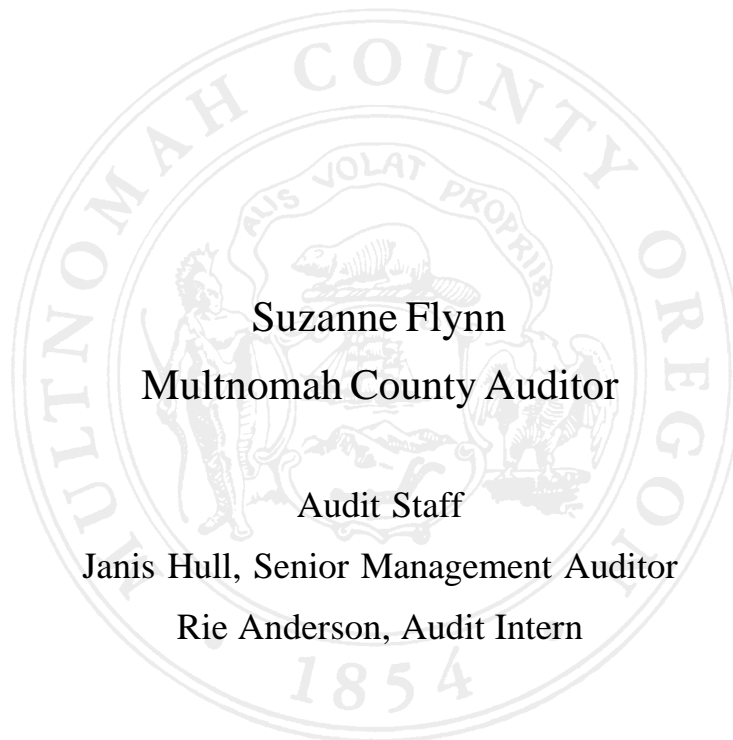


Citizen Involvement Committee

Roles Need Clarification

December 2002



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MEMORANDUM

Date: December 11, 2002

To: Diane Linn, Multnomah County Chair
Maria Rojo de Steffey, Commissioner, District 1
Serena Cruz, Commissioner, District 2
Lisa Naito, Commissioner, District 3
Lonnie Roberts, Commissioner, District 4

From: Suzanne Flynn, Multnomah County Auditor

Subject: Citizen Involvement Committee Audit

The attached report covers our audit of the Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC). This audit was added to our FY02-03 Audit Schedule at the request of the CIC and concerned citizens.

The citizens of Multnomah County approved a Charter provision in 1984 intended to improve two-way communication between the Board of County Commissioners and citizens. Based upon our review, we concluded that this provision was never implemented effectively.

During this review, we identified models for citizen involvement in other jurisdictions that could guide the improvement of the County's efforts and that would work within the existing CIC framework.

We are recommending that the Chair's Office appoint a task force that includes all stakeholders (CIC, Central Budget Advisory Committee, Public Affairs Office, and the staff of the Chair's, Commissioners', and CIC Offices) to determine how best to strengthen these efforts.

We have discussed our findings and recommendations with the CIC and County Chair's Office. Responses that were received are included in the report's appendix. A formal follow-up to this audit will be scheduled within one to two years.



We appreciate the cooperation and assistance extended to us by the Citizen Involvement Committee, the CIC staff, and the County Chair's Office.

Table of Contents

Summary	1
Background	3
Scope and Methodology	6
Audit Results	7
Organization of County's Citizen Involvement Program is Unclear	7
CIC role is clearer in other jurisdictions	7
CIC could be more effective	9
Citizen involvement in the County is organizationally weak	9
Recommendations	11
Responses to the Audit	12
Jim Davis, Chair CIC	13
Diane Linn, County Chair	15

The Table of Contents links to different sections of the document.

To go to a particular section or page:

- a) Place the cursor over the line that contains the section heading.
- b) Wait until the open hand  symbol changes to pointer .
- c) Click once to activate link

To return to Table of Contents use [Back to Table of Contents](#) buttons at the beginning of each section.

Summary

[Back to](#)

Citizen involvement is a multifaceted process that can have many purposes. The ways that a citizen can be involved range from receiving general information from the government to active engagement in decision-making and policy-making. Effective citizen involvement adds to the development and implementation of public policy, increases trust in government, and increases accountability. It also takes time and resources.

In 1984, citizens voted to add an amendment to the County Charter establishing an office of citizen involvement. The purpose of the office was to develop and maintain citizen involvement programs and procedures designed to facilitate communication between citizens and the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The Charter amendment also required that the BOCC establish a citizens' committee and a citizen involvement process by ordinance.

A separate program office to implement citizen involvement processes throughout the County was never established in the budget. The single budgetary entity implementing the Charter was the Citizen Involvement Committee.

In a 1995 resolution, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) stated citizen involvement was a top priority for the County and recognized the Citizen Involvement Committee as the County's lead agency in helping to develop and facilitate citizen involvement processes. We found that the Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) has not effectively assisted the county in implementing a citizen involvement system. We also found that despite the County's resolution to strengthen citizen involvement, it has not created clear avenues for citizens to become involved in county decision-making.

Our review of the CIC's work plans indicated that participation by members in the annual retreat has declined in recent years. Additionally, analysis of our survey of CIC members past and present (34% response rate with a total of 29 respondents) indicated that members are feeling less satisfied with the activities of the CIC as time goes on. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that encouraging citizen involvement in County government was the CIC's greatest value. However, one-third of respondents wished the CIC had been more active in outreach to citizens.

Based on our review, we found that a process for involving citizens and a citizen involvement committee were distinct entities in other jurisdictions in the region. In other jurisdictions, the citizen committee assists the governing body in developing and evaluating its program

to involve citizens while the government is responsible for implementing the program. Also, the citizen committee for involvement is both a watchdog and advocate for public participation.

We recommend that the Chair's Office appoint a task force to re-write the ordinance implementing the County Charter requirement. Further we recommend that the ordinance remove the CIC from actual implementation of the County's citizen involvement program and clarify its role as an advocate and monitor. The County should also create a separate program to formalize a citizen involvement program.

Background

In 1984, citizens voted to add an amendment to the County Charter establishing an office of citizen involvement. The purpose of the office was to develop and maintain citizen involvement programs and procedures designed to facilitate communication between citizens and the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The Charter amendment also required that the BOCC establish a citizens' committee and a citizen involvement process by ordinance. Further, the BOCC was directed to appropriate sufficient funds for the operation of the office and the committee. The citizens' committee was given the authority to hire and fire its own staff.

Multiple factors contributed to the decision to formalize the Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) and citizen involvement in the County's Charter. According to citizens involved in the development of the CIC, the Citizen Involvement Committee was viewed as an opportunity for citizens to establish their identity as part of the County. It was also an opportunity to enhance communication among the various advisory boards and commissions. Many community members felt excluded from decisions that were being made at the County level.

An ordinance enacting the requirements of the Charter amendment was first adopted by the BOCC in December 1984 and added to the County Code. Since that time there have been minor revisions to this ordinance regarding the CIC membership. The sections in this ordinance:

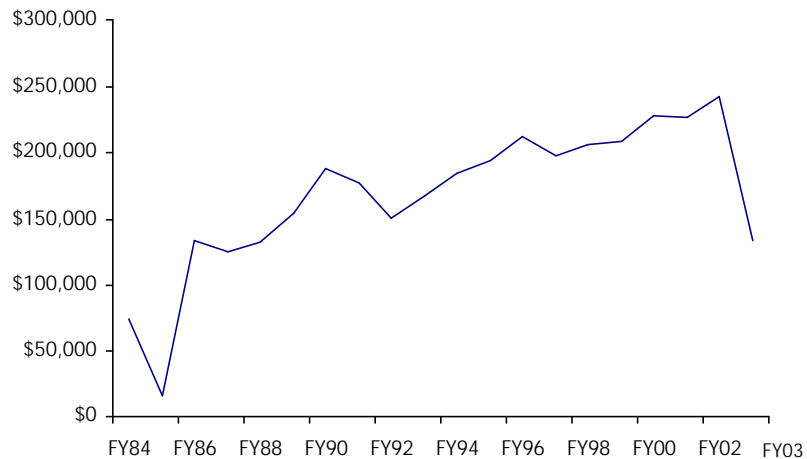
- defined the Committee's membership structure, nomination process, and term limits
- gave general guidance on Committee functions and responsibilities, legal requirements of open meetings, and federal and state legal requirements for conducting its activities and expenditures
- allocated funds for a director and secretary to the Office of Citizen Involvement and outlined its responsibilities
- required cooperation of the BOCC and County departments with the Citizen Involvement Committee and the Citizen Involvement Office in providing requested information

A separate program office to implement citizen involvement processes throughout the County was never established in the budget. The single budgetary entity implementing the Charter was the Citizen Involvement Committee. Currently, the Citizen Involvement Committee does have an office that staffs the Committee. However, the office that exists is functionally different than a separate program office, with its own budget, that is solely charged with implementing a citizen involvement program for the County. For purposes of clarity, in this report we will refer to the current budgetary structure and function as the CIC and the staff's office as the CIC's office.

From FY1985 through FY2002, the CIC's budget has increased steadily. When adjusted for inflation, the CIC budget increased by 28% from FY1990 to FY2002. However, the BOCC reduced the CIC's budget by 45% in FY2003. When this last reduction is included, the CIC budget has decreased by approximately one-third since FY1990.

Exhibit 1

Citizen Involvement Committee
Budget, FY84 to FY03
(adjusted for inflation)



While budget allocations for direct materials and supplies have decreased since FY1998, the budget allocation for staff had increased until the FY2003 budget cut. The program has maintained approximately three FTE since FY1990. The FY1990 budget provided for two staff assistants and one administrative staff. As of FY2002, the program had three staff assistants, including the Director. The director resigned after the FY2003 budget cut, and there are now two staff assistants.

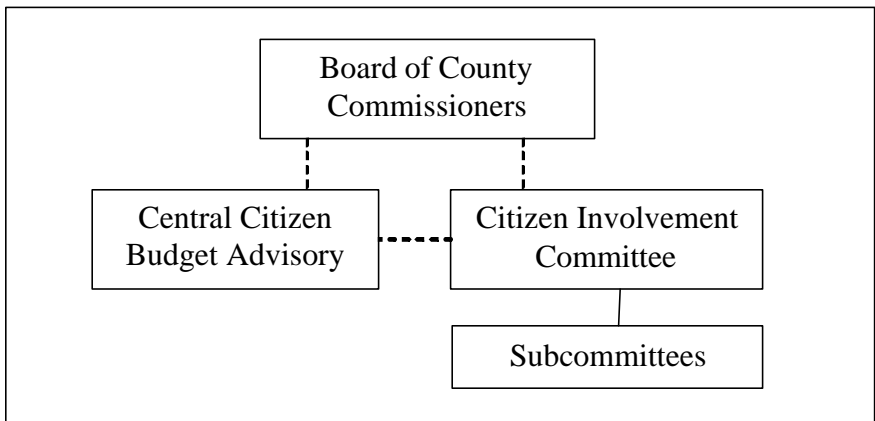
Current CIC membership is fifteen, as required by Code. Members are nominated by neighborhood and community organizations and appointed by the BOCC. Three members are to reside in each of the four commissioner districts, and there are to be three members-at-

large. The term of membership is three years with a limit of six consecutive years of service. Currently there are six vacant seats on the CIC. Two additional members are in the process of being appointed. The staff serves at the will of the CIC membership.

According to the Code, the CIC also provides technical assistance and clerical support to the Central Citizen Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC). The CCBAC was established to be independent of the CIC and was charged with making county-wide, cross-departmental recommendations to the County Chair, Commissioners, and the public. In practice, the staff of the CIC has taken on additional responsibilities and coordinates the individual Citizen Budget Advisory Committees in addition to the requirements outlined in the code. The CIC appoints a member-at-large who presides as the CCBAC Chair.

Exhibit 2

Organizational Chart
Citizen Involvement Committee



Aside from its support of the CCBAC, the CIC has completed several other volunteer and citizen involvement projects. The CIC has been acknowledged for such projects as:

- The Volunteer Awards Ceremony (FY88 – present)
- CONDUIT newsletter (FY87 – present)
- Multnomah County Service Directory (FY86 – FY98)
- Citizen Involvement Handbook (FY88)
- GIS pilot project initiated to help citizens identify neighborhood services and siting issues (1996-2002)

- Instrumental in facility siting ordinance (FY99)
- "Citizens Involved" monthly cable television show on County issues (FY96 – FY01)

As a result of CIC's efforts, publications assisting citizens in understanding the County and ways to participate have been completed. Some of the projects were discontinued due to budget cuts.

Scope and Methodology

The purpose of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of citizen involvement in Multnomah County through the Citizen Involvement Committee. We were requested to provide an objective review of the CIC's function, the County's role in citizen involvement, and the CIC's future role in the County. We reviewed pertinent State laws, County ordinances, and CIC by-laws. We also reviewed historical documents of the CIC.

The audit team interviewed CIC staff, County Commissioners and their staff, CIC members, and CCBAC members. We also conducted mail surveys of CIC and CCBAC members. We interviewed staff and collected documentation from other related organizations and programs. General research was done on the topics of citizen participation and involvement.

The Program's policies and procedures were reviewed, as were documents and publications produced by the CIC. We reviewed CIC brochures and pamphlets, training materials, newsletters, and various reports. We did a review of other models and jurisdictions locally and nationally. Criteria were developed for identifying other jurisdictions involved in similar programs for citizen involvement.

The audit was not included in our FY2001-2002 audit schedule, but was initiated upon the request of the CIC and concerned citizens. The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Audit Results

Organization of
County's Citizen
Involvement
Program is Unclear

According to our research, government interest in citizen involvement in public decision-making has increased in recent years. This interest is a result of several factors including diminished trust of government, concern over citizen apathy, and a growing recognition that decision-making without citizen participation is ineffective.

Citizen involvement is a multifaceted process that can have many purposes. The ways that a citizen can be involved range from receiving general information from the government to active engagement in decision-making and policy-making. Effective citizen involvement adds to the development and implementation of public policy, increases trust in government, and increases accountability. It also takes time and resources.

In a 1995 resolution, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) stated citizen involvement was a top priority for the County and recognized the Citizen Involvement Committee as the County's lead agency in helping to develop and facilitate citizen involvement processes. We found that the Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) had not effectively assisted the County in implementing a citizen involvement system. And, despite the County's resolution to strengthen citizen involvement, avenues for citizens to become involved in, or to participate in, County decision-making were lacking.

CIC role is clearer in
other jurisdictions

Based on our review, we found that a process for involving citizens and a citizen involvement committee were distinct entities in other regional jurisdictions. In the tri-county area, Clackamas and Washington counties, the City of Gresham, and the Metro regional government all have citizen involvement committees in which the roles have been more clearly defined. We also found that a citizen involvement manual created by the state to assist jurisdictions in meeting land use planning requirements provides clear definition for the role of a citizen involvement committee and the citizen involvement program.

	Citizen Involvement Program	CIC role distinct from Program	Authority	Staff
Clackamas	Yes	Yes	By policy, 1970	1.0 FTE employee of Division
Gresham	Yes	Yes	By code, 1989	1.0 FTE employee of City Manager
Metro	Yes	Yes	By charter, 1992	1.0 FTE employee of Council Outreach
Multnomah	No	No	By charter, 1984	2.0 FTE at will of CIC
Washington	Yes	Yes	By policy, 1986	2.0 FTE through intergovernmental agreement

In each of the jurisdictions we studied, the citizen committee assists the governing body in developing and evaluating its program to involve citizens. In Gresham, the committee reviews and comments on the mayor's annual report on citizen participation. In Washington County, the administration comes to the committee if they have concerns about how to handle citizen involvement on a particular issue. In Washington County, the CIC is also designing a strategy to assess the effectiveness of citizen involvement activities using exit interviews after citizens have completed their involvement.

At Metro, which recently reorganized its chartered program, the current committee chair stated that the committee is intended to be a "watchdog" group to make sure that Metro was getting citizen input to plans. According to Metro's citizen committee's by-laws, departments are to have their plans reviewed for the quality of the citizen involvement process.

The State's "how-to" manual for citizen involvement also refers to a citizen involvement committee as a "watchdog." They note that the citizen committee for involvement plays a vital role in citizen involvement and is both a watchdog and advocate for public participation.

The authority of the CIC to hire and fire their staff protects the Committee's independence. In only one other jurisdiction was the independence of the CIC as strongly protected. In Washington County, the Administrative Office has an intergovernmental agreement with the Oregon State University Extension Office to coordinate and support citizen involvement initiatives. However, the other jurisdictions that we surveyed indicated that their committees were independent and set their own agenda. It appears that independence is also possible with other designs.

CIC could be more effective

The CIC holds a retreat annually to review its mission, set priorities, and discuss the following year's work plan. The retreats are an opportunity for members to discuss what they want to accomplish as a Committee over the next year. Our review of the work plans indicated that participation in the annual retreat by CIC members has declined in recent years. Additionally, analysis of our survey of CIC members past and present (34% response rate with a total of 29 respondents) indicated that members are feeling less satisfied with the activities of the CIC as time goes on. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that encouraging citizen involvement in County government was the CIC's greatest value. Eighty-five percent also identified that as the mission of the CIC. However, one-third of respondents wished the CIC had been more active in outreach to citizens. Furthermore, respondents that served on the CIC since 1995 reported that the CIC has become less active in representing citizen concerns to the BOCC.

The CIC continues to be involved in many activities. While many of these activities are commendable, some are not geared toward improving citizen involvement in the County or meeting the expectations of CIC members. Because the code does not clearly define the role and responsibilities of the CIC, the CIC and BOCC members alike seem to struggle with its purpose. There also appears to be a lack of shared understanding of the CIC's role among the BOCC and citizens. Without a separate County process for involving citizens in decision-making, the CIC has attempted to take on both the role of advisor and the role of implementer. As a result, resources are expended on activities that may not contribute to improved citizen involvement in the County. The ability of the CIC to objectively evaluate processes of citizen involvement is weakened by the CIC's dual role of process implementer and evaluator.

Citizen involvement in the County is organizationally weak

To be effective, a citizen involvement process must provide many opportunities for various types of involvement and these opportunities must be communicated clearly to citizens. It also requires citizen advice, on-going evaluation, and a commitment of resources. While we found that the County had some of the components for a system, they were not communicated clearly to citizens or organized so that easy access was possible.

The County has several avenues for citizen involvement. They include:

- regularly scheduled opportunities at BOCC sessions for comment on any area of concern not covered in the agenda
- public hearings on proposed BOCC decisions
- budget advisory committees

- advisory committees
- telephone or email contact directly with elected officials
- communications from programs, departments, elected officials, and the Public Affairs Office to citizens
- citizen involvement committee

Based on our review of the CIC, entry to citizen involvement opportunities is limited. For example, the only reference to citizen involvement in the telephone book is a listing for the CIC. Without an organized citizen involvement process for the CIC staff to refer to, citizens may easily become discouraged. The CIC staff stated that any inquiries about participating in advisory groups other than the CIC or a Citizen Budget Advisory Committees are referred to the Chair's Office. These in turn are referred to the separate departments by the Chair's Office staff. There is no coordinated application process. This results in citizens possibly needing to make at least three calls or talk to three different persons prior to receiving information.

Similarly, there is no mention of citizen involvement on the County's internet home page . Access to information requires searching the links. Opportunities for citizen involvement are not mentioned unless the CIC web site is opened. A link from the CIC homepage will connect the citizen with information on advisory boards and committees and a form to request information. It requires three "clicks" to access this information.

We found examples in other jurisdictions of more comprehensive, active efforts to open up channels of communication and monitor their effectiveness. Some jurisdictions define the opportunities for involvement by ordinance. Entry in some is centralized and coordinated so that a citizen can learn about the various opportunities in one place. In both Gresham and in Washington County the citizen involvement committees are evaluating citizen satisfaction with their involvement experience. Clackamas County lists all of its advisory boards and commissions on its internet site and there is a link from the front page to citizen involvement information. None of these opportunities are currently occurring in this County. However, during this audit, the CIC's office began work on updating its web page.

Recommendations

1. In order to strengthen the citizen involvement process, the Board of County Commissioners should approve an ordinance that clarifies the County's responsibility towards a citizen involvement program and the role of the Citizen Involvement Committee. The ordinance should include:
 - a. The creation of a separate citizen involvement program that is designed to organize and facilitate a citizen's ability to access paths of two-way communication with elected officials and County programs
 - b. A definition of the Citizen Involvement Committee that removes it from the actual implementation of the citizen involvement program and gives it an advisory role in the program's development and an on-going role to monitor effectiveness and recommend improvements.
2. The Multnomah County Chair's Office should implement a task force charged with re-writing the Code to more clearly define the role of the CIC and the County in implementing and evaluating citizen involvement. The task force should include the Chair of the CIC, Chair of the CBAC, lead staff person of the CIC's office, representative staff from Commissioner's Offices, representatives from the Chair's Office, and a representative from the Public Affairs Office

A follow-up report on the progress of the audit and these recommendations will be conducted in 12-16 months.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Multnomah County Auditor's Office

Responses to the Audit



Citizen Involvement Committee
MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

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December 4, 2002

Suzanne Flynn
Multnomah County Auditor
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Room 601
Portland, OR 97214

Dear Ms. Flynn,

Members of the Citizens Involvement Committee and our staff from the Office of Citizen Involvement have reviewed this report and deeply appreciate the Auditor's willingness to conduct a special audit at our request. We found the report to be mostly accurate and quite thorough, especially with its inclusion of other County offices that are natural partners in providing more effective citizen involvement. We believe the findings not only justify the concerns that prompted us to request the audit, but also validate our efforts begun at the beginning of this year to address many of those concerns, including:

- Clarifying our goals as outlined in the County Charter and Enabling Ordinance.
- Making a clearer distinction in our outreach and materials between the Office of Citizen Involvement and Citizen Involvement Committee, focusing on the Office as program implementer and the Committee as guide and performance evaluator.
- Moving the Office of Citizen Involvement to the sixth floor of the Multnomah Building to facilitate stronger partnerships with County Officials and Departments and provide easier access for citizens who are visiting County Officials.
- Assisting other County offices in their citizen outreach efforts, including development of more effective outreach strategies and gathering citizen feedback on those initiatives to help the County continuously improve its citizen involvement efforts.
- Examining the volunteer process to improve citizen access to information about, and opportunities to serve on, County Boards and Commissions, ideally consolidating the application process under the Office of Citizen Involvement.
- Overhauling our website to serve as a tool for County offices to provide better citizen involvement assistance and as a one-stop source of information and participation for citizens, including communication between citizens and County Officials.
- Creating new citizen participation vehicles like announcement and discussion lists to make it easier for citizens to learn about and give input to County decisions.
- Working with the County to have a link to our website restored on the County's


homepage so citizens can easily get information on participation opportunities. While the audit found some confusion among stakeholders about our role, it confirmed our purpose is to create vehicles for communication between citizens and County Officials and work with the County to create and communicate opportunities for citizens to participate in the policy process. To make this happen consistently and effectively, the report points out the need for ongoing citizen input, objective evaluation and a commitment of resources. Each of these areas can be improved.

We agree with the need to find better ways to objectively evaluate the work of the Office and County's citizen involvement programs over time. While we applaud existing County citizen participation efforts, particularly the efforts of Departments that work with our Office to implement an effective Citizen Budget Advisory Committee program, we should also be more forthright in encouraging and evaluating those efforts. All County Offices and Departments should operate with a citizen involvement ethic — sharing responsibility for involving citizens in policy processes — and our Office should help identify opportunities and provide needed resources and expertise to ensure this happens.

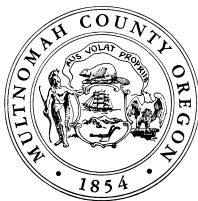
As for resources, the Chair's Office has been supportive of our projects this year, working with us to facilitate the relocation of the Office of Citizen Involvement and design a sufficient budget for its programs, asking us to co-host the recent budget workshops, and providing some County assistance in redesigning our website and outreach materials.

The audit suggests we address the need for resources and an objective structure for evaluating citizen involvement by creating a separate budget entity for the Office of Citizen Involvement and involving other County stakeholders in the design and implementation of its programs. We recognize that other County offices are already involved in formalized citizen participation efforts, and we believe it is important they continue to be partners in creating and evaluating citizen involvement programs. We look forward to talking with County Commissioners and other officials about these ideas. As our staff is doing a lot and deserves time to finish some projects before undertaking new ones, we suggest they complete the upcoming office move and be given at least a month to settle in before pulling stakeholders together.

Again, we appreciate the Auditor's willingness to undertake this audit. We believe it will be helpful as we continue to improve our programs and citizen involvement in this County.



Jim Davis, Chair
Citizen Involvement Committee



Diane M. Linn, Multnomah County Chair

December 6, 2002

Suzanne Flynn, Auditor
Multnomah County Oregon
501 SE Hawthorne, 6th Floor
Portland OR 97214

Dear Suzanne,

Thank you for your thorough and thoughtful audit of Multnomah County's Citizen Involvement program. As you know, I am very committed to finding ways to improve our efforts to effectively engage the public. As the Citizen Involvement Committee begins its transition to new office space in the Multnomah Building, I believe this is a significant opportunity to strengthen and reinvigorate our program.

As noted on page 7 of your audit, data suggests that growing apathy and an increasing lack of trust underlie much of the recent decline in citizen involvement. This trend needs to be addressed and Multnomah County must find better ways to share information about the important work we do and to create meaningful opportunities for participation in our efforts.

While we are still considering what should be the model for our program, I am pleased that we have begun to develop the practical tools which will lead to increased citizen involvement, in terms of both quantity and quality. The recent Budget Workshops are an example of the kinds involvement I believe we can accomplish. I look forward to working with CIC, the PAO, the CBAC's and the Commissioners to implement many of suggestions of this audit, including clarification of the governing Ordinance to more clearly define our respective roles.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the leadership of the CIC for requesting this audit and for their energy and perseverance over the course of the last six months. In particular, Jim Davis has been instrumental in creating the momentum and positive atmosphere from which we can continue to move forward.

Again, thank you for your willingness to assist us.

Sincerely,

Diane M. Linn

C: Board of County Commissioners
Jim Davis, CIC Chair
Kathleen Todd, Office of Citizen Involvement