

JTTF agreement tiptoes gray line with Portland City Council vote looming

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Jamie Francis / The

OregonianProtesters stormed into Portland City Hall on two months ago to deliver petitions to policymakers' offices opposing involvement in the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. Another protest is expected Thursday, when the Portland City Council will vote on its involvement on the six-year anniversary of removing officers from full-time involvement in the task force.

The agreement crafted by Portland officials and federal authorities for police involvement in an anti-terrorism task force delicately tiptoes a fine gray line.

When the Portland City Council votes today -- on the six-year anniversary of its landmark decision to pull police out of the **Joint Terrorism Task Force** -- it will strengthen ties with the FBI but also fall short of full involvement.

Federal authorities endorse the **proposal**, and the **ACLU of Oregon**, while expressing reservations, plans to offer guarded support. **Portland Mayor Sam Adams** and Commissioners **Nick Fish** and **Randy Leonard** said they favor the agreement, ensuring its approval.

"I don't remember anyone predicting at the beginning of this process that you could have both the Justice Department and the ACLU blessing a new and innovative way of crafting this relationship," Fish said. "I do believe the mayor deserves a lot of credit."

The agreement allows Portland officers to attend daily task force briefings led by the FBI and to become involved at the earliest stages of investigations. But it does not assign officers full time to the task force, as had been the case before 2005. It instead leaves participation decisions up to **Police Chief Mike Reese**, in consultation with Adams, to determine on an "as-needed basis."

Reese on Wednesday declined to address how he'll determine need, leading some insiders to question the agreement's true meaning.

Adams said that based on the briefings he has had as police commissioner, "The work of the JTTF, it's episodic, periodic.

"It's going to be based on the need, and it's going to be based on our ability to provide," Adams said. "And that is very situational."

The agreement contains many of the safeguards and oversight the ACLU sought -- specifically stating that city officers follow more restrictive state law respecting civil liberties during investigations and report violations to the chief and city attorney's office; that a police supervisor be assigned to the task force when a Portland officer is involved; that the chief give the council an annual report on participation; and that the police commissioner seek secret security clearance.

U.S. Attorney for Oregon Dwight Holton said the agreement removes decisions from the political realm and will put local officers at daily briefings so they can share information and offer feedback.

There are cases now, Holton said, that would benefit from Portland police involvement.

"Some have speculated about how much officers will work with us," he said. "But I don't have to speculate because I know the terrorist threat we face. The threat in Oregon is real, substantial and persistent, and that means the need for local officers is urgent, immediate and will continue for the foreseeable future."

Fish agreed: "I fully expect, based on the briefings I've had on risk assessment, that Chief Reese will be putting police officers in ongoing investigations."

Adams' plan is outlined in a City Council resolution but not a more formal memorandum of understanding, which is typical with FBI involvement. It does not include several provisions that threatened a consensus.

The new plan kills a requirement sought by the ACLU, and included in a draft last week, that would limit police to "full investigations," preventing involvement at early stages.

Adams' resolution also does not include explicit language from a draft released Saturday by Leonard that said, "The city of Portland is not joining the JTTF."

Leonard has been the most outspoken opponent of full-fledged involvement, calling for close oversight by politicians, but he removed the language when Fish wouldn't agree to it.

"I think it's clear," Leonard said of Adams' new proposal. "They are not joining the Joint Terrorism Task Force."

ACLU officials agree. Andrea Meyer, legislative director, expects police to work in their own offices -- and not with the FBI -- "more often than not."

"This is just the beginning, not the end," she said, noting that the first annual report to the City Council will be telling. "Only then will we even hopefully know that it works in the way we all expect it to."

Today's City Council meeting begins at 2 p.m. and a protest is expected. It's not clear how **Commissioners Dan Saltzman** and **Amanda Fritz** will vote. Saltzman cast the lone vote against Portland's JTTF pull-out in 2005, and since the alleged plot to bomb Pioneer Courthouse Square in November, he has again called for full involvement. Fritz wants to hear public testimony.

Knowing he has enough support, Adams on Wednesday didn't want to predict the final tally of his trickiest political maneuvering in several years.

"I really sought to try to get five votes," Adams said. "There were plenty of points along the way where I could have gone with three, but this issue is too important and I just felt in my bones, that with good will on all parties, we could come up with something."