

**Earning Their Keep:  
Do Elected Officials in the Portland Region Show up for Meetings?**

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April 2016

Most elected officials who serve on school boards or city councils do not get paid for service. However, for at least five governing jurisdictions in the Portland metro region, councilors do receive compensation. Those jurisdictions are: the Commissions for Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington Counties; the Portland City Council; and the Metro Council.

This research examined the attendance records for all regularly scheduled meetings for the five jurisdictions during 2014 and 2015. In some cases, there were also “board briefings” or “work sessions” to attend.

In general, most elected officials attended a high percentage of meetings, either by being present or by participating via telephone. Group participation rates usually exceeded 85%, on average.

Washington County Commissioner Greg Malinowski had the best attendance record of all elected officials over the two-year period – 100% for both years. Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack had the worst two-year record – 70% for board briefings, and 80% for board meetings. She is termed-out and not running for re-election.

Summaries of the attendance records for all elected officials are below. The numbers indicate the percent of meetings where the officials participated.

**Clackamas County Commission  
Regular Commission Meetings**

	<b>Ludlow</b>	<b>Savas</b>	<b>Schrader</b>	<b>Smith</b>	<b>Bernard</b>
<b>2014</b>	98%	100%	82%	89%	89%
<b>2015</b>	98%	95%	93%	93%	89%

**Multnomah County Commission  
Regular Commission Meetings**

	<b>Madrigal</b>	<b>Kafoury</b>	<b>McKeel</b>	<b>Wendt</b>	<b>Baily</b>	<b>Smith</b>	<b>Shiprack</b>
<b>2014</b>	100%	98%	88%	98%	86%	90%	83%
<b>2015</b>	n/a	92%	97%	n/a	89%	95%	77%

**Multnomah County Commission**  
Regular Briefings

	<b>Madrigal</b>	<b>Kafoury</b>	<b>McKeel</b>	<b>Wendt</b>	<b>Baily</b>	<b>Smith</b>	<b>Shiprack</b>
<b>2014</b>	100%	93%	83%	97%	94%	90%	70%
<b>2015</b>	n/a	100%	100%	n/a	65%	90%	70%

**Washington County Commission**  
Regular Commission Meetings

	<b>Duyck</b>	<b>Malinowski</b>	<b>Schouten</b>	<b>Rogers</b>	<b>Terry</b>
<b>2014</b>	94%	100%	87%	87%	94%
<b>2015</b>	91%	100%	91%	88%	85%

**Portland City Council**  
Regular Meetings

	<b>Hales</b>	<b>Fish</b>	<b>Fritz</b>	<b>Novick</b>	<b>Saltzman</b>
<b>2014</b>	92%	83%	92%	94%	85%
<b>2015</b>	97%	92%	97%	92%	85%

**Metro Council**  
Regular Meetings

	<b>Hughes</b>	<b>Chase</b>	<b>Craddick</b>	<b>Harrington</b>	<b>Stacey</b>	<b>Collette</b>	<b>Dirksen</b>
<b>2014</b>	84%	97%	95%	97%	97%	97%	89%
<b>2015</b>	93%	98%	95%	98%	100%	98%	93%

**Metro Council**  
Regular Work Sessions

	<b>Hughes</b>	<b>Chase</b>	<b>Craddick</b>	<b>Harrington</b>	<b>Stacey</b>	<b>Collette</b>	<b>Dirksen</b>
<b>2014</b>	85%	94%	96%	96%	96%	96%	94%
<b>2015</b>	89%	93%	93%	95%	98%	91%	91%

While taxpayers probably expect officials to show up, ***does attendance really matter?*** That depends. Strictly speaking, yes. Each body must have a quorum of members present to conduct business. If too many officials skip meetings, decisions can't be made. So even if individual commissioners are ineffective, a minimum number of them are needed at any given meeting.

Moreover, at most public meetings where agenda items will be voted on, public testimony will be taken. Constituents have a right to expect that when they take the trouble to show up with prepared testimony, elected officials will be there to listen.

However, attendance has little to do with influence or effectiveness. Public meetings are a form of street theatre; all the key decisions have been made ahead of time behind closed doors. So an elected official with a spotty attendance record could easily be the most important member of the body – it's just that the heavy lifting is being done out of sight.

For example, Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman had the lowest two-year record of attendance among all City Commissioners, but few observers would consider him ineffective. To the contrary, he may be the most influential member of the Council, especially with a Mayor who is not running for re-election.

Metro Presiding Officer Tom Hughes also had the worst attendance record among his peers. Yet any Council member hoping to advance new policy would hardly consider Councilor Hughes unimportant.

There are also extenuating circumstances. What we see may not reflect the whole story. According to Commissioner Malinowski:

“The issue of absences turns out to be apples and oranges most of the time. This is partially because 4 out of the 5 commissioners are part time, and most of the time the reason Commissioners miss meeting is because of prior obligations regarding outside County business. If you compare absences with the schedule of each commissioner, this is usually the case. However, meeting attendance and communication is critical, particularly when technical questions about County business need to be answered.”

When asked if there should be a required minimum participation rate for meetings, Commissioner Malinowski responded:

“Overall the honor system of attendance is working, and I don't see a need for a minimum attendance rate requirement. Many times what happens is the Commission will cancel meetings if two or more Commissioners are going to be absent. This usually happens on Tuesday evening meetings.”

The value of attendance is ultimately determined by voters. Those who are satisfied with the performance of their representative may overlook a mediocre participation rate.

However, voters should remember two things. First, for the five jurisdictions featured in this report, elected officials get paid to show up. They are not volunteers.

Second, attendance does matter. If everyone takes a night off, no business gets transacted. And running a government entity is a business.

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*Founded in 1991, Cascade Policy Institute is Oregon's premier policy research center. Cascade's mission is to explore and promote public policy alternatives that foster individual liberty, personal responsibility, and economic opportunity. To that end, the Institute publishes policy studies, provides public speakers, organizes community forums, and sponsors educational programs. Cascade Policy Institute is a tax-exempt educational organization as defined under IRS code 501(c)(3). Cascade neither solicits nor accepts government funding and is supported by individual, foundation, and business contributions. Nothing appearing in this document is to be construed as necessarily representing the views of Cascade or its donors. The views expressed herein are the authors' own.*

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