Richard Ranaghan, Jr., District 5

Nathan Smith, At-Large  
Anna Trevorrow, At-Large  
Naomi Mermin, Appointed  
Tom Valteau, Appointed

*Contact information is listed on the Commission’s web page. Questions and comments may also be sent to the Commission’s staff at [liz@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:liz@portlandmaine.gov). Written comments may be sent to the Charter Commission, c/o Elizabeth Boynton, 211 Portland City Hall, 389 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101.*



Prepared May 25, 2010, by the Portland Charter Commission

[www.portlandmaine.gov/charter/chartercommission.asp](http://www.portlandmaine.gov/charter/chartercommission.asp)

