

## **Evelyn's PAC Announcement** (Meeting scheduled February 16, 2021)

Dear Members of the PBOT PAC,

After much thought and consideration, I have decided to step down from the PAC. The meeting scheduled for February 16th would have been my last meeting. I acknowledge that it means that I will not be finishing out my term, of which there is about one year left.

This wasn't an easy decision to make, but I'm finding it difficult to be an active participant on the committee and bring my full and generally-optimistic self to the table. In part this is due to limited personal bandwidth, but also due to reflections on how much we have achieved over my time on the PAC -about three years now.

While I'm sure everyone here is grateful for PBOT's stellar work on PedPDX and the agency's expressed and renewed commitment to equity, **noticeable changes to pedestrian safety and experience have rolled out very slowly during this time. Pedestrian-centered infrastructure has not kept to pace with increases to the number of Portland drivers, vehicles on the road, public safety concerns, cultural shifts, environmental emergencies, and public health crises.**

While there is no singular solution to addressing all of these external factors, there are many things I wish the agency were doing -or at least discussing more proactively and aggressively in light of all of these extenuating circumstances.

I'll be honest, when I joined the PAC, I was hoping for and looking forward to having more dialogue on the types of projects that would have a noticeable impact on Portland's walkability and pedestrian experience. What I mean by this is more projects that **center** pedestrians, not just projects that include pedestrians as an (important) addition or an aside.

I probably sound like a broken record by now bringing up the need for and importance of car-free streets and public plazas. Studies show that designating public spaces is a relatively simple way to promote safe walkability, recreation, and public health, as well as provide COVID-safe outdoor seating. Most importantly, however, public spaces build community and foster democracy. Yes, democracy.

Walkability and public space are essential to democracy and community building. Public places have traditionally served as places where anyone, regardless of income or position, can meet, discuss, demonstrate and publicise their causes. The extent to which these spaces are disappearing and the effect on civic life deserves more attention, particularly as part of PBOT's commitment to equity and social justice.

While resistance may arise from some about prioritizing people on foot, I urge PBOT to take a pro-democracy and pro-pedestrian stance on these matters, working more aggressively to prioritize place-making projects that give Portlanders designated safe spaces to BE -to walk, run, hang out, build community, see and be seen, be outside in public, \*free of charge\*.

I think everyone on the PAC recognizes that PBOT requires more resources to continue general maintenance and upgrade the city's aging infrastructure. PBOT's current \$500M budget only allocates the equivalent of \$752 per capita for the 2021 budget. Budget restrictions aside, I continue to invite the

agency to call state legislators for increased funding for Vision Zero projects, all the while seeking low-budget, creative solutions to address these crises and foundational community needs -swiftly.

- Social media public service announcement campaigns would go a long way to teach drivers how to drive safely on Portland roads -and these are relatively cheap.
- Expedite testing and roll-out of city-wide bans on right turns on red.
- Perhaps partnerships with other state-agencies could get public service announcements and driving information mailed to more Portlanders, new homeowners, and new tenants to capture new arrivals to the city.
- Closing more streets to vehicular traffic to begin testing car-free public spaces will boost morale and bring hope to Portlanders of all ages desperate for safe places to be in community and in expression (talk to the street artists and performers hungry for an audience and more community-oriented public space).

Last but not least, I have also been concerned by the lack of conversation initiated by PBOT with the PAC regarding the agency's decision to reduce the width of new crosswalk striping installations by 25%. This decision, while ultimately made by one of PBOT's engineers to keep to a certain budget, raises questions regarding our role as the PAC, what projects come to us and actually have a say in, and whether PBOT does, in fact, have an internal system of checks and balances to weigh out a project's community impact versus its short-term cost savings *before being taken to construction crews*.

I hope my concerns are heard and resonate with members of the PAC as everyone continues to provide support and feedback to PBOT on their pedestrian projects and prioritization.

Concerns and constructive criticism aside, the PAC has been a source of community-oriented emotional fulfillment for me, so thank you everyone for the experience. It's reassuring to know so many of us are on the same page and care deeply about walkability. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have been in community with each of you. I have no doubt that everyone will continue the good work in our shared vision for a safer and more walkable Portland.

THANK YOU.

In community,  
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