

My suggestions for changing the ADPC process, within the existing structure – October 25, 2013

Drug policy is too important to the state and our shared future to neglect. We all know someone whose personal or family life has been negatively affected by substance use and abuse, and we all know that the social costs are enormous. The Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission has a responsibility to help our state address these issues in a coherent and strategically-effective manner.

Rob Bovett and other Oregonians, both on the Commission and not, have been tireless and exemplary in their advocacy for alcohol and drug policy change. But as Rob has said, piecemeal policy advocacy by individuals, ad hoc groups and task forces is not the most effective way to develop a coherent statewide, multi-stakeholder, multi-year plan. I think that was why the former Attorney General advocated for this Commission to supplant all the other policy activities.

So now we have the ADPC. I think it's fair to say that the previous attempt to establish the ADPC as a valued contributor to state policy collapsed. Not for lack of a vision. I think that past participants shared the vision of a single Policy Commission that cross-cuts departments and finds consensus solutions among competing interests. I think our present membership also shares that vision.

I think there are some structural obstacles. The statute that enables the ADPC may be one of them. It (a.) covers a lot of policy ground and (b.) establishes what I believe is an unusually large group – 28 members. (As a formerly-practicing psychologist, I can tell you that it is widely understood that the most effective group size is three to seven.) Consequently, we have a built-in challenge: excessively broad scope plus a large group size. This virtually guarantees that many topics will deeply interest only a minority of the group, demonstrably leading to collective apathy and atrophy.

Here are my suggestions to address both of these structural challenges without waiting to change the statute. I suggest these ideas for your consideration:

A. The Commission would establish for itself a set of consensus goals for Oregon policy on alcohol and other drugs. I propose the unranked list of ten goals below as a starting point:

1. Reduce or eliminate the exposure of children to drugs\*
2. Reduce the use of drugs by people of all ages
3. Reduce health risks and other harm to people who use drugs
4. Reduce harm caused by people who use drugs
5. Reduce the violence that often accompanies distribution and use of drugs
6. Reduce the number of people in jails and prisons because of drug use
7. Improve timely access to effective treatment services by people who use drugs
8. Reduce or eliminate disparities in access to drug treatment
9. Improve the value of drug use prevention programs supported by taxpayer funds
10. Improve the value of drug treatment programs supported by taxpayer funds

(\* "Drugs" includes alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, diverted pharmaceuticals, illicit drugs, inhalants, new molecules, etc.)

B. The Commission would evaluate its enabling statute and the many other legislated authorities in terms of how those authorities and implied activities relate to the framework of the consensus

goals...resulting in a prioritized list of activities and policy areas that the Commission can reasonably address.

- C. The Commission would work on the prioritized topics with staff in small committees of three to five participants. (Committee meetings would comply with Public Meeting laws.)
- D. Those small committees or staff would then bring their recommendations to the full Commission, which would not routinely meet in-person every month. (And could be conducted by teleconference, as Public Meeting laws may allow.)
- E. When these policy recommendations are brought to the full Commission, the Commission may take one or more of these actions:
  - 1. Publish a written policy recommendation to the Governor, a department of the state government, or to the Legislature.
  - 2. Address a letter of advocacy to a federal, state, or local entity, a foundation or other potential funder, or the public.
  - 3. Publish a written report about the Commission's views on a topic.
  - 4. Propose legislation to address the issue.
  - 5. Make a rule on the issue.
  - 6. Direct the issue to the Commission's Budget Advisory Committee for consultation.
  - 7. Recommend state budget changes to address the issue.
  - 8. Request information from State departments or other agencies.
  - 9. Request a presentation or discussion of the issue at a Commission meeting.
  - 10. Direct staff to study the issue and present findings to the Commission.
  - 11. Discuss the issue in a Commission meeting.

What I'm suggesting here up-ends the process the Commission followed in the past, and seemed to follow last month. My interpretation of the past process is this:

- A. Commission listens to a presentation, usually about a treatment or prevention program
- B. Commission discusses presentation
- C. Topic is dropped, or Commission refers topic to a sub-committee
- D. Subcommittee makes a recommendation; commission staff advocates for the recommendation

The process I'm proposing is this:

- A. Commission member has an interest in a topic that relates to one of the ten consensus policy goals
- B. Commission member, along with staff or committee, determines that the topic is within one of the Commission's prioritized areas (derived from the ten consensus goals), does preliminary investigation of topic, may ask a committee to work on it
- C. Commission member, staff or committee brings recommendation or work-in-progress to commission requesting one or more of the eleven possible actions listed above.
- D. Commission considers issues, takes one or more of the eleven actions above.

Agendas of the Commission would then always be filled with the explicit consideration of policy recommendations or follow-up on those. Topical presentations would still occur, but in the context of solving a policy issue, not just for general information. Information-gathering and fact-finding that occurs during full Commission meetings would be always in the context of helping the Commission make a specific decision about a specific policy issue.