
INDEPENDENT PUBLIC-INTEREST STUDY · OCTOBER 2026

Portland at a Crossroads

A Resident's Data Study and a 21st-Century Operating Plan for the City of Portland

A great city does not need more excuses. It needs a system that reads the file, answers the question, and shows its work.

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About This Study

Who wrote it

This study was written by Vikrant Salar, founder and principal of SALAR Technologies LLC, a defense electronics and semiconductor IP company based in Wilsonville, Oregon. He has 21 years of experience in the technology industry, including as a Senior Technical Program Manager at Intel, where his work was to make large, complex programs deliver on time.

He lives outside Portland, inside the Metro district. Like hundreds of thousands of people in Washington and Clackamas counties, he pays regional taxes collected by the City of Portland and depends on the region working. This study is written from that seat: a resident and taxpayer looking at the system from one step back.

Why SALAR Technologies is publishing it

SALAR Technologies is offering this study free of charge to the City of Portland, Metro, Multnomah County, the State of Oregon and the public. It is not paid for by any campaign, party, union, business group or government. No one reviewed it before publication. Its purpose is simple: to put the facts in one place, in plain language, and to show a practical path forward.

What it is, and what it is not

- **It is** a data study. Every number comes from a public source: City Auditor reports, state audits, Census and labor data, Metro and county reports, court records as reported, and established Oregon newsrooms.
- **It is** nonpartisan. Candidates and officials are described with the same yardstick: what they have said and what they have done, favorable or not.
- **It is** a plan. Part VII lays out a step-by-step, 365-day modernization roadmap built on methods other governments have already tested.
- **It is not** legal advice, and it makes no claim about any person beyond what the cited records state.

How to read it

- Short on time? Read the Executive Summary and the one-page Scorecard.
- Each chapter opens with an **In brief** box and closes with **What this means**.
- Small numbers in brackets, like ^[1], point to the source in the Bibliography.

Method and source rules

- **Official data first.** Government reports and audits were used wherever available. News reporting was used where it documents events or quotes official records.
- **Show the uncertainty.** Where sources disagree, both are shown. Where a measure changed method (for example, homeless counts in 2023–2025), the change is flagged on the chart.
- **Exact status for controversies.** If a matter was dismissed, overturned or is only alleged, the study says so in those words.
- **Estimates are labeled.** Any cost or time estimate that is the author's own is marked "SALAR estimate," with its assumptions shown.

Data current to late October 2026. Errors, if found, will be corrected in later editions; send corrections with a source to contact@salartechnologies.com.

Contents

About This Study

Executive Summary

Scorecard: Portland at a Glance

Part I — Oregon Is More Than Portland

Chapter 1 36 Counties, 241 Cities, 4.2 Million People: Where Portland Fits

Chapter 2 The State's Competing Demands: Why Portland's Results Matter to Everyone

Chapter 3 Metro: The Regional Government Most Residents Never Think About

Part II — The Portland That Was

Chapter 4 What Made Portland Great

Chapter 5 The Turn, 2015–2026: What the Indicators Show

Part III — How Portland Is Governed Now

Chapter 6 From Commission to Council: The 2022 Charter Reform and the 2025 Transition

Chapter 7 The Budget: Where the Money Goes and Why the Gaps Keep Coming

Chapter 8 Taxes Stacked on Residents and Employers

Part IV — Homelessness: Money In, Results Out

Chapter 9 The Scale: How Many People, and Who

Chapter 10 The SHS Tax: Money In

Chapter 11 Design Problems in the SHS Tax

Chapter 12 Policy Whiplash: Shelters, Camping Rules and Who Is in Charge

Chapter 13 What Worked Elsewhere

Part V — Accountability: Does Anyone Check?

Chapter 14 What the City's Own Auditors Found

Chapter 15 The Ombudsman: Rising Demand, a Small Team

Chapter 16 Public Records: Fast Answers, but Fees as a Wall

Chapter 17 State Oversight Capacity: When the Watchdogs Are Short-Staffed

Chapter 18 The Record of Controversies

Part VI — The People Asking for Your Trust

Chapter 19 Offices on the 2026 Ballot and in Power: Records and Stated Positions

Chapter 20 Federal Relations and Funding Risk

Part VII — The Fix: A 21st-Century Operating Plan

Chapter 21 Principles: How a Modern City Should Work

Chapter 22 Architecture: A City "Data Spine"

Chapter 23 Public Records at Near-Zero Cost

Chapter 24 A Real Ombudsman: Triage, Capacity and Published Outcomes

Chapter 25 Homelessness: From Spending to Results

Chapter 26 Talent and Speed: People Who Can Build a Modern City

Chapter 27 Performance Management: PortlandStat

Chapter 28 Tax Fairness and Competitiveness: The Options

Chapter 29 The Roadmap: 30, 90, 180 and 365 Days

Chapter 30 How Residents Can Hold the System to Account

Appendix — Glossary

Bibliography

Notice

Executive Summary

The short version: Portland still has great bones: parks residents love, a planning tradition that earned national notice, and a downtown that is slowly coming back. But the systems that run the city have not kept up. Money is raised faster than it is turned into results, audits are written faster than they are acted on, and residents who ask hard questions can meet fees, slow answers or overloaded offices. The fixes are not mysterious. Other governments have already tested them. This study lays them out, step by step.

Ten findings

1. **Oregon is more than Portland.** Portland is about 15% of Oregon's 4.27 million people, and Multnomah County about 18.6%. Thirty-six counties compete for the same state attention, so Portland's results matter to the whole state. (Ch. 1–2)
2. **The indicators turned, and are only partly recovering.** Population fell after 2020, and downtown office vacancy reached roughly a third of space by late 2025 on some brokers' measures. Homicides have fallen sharply from their 2022 peak, and foot traffic is recovering. (Ch. 5)
3. **The new government is still finding its footing.** Voters replaced the commission system in 2022. The new 12-member council has split six to six on leadership votes and several budget amendments, and the FY2026-27 budget closed a General Fund gap of about \$170 million with layoffs and one-time money. (Ch. 6–7)
4. **Taxes are stacked high.** A high earner in Portland faces one of the highest combined top income-tax rates in the country, about 14.77% in 2024, comparable to New York City. Evidence on whether this drives people away is genuinely disputed; both sides are shown. (Ch. 8)
5. **Homelessness rose even as spending rose.** The one-night count grew from 3,801 (2015) to 10,526 (2025), partly because counting methods changed. Regional spending passed \$724 million in 2024. (Ch. 9, Ch. 12)
6. **The SHS tax raised more than promised; results against its 10-year goals are partial so far.** Voters were told to expect about \$250 million a year; after a first year of about \$243 million (read from a Metro chart), collections ran at roughly \$335–350 million. Metro reported more than \$400 million unspent in July 2024. Through mid-2024, 6,086 households had been placed against a 10,000 goal, and 4,055 supportive-housing units against a goal of 5,000 households (units are not households). (Ch. 10–11)
7. **Plans keep changing.** Shelter goals, camping rules, sweeps and supply hand-outs have pulled in different directions, and the city–county split of responsibility changed again. The mayor's 1,500-

bed goal for December 2025 reached about 890 by one count. (Ch. 12)

8. **Audits are not acted on.** The City has implemented about 49% of its own auditors' recommendations, against about 64% for peer cities. (Ch. 14)
9. **Watchdogs are overloaded.** Complaints to the Ombudsman rose to 617 in 2025, up 32% in a year, with a very small named staff. At the state level, the longest BOLI case waiting for an investigator had waited 1,046 days. The City Auditor's records fees are charged at staff wage plus 39% overhead, and reported fee waivers fell sharply in FY2024-25 (the exact size depends on how waivers are counted). (Ch. 15–17)
10. **Trust has been worn down.** A series of documented controversies, each reported here with its exact status, from resignations and fines to dismissed complaints, has made residents skeptical. Many complaints were dismissed, and some penalties were overturned in court. The study found no survey measure of trust, but the pattern is a fair concern. (Ch. 18)

Ten fixes

1. **Build a City "Data Spine":** one case number that follows a request across bureaus, one records store, one public dashboard, and a full audit log. (Ch. 22)
2. **Make public records nearly free:** publish released records in a public library so repeat requests cost nothing, use AI-assisted search and redaction with human review, and drop fees for individual residents. (Ch. 23)
3. **Give the Ombudsman the capacity its caseload demands,** with triage, caseload targets, written reasons for every decline, and published anonymized outcomes. (Ch. 24)
4. **Run homelessness like an emergency operation:** one command structure across city, county and Metro, a by-name list everyone shares, real-time bed data, and contracts paid for outcomes. (Ch. 25)
5. **Act on the audits:** a public tracker of every open recommendation, reviewed monthly, with a named owner and date. (Ch. 27)
6. **Launch PortlandStat:** monthly public metrics for records, complaints, shelter beds, 311, permits and audit follow-through. (Ch. 27)
7. **Hire faster and bring in new talent:** a Portland Digital Service team, fellowships and apprenticeships that bring younger technologists into government, and knowledge capture before retirements. (Ch. 26)
8. **Use AI with guardrails:** pilots first, human review always, and a policy aligned with the NIST AI Risk Management Framework. (Ch. 22–23)
9. **Review the tax stack openly:** options for the SHS sunset, fair treatment of taxpayers who also pay other states, and housing-production uses, each with trade-offs. (Ch. 28)

10. **Follow a 365-day roadmap** with owners, deliverables and success measures at 30, 90, 180 and 365 days. (Ch. 29)

The ask: Read the file. Answer the question that was asked. Publish the results. A city that does these three things every day will earn back the trust it needs to solve everything else.

Scorecard: Portland at a Glance

Headline numbers from this study. Each is explained, with its source and caveats, in the chapter shown.

~15% Portland's share of Oregon's 4.27M people (Ch. 1)	10,526 People counted homeless one night in Jan 2025, Multnomah (Ch. 9)	\$724M+ Regional homelessness spending, 2024 (Ch. 12)	\$250M Yearly SHS revenue voters were told to expect (Ch. 10)
6,086 / 10,000 Households placed vs SHS goal, mid-2024 (Ch. 10)	890 / 1,500 Shelter beds opened vs mayor's Dec 2025 goal (Ch. 12)	49% vs 64% Audit recommendations implemented: Portland vs peers (Ch. 14)	617 Ombudsman complaints in 2025, up 32% (Ch. 15)
wage + 39% City Auditor's public-records fee formula (Ch. 16)	1,046 days Longest BOLI wait for an investigator, 2025 audit (Ch. 17)	~14.77% Combined top income-tax rate, 2024 (Ch. 8)	101 → 52 Homicides, 2022 peak to 2025, different counts (Ch. 5)

Some figures come from different sources or methods; each chapter explains comparability.

Part I — Oregon Is More Than Portland

CHAPTER 1

36 Counties, 241 Cities, 4.2 Million People: Where Portland Fits

In brief: Oregon had about 4.27 million residents in 2025, spread across 36 counties and 241 incorporated cities. The City of Portland holds about 15% of them. The three Metro-area counties (Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas) hold about 43%. That means 57% of Oregonians live outside the Portland metro counties, many in places with fewer than 30,000 people. Portland is the state's largest city and its economic center, but it is one part of a large and varied state. This chapter sets out the numbers so that later chapters can be read in proportion.

1.1 The basic count

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates Oregon's population at 4,273,586 on July 1, 2025.^[1] When the Census Bureau's county estimates for the same date are added up, the total is 4,272,371.^[2] The two totals differ by 1,215 people, most likely because of a revision between data releases. This study uses the county series (4,272,371) for every share in this chapter, so the parts add up to the whole.

Oregon has 241 incorporated cities, according to the League of Oregon Cities.^[3] Portland State University's Population Research Center, Oregon's official population certifier, put the City of Portland at 640,623 people on July 1, 2025.^[3] That is about 15.0% of the state.

Two official counts, one rule. Two public bodies estimate Oregon's population: the U.S. Census Bureau and Portland State University (PSU). Their numbers differ. For Portland in 2025, PSU says 640,623 and the Census Bureau says 635,109, a gap of about 5,500 people.^[4] PSU's figure is the one the state uses to share revenue with cities. This study names the series each time and does not mix them in one trend line. Where a share must combine them (for example, Portland city as a share of the state), the study says so.

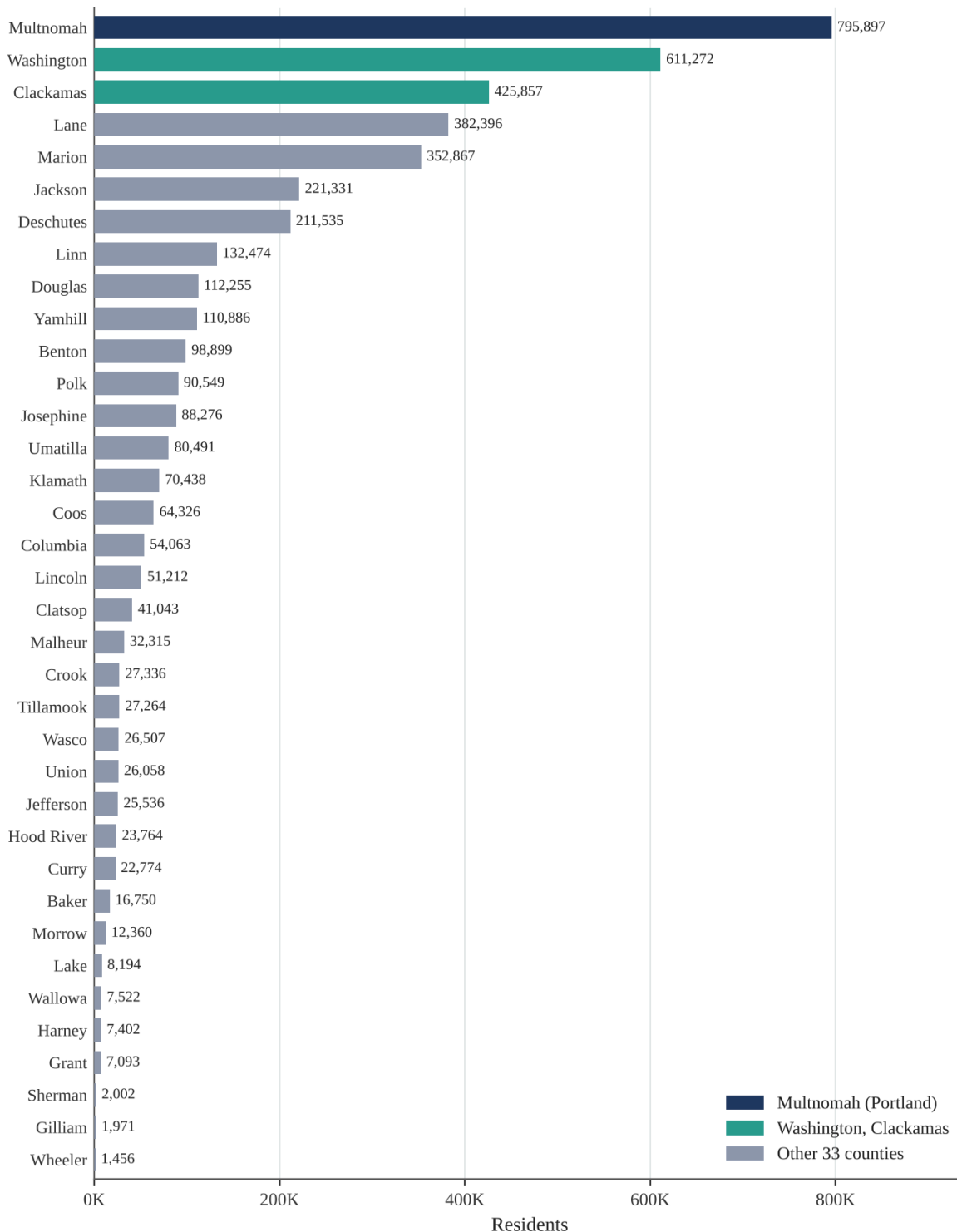
Growth has slowed. PSU's certified estimates show Oregon grew by about 14,000 people (0.3%) from July 2024 to July 2025. Deaths (42,136) outnumbered births (39,302). About 17,000 net new residents moving in made up the difference.^[5] In plain terms, Oregon now depends on people moving in to grow at all. Where those people choose to live, and whether they choose Portland, matters for the whole state.

1.2 Where Oregonians live

Oregon's population is concentrated in the northwest. Five counties (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Lane and Marion) hold about 60% of all residents. At the other end, 16 of the 36 counties have fewer than 30,000 residents each. The three smallest are Wheeler (1,456), Gilliam (1,971) and Sherman (2,002).^[2] Multnomah County alone has more than 500 times the population of Wheeler County. Both elect state legislators, both receive state services, and both are affected by decisions made in Salem.

Oregon's 36 counties: population, July 1, 2025

Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas (the Metro counties) hold 42.9% of Oregon's 4,272,371 residents; 16 counties have fewer than 30,000. Census Vintage 2025 county series (QuickFacts shows Multnomah at 795,391).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 county estimates, as republished by citypopulation.de, "USA: Oregon" (research file 04)

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Figure 1. Oregon's 36 counties by population, July 1, 2025. Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas (the Metro-area counties) are highlighted. Source: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 county estimates, as republished by citypopulation.de.^[2]

Table 1.1 — All 36 counties

Table 1.1 — Oregon county population, July 1, 2025 (ranked largest to smallest)

Rank	County	Population	Share of state	Rank	County	Population	Share of state
1	Multnomah	795,897	18.63%	19	Clatsop	41,043	0.96%
2	Washington	611,272	14.31%	20	Malheur	32,315	0.76%
3	Clackamas	425,857	9.97%	21	Crook	27,336	0.64%
4	Lane	382,396	8.95%	22	Tillamook	27,264	0.64%
5	Marion	352,867	8.26%	23	Wasco	26,507	0.62%
6	Jackson	221,331	5.18%	24	Union	26,058	0.61%
7	Deschutes	211,535	4.95%	25	Jefferson	25,536	0.60%
8	Linn	132,474	3.10%	26	Hood River	23,764	0.56%
9	Douglas	112,255	2.63%	27	Curry	22,774	0.53%
10	Yamhill	110,886	2.60%	28	Baker	16,750	0.39%
11	Benton	98,899	2.31%	29	Morrow	12,360	0.29%
12	Polk	90,549	2.12%	30	Lake	8,194	0.19%
13	Josephine	88,276	2.07%	31	Wallowa	7,522	0.18%
14	Umatilla	80,491	1.88%	32	Harney	7,402	0.17%
15	Klamath	70,438	1.65%	33	Grant	7,093	0.17%
16	Coos	64,326	1.51%	34	Sherman	2,002	0.05%
17	Columbia	54,063	1.27%	35	Gilliam	1,971	0.05%
18	Lincoln	51,212	1.20%	36	Wheeler	1,456	0.03%
Oregon total (sum of counties)				4,272,371 (100%)			

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 county estimates (July 1, 2025), as republished by citypopulation.de.^[2] Shares computed by the author. Note: the Multnomah figure in this table (795,897) is the same number KOIN reported as the Census estimate for July 1, 2024;^[6] Census QuickFacts gives 795,391 for July 1, 2025. This study uses 795,391 when it cites Multnomah's 2025 population on its own, and keeps 795,897 here only so the county table adds to its published total. The 506-person difference does not change any share shown.^[7] PSU certified county figures can differ by up to about 2,000 people per county (for example, PSU puts Douglas County at 110,355).^[5] Appendix B repeats this table.

A few patterns stand out:

- **The Metro-area counties are large but not a majority.** Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas together hold 1,833,026 people, or 42.9% of the state.
- **The Willamette Valley and Central Oregon carry the next tier.** Lane (Eugene), Marion (Salem), Jackson (Medford) and Deschutes (Bend) each hold between 5% and 9% of Oregonians.
- **The 18 smallest counties combined** hold about 317,000 people, fewer than half of the City of Portland alone.
- **Washington County is now three-quarters the size of Multnomah.** It is home to Intel's Hillsboro and Aloha campuses and Nike's Beaverton headquarters (see Chapter 4).^[8]

1.3 Portland's share of the state

Using the figures above, Oregon's population divides into four parts:

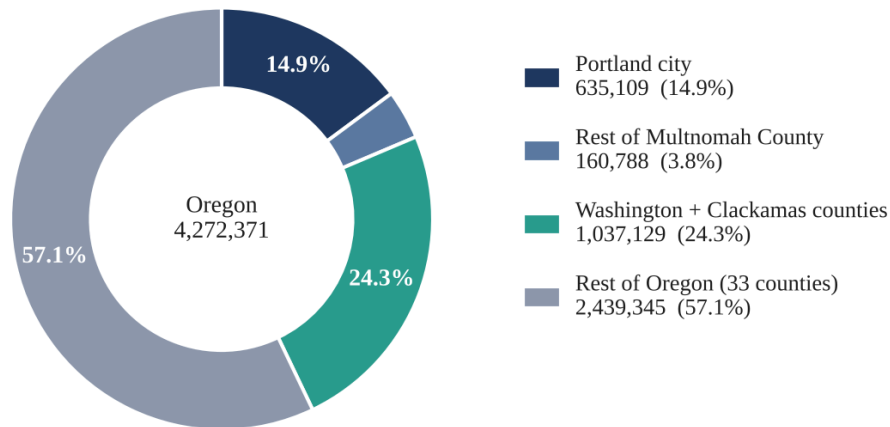
Table 1.2 — Where Oregonians live, 2025

Area	Population	Share of Oregon
City of Portland (PSU certified)	640,623	15.0%
Rest of Multnomah County (other cities and unincorporated areas)	about 155,300	3.6%
Washington and Clackamas counties	1,037,129	24.3%
Rest of Oregon (33 counties)	2,439,345	57.1%
Total	4,272,371	100%

Sources: county figures from Census Vintage 2025 via citypopulation.de^[2]; Portland city from PSU certified estimate via League of Oregon Cities.^[3] "Rest of Multnomah" is derived by subtraction and mixes a PSU city figure with a Census county figure, so treat it as approximate.

Where Oregonians live: Portland's share of the state

About 1 in 7 Oregonians lives in the City of Portland; 57% live outside the three Metro counties. Shares derived from 2025 estimates; "rest of Multnomah" = county minus city (derived). Using PSU's certified city figure (640,623) gives 15.0%.



Source: Census V2025 county estimates via citypopulation.de; Census QuickFacts, Portland city (V2025, 635,109); League of Oregon Cities, Population 2026 (PSU)

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Figure 2. Share of Oregon's population, 2025: Portland city, rest of Multnomah County, Washington plus Clackamas, and the rest of the state. The chart uses the Census city estimate (14.9%); Table 1.2 uses PSU's certified estimate (15.0%). Source: Census Vintage 2025 county estimates via citypopulation.de; Census QuickFacts (city); PSU certified city estimate via League of Oregon Cities. ^{[4][2][3]}

Two facts follow. First, Portland is far larger than its neighbors. For comparison, Gresham had 115,739 people in 2025, less than one-fifth of Portland's population.^[9] Second, most Oregonians do not live in Portland or even next to it. A plan for Portland must therefore be one that the other 85% of the state can see the value of.

1.4 A region that grows while its core shrinks

The wider Portland metropolitan area (the Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro region, which reaches into Washington State) had 2,542,282 residents in 2025, up 0.98% since 2020.^[10] Over the same years, the City of Portland shrank about 1.38% on PSU's figures, while smaller neighboring cities grew.^[11] Multnomah County, on Census figures, was 2.5% smaller in 2025 than its April 2020 base.^[7]

This is the central population fact of the study: **people are still choosing the Portland region, but fewer are choosing the city and the county at its center.** Chapter 5 looks at that trend year by year. Chapter 2 shows why it matters beyond the city limits.

- **Willamette Valley outside Metro** (Marion, Lane, Linn, Benton, Polk, Yamhill): about 1.17 million people including Salem, the state capital, and Eugene.
- **Southern Oregon** (Jackson, Josephine, Douglas, and others): mid-sized counties, some of them losing residents. Douglas County lost about 774 residents from 2024 to 2025 while the state grew.^[5]
- **Central Oregon** (Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson): Deschutes (Bend) is now the seventh-largest county, with 211,535 people.
- **Eastern Oregon** (Umatilla, Malheur, Baker, Union, Harney, Grant, Wallowa, and others): large land area, small populations, and the center of the "Greater Idaho" movement described in Chapter 2.
- **The Coast** (Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln, Coos, Curry): about 206,600 people combined. The state employment department reports population loss on the South Coast.^[12]

1.6 Income: Portland's county is above the state average

Multnomah County residents earn more, on average, than Oregonians as a whole. Census survey data for 2020–2024 shows:

Table 1.3 — Income and poverty, Oregon vs. Multnomah County (ACS 2020–2024, in 2024 dollars)

Measure	Oregon	Multnomah County
Median household income	\$83,011	\$88,766
Per-capita income	\$45,612	\$53,996
Poverty rate	11.8%	12.7%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, Oregon^[1] and Multnomah County.^[7] Comparable figures for rural counties such as Malheur, Harney and Josephine could not be verified for this study and are left out.

The county has both higher average incomes and a higher poverty rate than the state. That combination (more wealth and more hardship side by side) shapes the tax and homelessness debates in Parts III and IV. It also explains why Portland-area taxes produce revenue that matters at the state level, a point Chapter 2 develops.

What this means: Portland is about 15% of Oregon, and the three Metro-area counties are about 43%. That is enough to make Portland's results matter to the whole state, but not enough to let Portland ignore the other 57%. Every recommendation in Part VII is written with that balance in mind: Portland's fixes should cost the rest of Oregon nothing and, where possible, help it.

The State's Competing Demands: Why Portland's Results Matter to Everyone

In brief: Oregon's state budget, about \$141 billion over two years, must cover schools, human services, prisons, record wildfires, drought in a third of its counties, and struggling rural hospitals. Thirteen counties have voted at least once to explore leaving Oregon for Idaho. At the same time, the Portland area produces a large share of the state's jobs and income-tax base, and that base is under strain: Oregon was the only West Coast state to lose jobs in 2025, and studies disagree on how many high earners have left. When Portland struggles, the whole state has less to work with. When Portland works, every region benefits.

2.1 The state budget: big, but already spoken for

The Oregon Legislature closed its 2025 session with a two-year (2025–27) budget of \$138.9 billion in total funds, up 5.9%.^[13] After changes made in the 2026 session, the total stood at about \$141 billion.^[14]

Much of that total is money set aside for specific uses. The part lawmakers control most directly is the General Fund plus Lottery funds, about \$39.3 billion. Two areas take three-quarters of it:

Table 2.1 — Where Oregon's flexible state dollars go, 2025–27 (General Fund + Lottery)

Area	Amount	Share of GF/Lottery
Education	\$15.4 billion	39.3%
Human Services	\$14.2 billion	36.2%
All other areas (public safety, natural resources, economic development, administration, etc.)	about \$9.7 billion	about 24.5%
Total General Fund + Lottery	\$39.3 billion (\$37.5B GF + \$1.8B Lottery)	100%

Source: Legislative Fiscal Office, 2025-27 Budget Highlights Update (May 2026).^[14] "All other areas" derived by subtraction.

Some other line items, for scale:

- **State School Fund:** \$10.48 billion of General Fund and Lottery money (about \$11.4 billion in total funds). This is the main state money for K–12 schools in all 36 counties.^[13]
- **Public safety:** \$4.852 billion of General Fund (\$4.8645 billion with Lottery).^[13] The 2026 session added \$39.9 million of General Fund to Corrections.^[14]

- **Human Services in total funds:** \$65.3 billion.^[14]

Transportation: voters said no

In a 2025 special session, lawmakers passed a transportation package. It included a 6-cent-per-gallon gas tax increase, roughly doubled registration and title fees, and a higher transit payroll tax, worth about \$4.3 billion over 10 years. A citizen petition referred it to the ballot as Measure 120. On May 19, 2026, voters rejected it: 16.98% Yes, 83.02% No.^{[15][16]} The result leaves the state's road and transit funding question open. The governor formed a 12-member funding workgroup due to report by the end of 2026.^[16]

A five-to-one "no." A margin of 83% to 17% is a clear signal. Oregon voters as a whole were not willing to approve new transportation taxes in 2026. (County-level results were not reviewed for this study.) Any plan that depends on new revenue, in Portland or in Salem, must first show that existing money is being spent well. That is a theme of Parts IV, V and VII.

2.2 The kicker: Oregon returns surpluses to taxpayers

Oregon has an unusual rule called the "kicker." When state revenue beats the official forecast by a set margin, the extra is returned to taxpayers. For the 2023–25 budget period, the kicker was \$1.41 billion, delivered as a credit on 2025 tax returns. It was worth nearly 10% of 2024 tax liability. It was the sixth kicker cycle in a row and the fourth-largest ever. The largest was \$5.6 billion, in the 2024 filing season.^[17]

The kicker matters for this study in two ways:

- It means the state does not keep "windfall" revenue for new programs. Each budget is built on the forecast. If Portland-area income growth slows, the whole state's forecast slows with it.
- It shows that state income-tax revenue has been running ahead of expectations for years. The question is not only how much is collected, but how well it is used. One candidate for governor in 2026 has pledged to protect the kicker.^[18] No candidate's position is endorsed here.

2.3 Demands from beyond Portland

Wildfire

The 2024 fire season was the largest in Oregon's recorded history. About 1.9 million acres (1,915,554) burned in 2,039 fires.^[19] The largest fires were all east of the Cascades:

Table 2.2 — Largest Oregon wildfires of 2024

Fire	Acres	Counties
Durkee	294,265	Baker, Malheur
Battle Mountain	183,026	Umatilla, Grant, Morrow
Rail Ridge	176,661	Crook, Grant
Falls	151,680	Harney

Sources: Wikipedia, "2024 Oregon wildfires"^[19]; Axios Portland (Nov. 6, 2024).^[20] Wikipedia is a secondary source; acreages should be confirmed against Oregon Department of Forestry reports.

The cost was large. The Oregon Department of Forestry's net cost was \$132 million, more than triple 2023's \$37 million; gross cost was about \$317 million.^[20] On Dec. 12, 2024, lawmakers held a one-day special session and passed SB 5801. It provided \$218 million (\$191.5 million to Forestry and \$26.6 million to the State Fire Marshal) for a season costing about \$352 million, with \$200.5 million in federal reimbursement expected. The bill passed 25–2 in the Senate and 42–2 in the House.^[21]

That near-unanimous vote is worth noting. When the need is clear and the spending is visible, Oregon's lawmakers can act quickly and across party lines. Figures for the 2025 fire season could not be verified for this study.

Drought

On May 12, 2026, the governor declared drought emergencies in Coos, Klamath and Wheeler counties. That brought the number of counties under drought emergency to 12 of 36, in the third declaration of the year. Snowpack stood at 4% of normal in the Klamath Basin and 2% in the John Day Basin.^[22] The year before, Douglas, Morrow and Union counties were declared on Aug. 1, 2025, after Lincoln and Baker in July; severe drought then covered about 31% of Oregon.^[23]

Rural hospitals

Oregon's hospitals, taken together, earned about \$50.5 million in 2024, about a tenth of their pre-pandemic average. Delayed patient discharges alone cost \$324 million. Lower Umpqua Hospital, a small rural hospital, lost about \$3.6 million.^[24] Some 45% of hospitals lost money in 2024 and another 26% barely broke even. Some rural residents live one to two hours from a hospital.^[25] In late 2025, Ashland Community Hospital (49 beds) announced it would end inpatient and obstetric care, and Vibra Specialty Hospital of Portland (73 beds, about 310 staff) announced it would close on Feb. 1, 2026.^[26]

Table 2.3 — A sample of statewide demands outside Portland, 2024–2026

Demand	Key figure	Where
Wildfire (2024)	1.9 million acres; ~\$352M season cost	Mostly Eastern and Central Oregon

Demand	Key figure	Where
Drought (2026)	12 of 36 counties under emergency by May	Coast, south, east
Hospitals (2024)	45% lost money; statewide margin ~\$50.5M	Statewide, worst in rural areas
Population loss	Douglas -774 (2024–25); South Coast losses	Southern Oregon and Coast
Schools	\$10.48B State School Fund (GF + Lottery)	All 36 counties

Sources: as cited in sections 2.1 and 2.3 above.^{[21][22][25][5][13]}

Data on timber-harvest decline and federal timber payments to counties, which matter greatly to many rural budgets, could not be verified for this study and are not included.

2.4 The rural-urban divide: the Greater Idaho votes

The clearest sign of rural frustration is the "Greater Idaho" movement. It asks that part of eastern and southern Oregon be moved into Idaho. The proposed map would move close to 400,000 Oregonians and almost two-thirds of Oregon's land.^[27] The county measures are advisory; they do not move any border. Oregon Senate Joint Memorial 2 (2023) received no vote. The Idaho House passed a supporting memorial in February 2023.^[28]

Table 2.4 — County votes on Greater Idaho measures, 2020–2024

Year	Passed (Yes %)	Failed (Yes %)
2020	Jefferson (50.9%), Union (52.4%)	Douglas (43.3%), Wallowa (49.6%)
2021	Baker (57.5%), Grant (62.2%), Lake (74.6%), Malheur (54.1%), Sherman (62.3%), Harney (63.2%)	—
2022	Klamath (57.0%), Morrow (60.7%), Wheeler (58.6%)	Douglas (47.4%), Josephine (48.7%)
2023	Wallowa (50.1%)	—
2024	Crook (53.4%)	—

Sources: Wikipedia, "Greater Idaho movement" (compiled county results; secondary source)^[29]; Ballotpedia News (June 14, 2023), which counted 12 approvals out of 16 countywide measures from 2020 to 2023.^[28] The 2023 Wallowa result passed by seven votes, according to InvestigateWest.^[27]

Read in proportion, the movement is both small and important:

- **Small in people.** The 13 counties that approved a measure at least once hold 244,462 people, about 5.7% of Oregon (computed from Table 1.1).
- **Large in land and in message.** These counties cover much of the state's area. Their votes say that many rural residents feel state policy is set for, and by, the Portland area.

- **Not one-way.** In 2026, Wallowa County voters ended, 61% to 39%, the county's requirement to meet twice a year on the border question.^[29]

Why this matters for Portland. Rural voters cannot fix Portland, but they can see its results. When Portland's homelessness, crime and downtown problems are in national news, it strengthens the view that "Portland's way" does not work. When Portland shows measurable results for its tax dollars, it strengthens the case for statewide cooperation. Portland's credibility is a statewide asset.

2.5 Why Portland's results matter to the whole state

The Portland area is the state's economic engine

The three Metro-area counties hold 43% of Oregonians and include the headquarters or largest campuses of the state's best-known employers. Intel, Oregon's largest private employer, had more than 23,000 Oregon workers at the start of 2024.^[8] Multnomah County's per-capita income (\$53,996) is about 18% above the state's (\$45,612).^{[7][1]} Higher incomes in the Portland area produce more state income tax, which helps pay for schools and services in every county.

That engine has slowed

- Oregon lost more than 18,000 jobs in 2025, the only West Coast state to lose jobs, according to federal labor data reported by OPB. Oregon ranks 39th in CNBC's business-friendliness ranking.^[30]
- From June 2025 to June 2026, total nonfarm jobs fell by 8,500 (−0.4%). Manufacturing fell by 10,000 (−5.6%). Private health care and social assistance grew by 14,000 (+4.5%), the only large growth sector.^[31]
- Oregon's 2025 unemployment rate (5.2%) was 0.9 points above the U.S. rate (4.3%), the widest gap in the 2015–2025 series.^{[32][33]}
- In January 2026 the governor convened a 16-member Prosperity Council to address the economy.^[30]

Taxes stack up in Portland

A high earner living in Portland pays several income taxes on top of one another. The Tax Foundation calculated a combined top marginal rate on wages of 14.77% in 2024, made up of Oregon's 9.9% top rate, the Metro supportive housing tax (1%), Multnomah County's Preschool for All tax (1.5% or 3%), the TriMet payroll tax (0.7737%) and the state transit tax (0.1%). That compares with 14.776% in New York City and 14.4% in California.^[34] A city task force in January

2025 found that Portland had the second-highest top rate of any U.S. city.^[35] Chapter 8 covers these taxes in detail.

Do high earners leave? The evidence is mixed

This question matters statewide, because a high earner who moves from Portland to Vancouver, Washington, can take Oregon income-tax revenue with them (how much depends on where that income is earned). Studies disagree, and this study reports both sides:

Table 2.5 — Competing evidence on high-earner migration from the Portland area

Study	Finding	Caveats
Conway (UNH), Iselin (Yale Budget Lab), Rork (Reed), April 2026	After Preschool for All took effect, net income moving into Multnomah fell about 3 points; about \$1.4B of adjusted gross income left; Oregon lost an estimated \$78.6M of 2022 income tax; Clark County, WA was the main destination.	Authors call these upper-bound estimates; COVID, protests and Measure 110 are confounders; effect may be fading by 2024. Multnomah County disputes the study.
Common Sense Institute, July 2026 (IRS data, 2022–23)	Oregon had a net income loss of \$476M, of which \$403M came from households earning \$200K+. Net loss to Washington \$487M; net gain from California \$609M.	Arrivals and departures were nearly equal (64,386 vs. 64,431).
Mary C. King (PSU), May 2026	Multnomah households earning over \$500K grew from 2,541 (2019) to 7,695 (2024).	Based on Census survey microdata.
Erik Dean, for Councilor Mitch Green, June 2025	Preschool for All tax returns rose 16.5% (32,941 in 2021 to 38,370 in 2023) while county population fell 1.3%.	Prepared for an elected official.

Sources: Conway, Iselin and Rork (2026)^[36]; Common Sense Institute (2026)^[37]; King (2026)^[38]; Dean (2025)^[39]; Multnomah County's response as reported by OPB (Apr. 16, 2026).^[30]

A fair reading: there is credible evidence that some high-income households and income left Multnomah County after 2020, mostly for Clark County, Washington. There is also credible evidence that the number of very high earners in the county grew. Both can be true at once. What is not in dispute is the direction of risk: Portland-area tax policy affects the state's income-tax base, and so it affects every county's schools and services.

What this means: Oregon has real needs far from Portland: fire, drought, rural hospitals, and counties losing people. The state pays for them largely from income taxes, and the Portland area is the largest source. When Portland's economy and reputation weaken, the whole state has less to share and less trust to work with. A well-run Portland is not a favor to Portland. It is a statewide interest.

CHAPTER 3

Metro: The Regional Government Most Residents Never Think About

In brief: Metro is the elected regional government for 24 cities and parts of Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties. It manages the Portland-area urban growth boundary, about 20,000 acres of parks and natural areas, the Oregon Zoo, regional venues and the garbage and recycling system. Its proposed FY 2025-26 budget was about \$1.9 billion, and almost three-quarters of its revenue comes from the voter-approved supportive housing income taxes plus user fees. Its 2018 housing bond is beating its unit goal by a wide margin. Its 2019 parks bond and its homelessness tax have drawn sharper findings from Metro's own auditor. In 2026, Metro changed leaders: its president resigned in March, and a new president took office in June.

3.1 What Metro is

According to the Oregon Encyclopedia, voters created Metro in 1979. It manages the Portland-area urban growth boundary (UGB) across Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties.^[40] Metro is often described as the only directly elected regional government in the United States, and its current home-rule charter is often dated to 1992. Neither claim could be verified from an official source for this study, so neither is relied on here.

Metro's basic structure, as reported in 2026:

- **Area served:** 24 cities and parts of three counties.^{[41][42]}
- **Council:** seven members. Six councilors are elected by district, and one president is elected by voters across the whole region.^[41]
- **Auditor:** Metro also has an independently elected auditor. Auditor Brian Evans ran unopposed in May 2026.^[43]
- **Parks and nature:** close to 20,000 acres.^[41]

The author of this study lives in Wilsonville, outside Portland but inside the Metro district. That is a common situation. Many residents who never vote in a Portland election still pay Metro taxes, use Metro parks, and live under Metro's growth boundary.

3.2 What Metro does

Metro's FY 2026-27 budget page lists its functions as Housing, the Oregon Zoo, Parks and Nature, Planning, and others.^[44] Its audited financial statements also report business-type operations in Solid Waste, the Zoo and the MERC venues (Metro's convention and performance venues).^[45]

Table 3.1 — Metro's main lines of work

Function	What it covers	Notes
Land use and planning	The regional urban growth boundary; long-range regional plans	Boundaries must hold a 20-year land supply ^[40] ; "Future 50" plan launched 2026
Housing and homelessness	2018 affordable housing bond; Supportive Housing Services (SHS) tax	Largest revenue source; see 3.4 and Part IV
Parks and nature	~20,000 acres; 2019 parks bond; parks levy	See 3.5
Solid waste	Regional garbage and recycling system, transfer stations	Business-type activity
Venues and the Zoo	Oregon Zoo; MERC venues	Business-type activity

Sources: Metro budget page^[44]; Metro FY2023-24 financial report^[45]; OPB (June 10, 2026).^[41]

In 2026, Metro launched "Future 50," a regional planning process that looks ahead to 2077. The last comparable regional plan dates from 1995.^[41] A 31-year gap between regional plans is long for a region whose economy, housing market and transit use have changed so much.

3.3 What Metro taxes and spends

Metro's proposed budget for FY 2025-26 was about \$1.9 billion in all funds. Almost 75% of revenue came from the voter-approved SHS income taxes plus fees paid by users of Metro facilities and services.^[46] The adopted figure for that year, and the total for the FY 2026-27 adopted budget, could not be retrieved for this study.

Table 3.2 — Selected Metro revenue sources, FY 2025-26 proposed budget

Source	Amount	Type
SHS personal and business income taxes	~\$329M forecast (gross)	Dedicated to homeless services
General obligation debt levy	\$88.6M	Property tax to repay voter-approved bonds
Solid waste excise tax (to General Fund)	\$23.7M	Tax on garbage disposal
Permanent operating levy	\$21M	Property tax; discretionary
Parks local option levy	~\$19.2M	Property tax for parks
Construction excise tax	~\$3.6M	Tax on construction permits

Sources: Metro FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget^[46]; SHS figure is Metro's March 2025 gross forecast for FY26 (\$328.8M).^[47]

The table makes one point plain: **the homelessness tax is now Metro's single largest revenue source**, several times larger than Metro's own permanent operating levy. Metro is no longer mainly a planning, parks and garbage agency. It is a major funder of homeless services.

The same budget cut staff. Visitor Venues were reduced by 33 full-time-equivalent positions (from a workforce of 203), and Parks and Nature had a net reduction of 19.8 positions.^[46]

Audited financial condition

Metro's FY 2023-24 annual financial report received an unmodified ("clean") audit opinion from the accounting firm Moss Adams LLP. Key results:^[45]

- Net position: \$961.3 million, up 0.7%.
- Governmental fund balances: \$1.051 billion, down 6.7%.
- SHS tax revenue: \$335.1 million, down 3.4% from the prior year.
- Business-type revenues (Solid Waste, Zoo, venues): \$229.6 million, up 7.3%.
- Total debt: down \$30.3 million (3.0%), with no new debt issued.

A clean opinion means the books fairly present Metro's finances. It does not measure whether programs achieved their goals. That is the job of performance audits, discussed below.

3.4 The SHS tax in brief

The Supportive Housing Services tax was approved by voters as Measure 26-210 in May 2020. It has two parts:^[42]

- A 1% tax on household taxable income above \$200,000 (joint filers) or \$125,000 (single filers).
- A 1% tax on business profits, with businesses of \$5 million or less in gross receipts exempt.
- Metro's administrative costs are capped at 5%. Continuing the tax past 2030 requires voter approval.

Voters were told to expect about \$250 million a year. After collection costs, revenue is split among the three counties: Multnomah 45.33%, Washington 33.33%, Clackamas 21.33%.^[48] The City of Portland's Revenue Division collects the tax for Metro.^[49] The diagram below shows the flow. Part IV examines the tax, its spending and its results in detail.

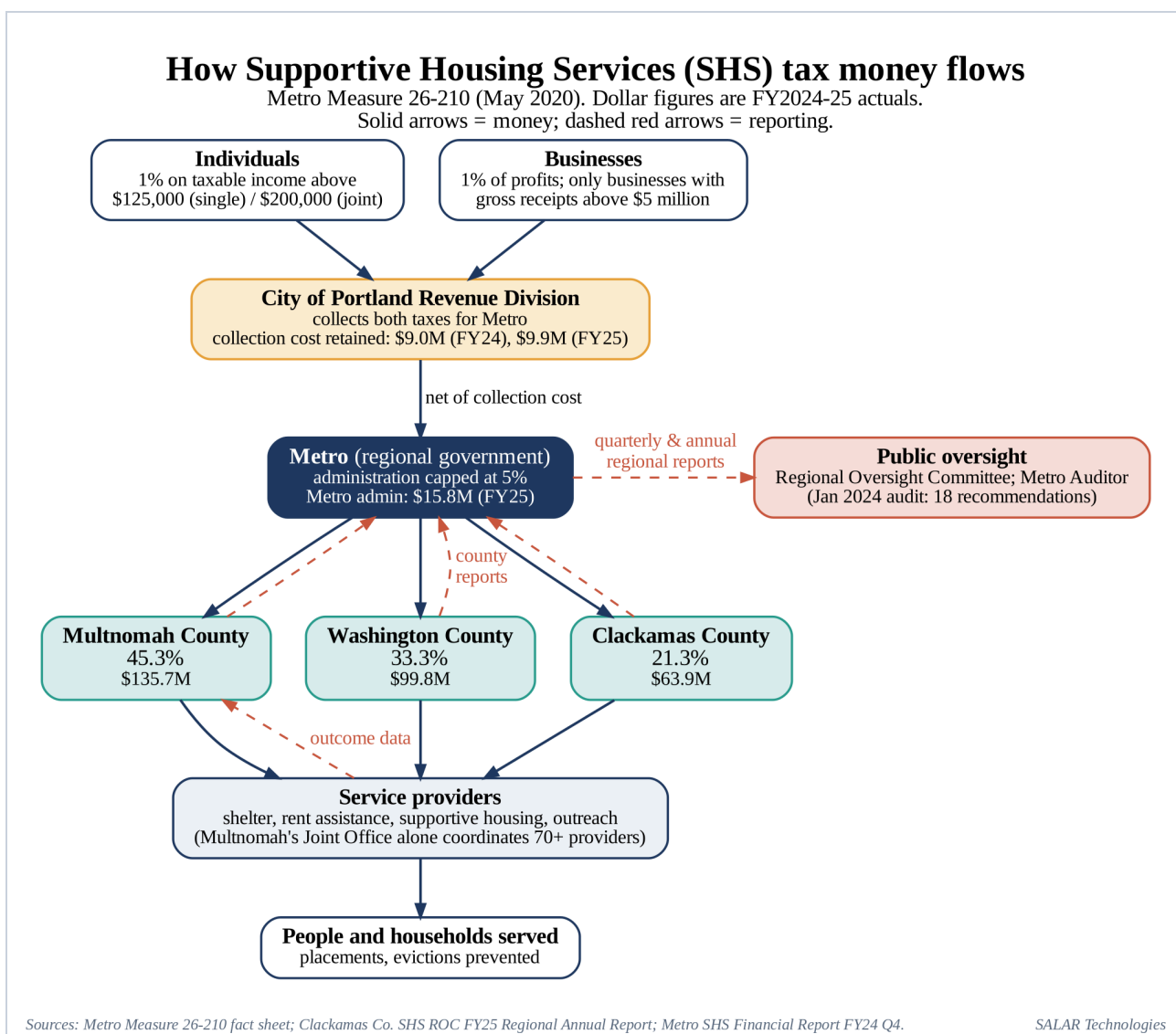


Figure 4. How SHS money flows: taxpayers, City Revenue Division (collector), Metro, the three counties, and service providers. Source: Metro income tax information; Metro Auditor (January 2024).^{[49][48]}

Three facts set the stage for later chapters:

- **Collections beat the promise.** Revenue has run above the \$250 million voters were told to expect. Metro's December 2025 forecast for FY 2026 was \$351 million, including a one-time \$40 million of late business payments; without it, about \$311 million.^[50]
- **The auditor found weak oversight.** Metro's auditor in January 2024 found duplicated or unclear oversight and inconsistent performance data, made 18 recommendations, and urged planning now for the 2030 sunset.^[48]
- **Renewal is undecided.** In June 2025, Metro proposed indexing the income thresholds to inflation starting in tax year 2026; ballot ideas included extending the tax to 2050 and cutting the

rate to 0.75% in 2031.^[51] Councilors chose not to send a renewal to voters in 2025. The tax expires in 2030, and the next council will decide how to revise it.^[43]

Metro reports that since 2020 the program has housed more than 18,000 people and helped 5,000 exit chronic homelessness.^[41] These are program-reported figures, not audited results.

3.5 Bonds and their audited results

Metro has asked voters for two large bonds in recent years. Their results differ.

2018 Affordable Housing Bond (\$652.8 million)

The housing bond (Measure 26-199) set a goal of about 3,900 affordable homes. As of December 2024, it had 4,989 homes in 60 projects, or 128% of the goal: 2,221 complete, 1,764 under construction and 1,004 in pre-construction. About 5,600 units are projected in total (144% of goal). Units for households at or below 30% of area median income numbered 1,773, about 11% above that sub-goal. Family-size units numbered 2,545, or 131% of target. Final projects are due to break ground by 2027, and the bonds are repaid by 2039.^{[52][53]} By June 2026 the bond had built more than 5,000 affordable units, according to OPB.^[41]

Portland's share was \$208,740,992, against a goal of 1,475 units. The City's 2024 progress report gives two different totals as of Dec. 31, 2024: 2,153 units in the narrative and 2,098 in Figure 1.^[54] Either number exceeds the goal. The discrepancy is small but shows why consistent public data matters (Part VII).

Metro's auditor reviewed the bond in November 2023 and found:^[55]

- 981 units complete and 1,600 under construction as of August 2023, with 34% of proceeds spent by the end of FY2023.
- Uneven results by place: none completed in Hillsboro or through Home Forward in east Multnomah County at that time.
- A 5% administrative cap that was too low; administration was projected at \$68 million through FY2027-28.
- Seven of nine 2021 audit recommendations implemented.

2019 Parks and Nature Bond (\$475 million)

Metro's auditor reviewed the parks bond in June 2023. The audit found that "access to nature," a stated aim, was not defined and had no specific goals; performance measurement was underdeveloped; as of Jan. 23, 2023, 1% of funds had been spent on new parks; and some sites were hard to reach without a car.^[56]

The bond's oversight committee reported more progress by its third year (October 2024): about \$80 million spent by June 2024, about \$67 million awarded across more than 55 projects, 22 land purchases totaling 824 acres, and more than \$34 million invested in Metro's developed parks.^[57] About \$80 million of \$475 million is roughly 17% of the bond spent by June 2024.

Table 3.3 — Metro's bonds and tax: promise vs. result

Measure	Amount	Promise	Latest verified result	Auditor's view
2018 Housing Bond	\$652.8M	~3,900 units	4,989 units in pipeline (128%), ~5,600 projected (Dec. 2024)	Strong unit results; uneven geography; admin underfunded (2023)
2019 Parks Bond	\$475M	Protect nature; improve access	~\$80M spent; 824 acres acquired (June 2024)	"Access to nature" undefined; weak measurement (2023)
2020 SHS tax	~\$250M/yr expected	~5,000 supportive housing placements; 10,000 households stably housed	Collections above forecast; outcomes program-reported	Unclear oversight; inconsistent data; 18 recommendations (2024)

Sources: as cited in sections 3.4 and 3.5.^{[52][56][57][48]} SHS goals: Metro Measure 26-210 fact sheet.^[58]

3.6 Does Metro act on its own auditor's advice?

Metro's auditor tracks whether recommendations are carried out within five years. Metro's own target is 75%. It has fallen short:

- In the 2022 annual report, 53% of recommendations from five years earlier had been implemented.^[59]
- In the FY 2023-24 report, only 41% had been implemented. That year the auditor issued five audits (transfer stations, housing bond, SHS, capital asset renewal and financial condition) with 56 recommendations in total. The fraud and waste hotline received 28 reports, a five-year high, and 7 were substantiated.^[60]
- Of three SHS-related recommendations from May 2021, one was implemented and two were still in process by January 2024.^[48]

Metro's audit list for 2025–2026 could not be retrieved for this study. Chapter 14 makes the same follow-through test for the City of Portland's auditors.

3.7 Leadership change in 2026

Metro's leadership turned over in 2026:

Table 3.4 — Metro leadership timeline, 2026

Date	Event
Mar. 10, 2026	President Lynn Peterson (in office since 2019; salary \$204,000) announced her resignation, effective Mar. 13, to become Lake Oswego's interim city manager. Her second term would have ended Dec. 31, 2026. Deputy President Duncan Hwang presided in the interim.
May 19, 2026	Councilor Juan Carlos González (District 4, two terms) won the primary for president with about 65% of early returns. OPB reported he would be the first Latino in the post. Ashton Simpson (District 1) led Noah Ernst 58% to 40%. Miles Palacios won District 4, 51% to 48%, over Alex Phan. Christine Lewis (District 2) and Auditor Brian Evans ran unopposed.
June 2, 2026	González resigned his District 4 seat and was appointed president about seven months early to finish Peterson's term. His own four-year term begins January 2027.
Jan. 4, 2027	Palacios's District 4 term begins.

Sources: KOIN (March 2026)^[61]; OPB (May 19, 2026)^[43]; OPB (July 6, 2026).^[62]

Multnomah County's list of elected officials shows the current council as President Juan Carlos González; Ashton Simpson (District 1), Christine Lewis (District 2), Gerritt Rosenthal (District 3), Miles Palacios (District 4), Mary Nolan (District 5) and Duncan Hwang (District 6).^[63] Whether Palacios already holds the District 4 seat by interim appointment, or the page lists him as the incoming member, could not be confirmed.

Criticism and praise, side by side

Table 3.5 — How Metro has been judged, as reported

Criticism (as reported)	Praise (as reported)
Slow SHS spending and limited visible impact (OPB, May 2026)	Housing bond beat its unit goal by more than 1,000 units (Governing, June 2025)
An Oregonian analysis found the former president missed more than a third of council meetings after the start of 2025 (KOIN, March 2026)	SHS collections exceeded the \$250M voter estimate (Willamette Week, Dec. 2025)
A PSU economist argues high taxes push residents to Clackamas, Washington and Clark counties (Willamette Week, Dec. 2025)	Clean audit opinion on FY2023-24 financial statements; debt reduced with no new issuance (Metro ACFR)

Sources: OPB^[43]; KOIN^[61]; Governing^[53]; Willamette Week^[50]; Metro ACFR.^[45]

What this means: Metro has shown it can deliver on a concrete promise: the housing bond is beating its unit goal. Where goals were vague (the parks bond's "access to nature") or oversight was split among many agencies (the SHS tax), its own auditor found weak measurement and slow progress, and only 41% of past audit recommendations had been carried out within five

years in the latest report (53% in 2022), against a 75% target. With a new president, a 2030 tax sunset ahead, and a 50-year plan underway, Metro has a natural moment to adopt the same standard everywhere: clear numeric goals, public data, and audit follow-through.

Part II — The Portland That Was

What Made Portland Great

In brief: Portland earned a national reputation by making choices other cities did not. Oregon adopted statewide land-use planning in 1973. Portland tore out a riverfront highway in 1974 and built a park. It cancelled a freeway the same year and used the money toward light rail, which opened in 1986. A high-tech cluster, the "Silicon Forest," grew around it. In 2008 it became the first large U.S. city rated "Platinum" for bicycling. Residents still give their parks high marks. These were deliberate public decisions, and they show that this region's governments have delivered bold, lasting results before.

4.1 A timeline of choices

Table 4.1 — Milestones in Portland’s rise (verified dates only)

Year	Milestone	Source status
1913	Portland adopts the commission form of government (used until 2024)	Secondary source (Wikipedia)
1946	Tektronix founded, the seed of the "Silicon Forest"	Oregon Encyclopedia
1973	Senate Bill 100 creates Oregon's statewide land-use planning system and its 19 goals	Oregon Encyclopedia (enactment date given as May 2 or May 29, 1973)
1974	Harbor Drive closed; Mount Hood Freeway cancelled and funds redirected toward light rail	Congress for the New Urbanism; Willamette Week
1976	Intel opens its first Oregon plant	Oregon Encyclopedia
1978	37-acre Waterfront Park completed on the former highway site	Congress for the New Urbanism
1979	Voters create Metro, which manages the regional urban growth boundary	Oregon Encyclopedia
1984	Waterfront Park named for Gov. Tom McCall	Congress for the New Urbanism
1986	First MAX light rail line (Eastside/Banfield) opens, Sept. 5	Secondary source (Wikipedia)
1999	Waterfront Park roughly doubled by an extension	Congress for the New Urbanism
2008	First large U.S. city rated "Platinum" for bicycling, Apr. 29	League of American Bicyclists release via BikePortland

Sources: Oregon Encyclopedia, "Urban Growth Boundary"^[40] and "Silicon Forest"^[64]; Congress for the New Urbanism^[65]; Willamette Week (Nov. 12, 2024)^[66]; Wikipedia, "MAX Light Rail"^[67] and "Portland City Council (Oregon)"^[68]; BikePortland (Apr. 29, 2008).^[69]

What could not be verified. The year the Portland-area urban growth boundary was first adopted is commonly given as 1979, but the sources available for this study confirm only that Metro was created by voters in 1979. Portland's food and culture reputation and its past rankings in national "livability" lists (for example, by magazines) could not be verified from a citable source and are left out of this chapter.

4.2 Land-use planning and the urban growth boundary

Oregon's Senate Bill 100 created a statewide land-use planning system with 19 statewide goals. Sources differ on the date: the Oregon Encyclopedia gives May 2, 1973 for enactment, and a related entry gives May 29, 1973 for the signing.^[40]

The heart of the system is the urban growth boundary: a line around each urban area. Inside it, cities plan for homes and jobs. Outside it, farm and forest land is protected. Each boundary must hold a 20-year supply of land. Metro manages the Portland-area boundary across Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. In 2002, Metro expanded it by 18,867 acres.^[40]

The boundary is why the drive from downtown Portland to open farmland is short. It also links Portland to the rest of the state: farm and forest land in the Willamette Valley stays working land in part because the region agreed to grow up and in, not only out. The trade-off, debated for decades, is pressure on land and housing prices inside the line. Housing supply is covered later in the study.

4.3 Freeways out, transit in

In the 1970s Portland made two transportation choices that drew national attention:

- **Harbor Drive.** Portland closed this riverfront highway in 1974, the first major U.S. highway intentionally removed. Removal cost about \$20 million. On the site, a 37-acre Waterfront Park was completed in 1978. In 1984 it was named for Gov. Tom McCall, and a 1999 extension roughly doubled its size.^[65]
- **The Mount Hood Freeway.** This planned freeway through Southeast Portland was cancelled in 1974. Opponents led by Mayor Neil Goldschmidt persuaded the federal Department of Transportation to redirect its funding to light rail, which became MAX.^[66]

MAX light rail

The first MAX line (Eastside/Banfield) opened on Sept. 5, 1986. The system now has 5 lines, 93 stations and 59.7 miles of track.^[67]

Table 4.2 — MAX annual ridership, peak vs. latest

Year	Riders	Change from peak
2012 (peak)	~42.2 million	—
2025	~22.1 million	about -48%

Source: Wikipedia, "MAX Light Rail" (secondary source; should be confirmed against TriMet's official ridership reports).^[67]
Change from peak computed by the author.

MAX is a lasting asset: the tracks, stations and right-of-way exist and will serve the region for decades. But ridership in 2025 was roughly half the 2012 peak. A system built for a busy downtown is only as strong as the downtown it serves, which is a theme of Chapter 5.

4.4 The Silicon Forest

The "Silicon Forest" is the name for the Portland region's technology cluster. Tektronix was founded in 1946, and Intel opened its first Oregon plant in 1976. Metro-area high-tech employment rose from about 34,000 in 1988 to about 61,000 by the end of the 1990s. About 1,500 high-tech firms were in the region as of 2006.^[64]

Intel became Oregon's largest private employer, with more than 23,000 Oregon workers at the start of 2024.^[8] Nike's world headquarters is in nearby Beaverton.^[70] Both are in Washington County, not in the City of Portland. Their hiring and layoffs shape the regional job market that Portland residents depend on. Chapter 5 shows what happened to that base after 2023.

The author of this study has 21 years in the technology industry, including as a Senior Technical Program Manager at Intel. For the region, the Silicon Forest is not an abstraction: Intel alone employed more than 23,000 Oregonians at the start of 2024.

4.5 Livability: parks, trails and bikes

- **Forest Park** covers about 5,200 acres with more than 80 miles of trails, fire lanes and forest roads.^[71]
- **Bicycling:** on Apr. 29, 2008, Portland became the first large U.S. city to earn the League of American Bicyclists' "Platinum" Bicycle Friendly Community rating. At the time, Davis, California, was the only other Platinum city.^[69]
- **Parks are still a strength.** In the City's 2024 Portland Insights Survey (more than 4,000 respondents from 20,000 randomly selected households), 87% rated City parks good to excellent.^[72]

4.6 What the record shows

The common thread in Portland's rise is not luck or geography alone. It is a series of **specific, public decisions with visible results**: a law (SB 100), a boundary, a highway removed, a freeway cancelled, a rail line opened, a park built. Each one could be seen, measured and judged by residents.

That is the standard this study applies to Portland's current government. The question in Parts III through VI is whether today's programs, which are funded at far larger scale, produce results that residents can see and measure in the same way.

What this means: Portland's reputation was built on bold, concrete choices that delivered visible results, and many of those assets (the growth boundary, MAX, Forest Park, Waterfront Park, a technology base) still exist. The city does not need to invent a new identity. It needs to run its government with the same clarity of purpose and visible results that built the old one.

The Turn, 2015–2026: What the Indicators Show

In brief: After 2020, Portland's main indicators moved the wrong way. The city lost population for three straight years. Downtown office vacancy rose to the highest of any U.S. downtown measured by one major broker. Well-known retailers closed stores. Homicides nearly tripled, from 36 in 2019 to a record 101 in 2022. By 2024–2025, local unemployment rose above the national rate for the first time since at least 2015, the start of the series reviewed. But the picture is not one-way. Homicides and shootings have fallen sharply since 2022, downtown foot traffic is rising, office vacancy has started to fall, and the city's population stabilized. Portland in 2026 is a city in partial recovery, still below where it was before 2020 on most measures.

This chapter uses the same rule for every indicator: show the longest verified series, name the source, flag any break in method, and report improvement as clearly as decline.

5.1 Population: three years down, then flat

The 2020 Census counted 652,503 people in the City of Portland.^[73] Two series track the city since then, and they disagree on size but agree on direction.

Table 5.1 — City of Portland population, 2020–2025, by series

Date	PSU (Oregon's official certifier)	U.S. Census Bureau estimates
Apr. 1, 2020 (Census count)	652,503	
July 1, 2021	650,168	—
July 1, 2022	647,697	634,668
July 1, 2023	—	630,498
July 1, 2024	639,448	~635,750
July 1, 2025	640,623	635,109

Sources: PSU 2022 Annual Population Report Tables^[73]; Willamette Week (May 2024)^[74]; OPB (May 26, 2025)^[75]; League of Oregon Cities (PSU 2025 certified)^[9]; Census QuickFacts.^[4] Yearly figures for 2015–2019 could not be retrieved for this study.

- On Census figures, 2023 was the "third straight year" of decline.^[74]
- 2024 brought the first increase since the pandemic, up 1,435 on Census figures, though the city remained about 17,000 below July 2020.^[75]

- By 2025 the Census series showed Portland 2.7% below its 2020 base, and the PSU series about 1.4% below.^{[4][11]}

Multnomah County shows the same pattern. PSU recorded a loss of 2,321 in the year to July 2022, the county's third straight annual loss. Before 2020, the county had not lost population since 1987.^[76] On Census figures, the county went from 794,271 (2023) to 795,897 (2024), a small gain, and stood at 795,391 in 2025, 2.5% below its 2020 base.^{[6][7]}

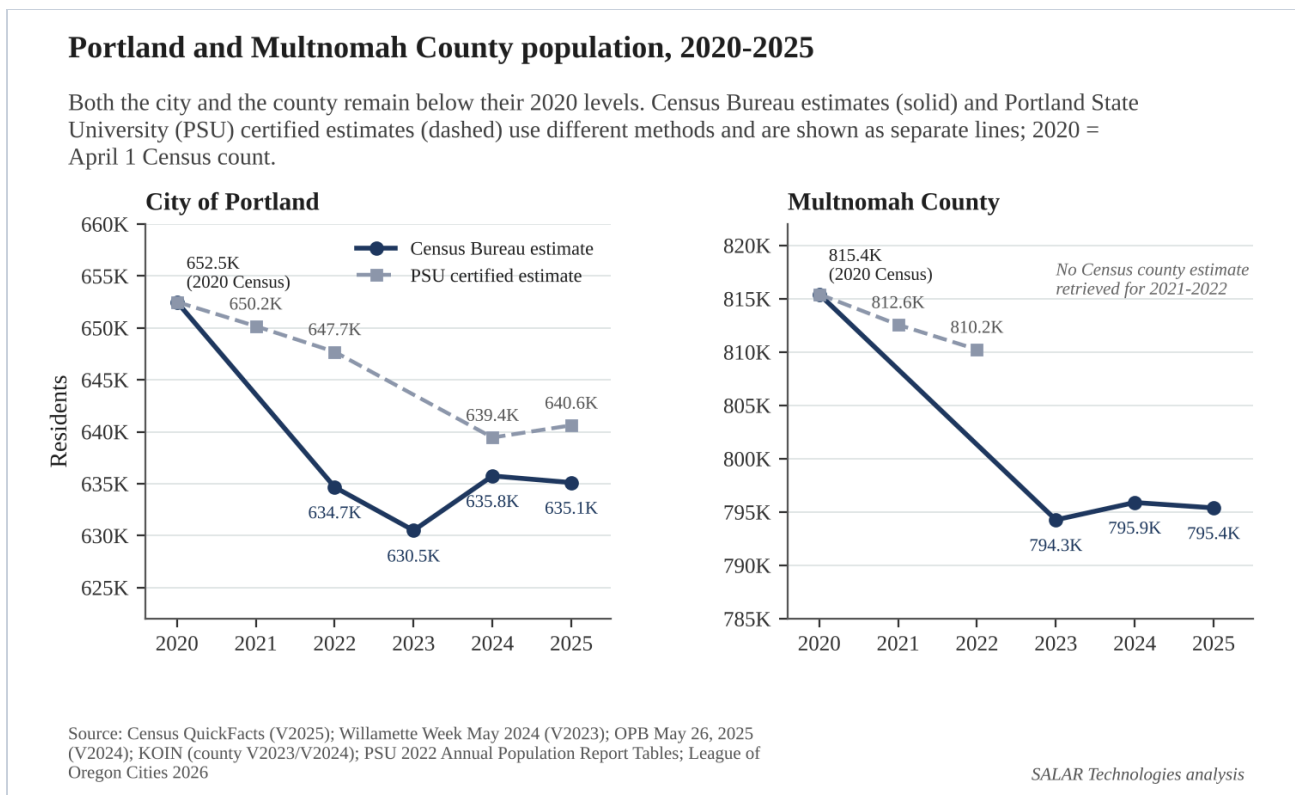


Figure 5. Portland city and Multnomah County population, 2020–2025 (Census Bureau and PSU series shown as separate lines). Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts and Vintage estimates as reported by Willamette Week, OPB and KOIN; PSU certified estimates via PSU and the League of Oregon Cities.^{[9][4][7][6]}

Meanwhile, the wider metro area grew by about 1% from 2020 to 2025.^[10] People did not leave the region. More of them chose to live outside the core city and county.

5.2 Downtown: offices, stores and foot traffic

Office vacancy

Office vacancy is the clearest measure of downtown's trouble. Brokerage firms measure it differently (some count only space directly for lease, some include sublease space, some measure "availability"), so this study compares figures only within one firm's series.^[77]

Table 5.2 — Downtown Portland office vacancy, by broker

Period	Colliers (CBD)	Kidder Mathews (downtown availability)	CBRE (downtown direct)
Q4 2019	—	10.4%	—
Year-end 2023	30.2%	—	—
Q3 2024	33.8%	—	—
Q4 2024	34.7%	—	—
Q2 2025	33.3%	—	—
Q3 2025	34.6%	—	—
Q4 2025	—	33%	34.7%
Q1 2026	—	31.9%	—
Q3 2026	—	32.2% (CBD availability)	—

Sources: Colliers via KOIN/KGW^[78] and Willamette Week^{[79][80]}; Kidder Mathews via Axios^[77] and Kidder Mathews Q3 2026 report^[81]; CBRE via Axios.^[82]

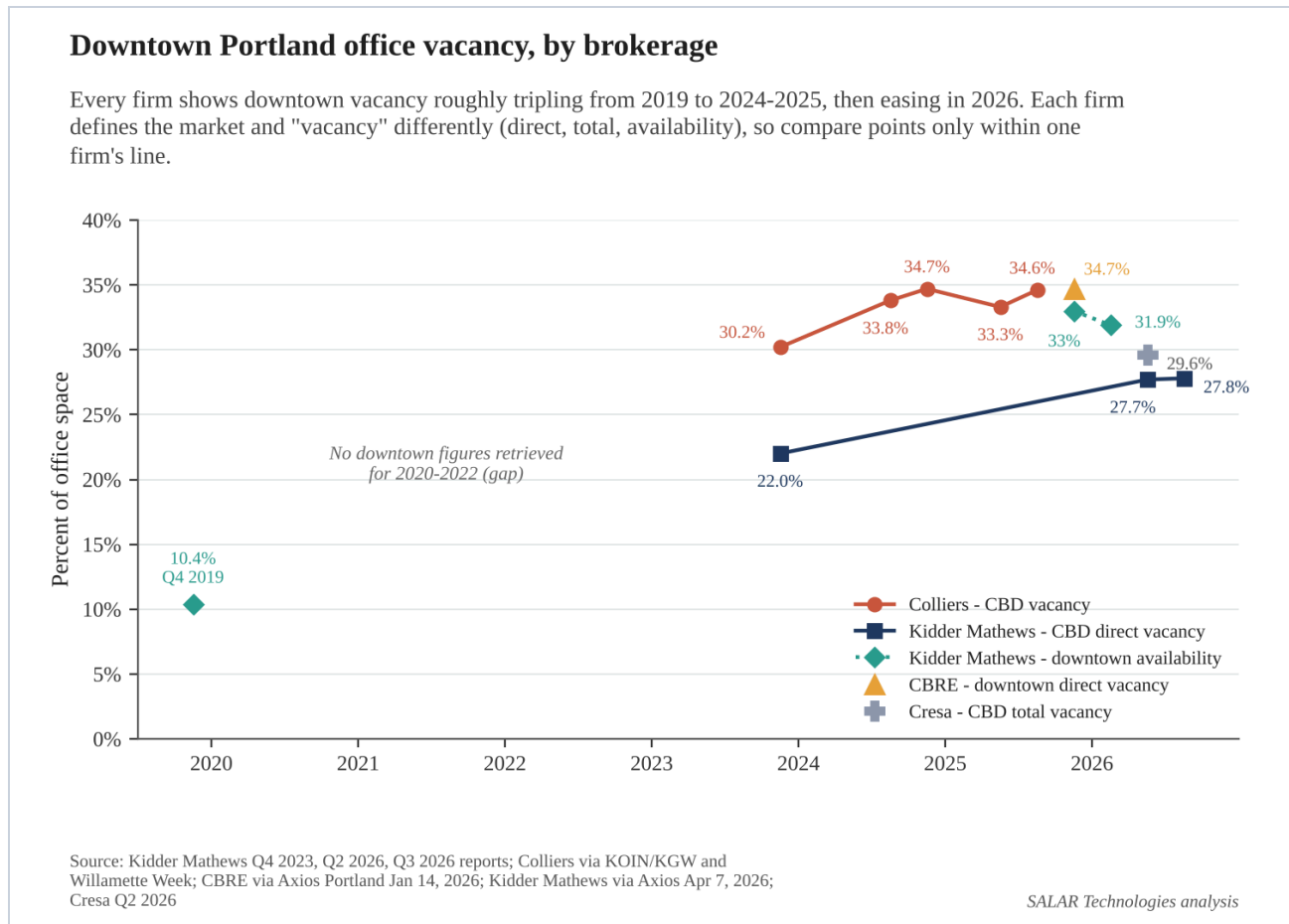


Figure 6. Downtown Portland office vacancy over time, labeled by broker (do not read as a single series). Sources: Colliers, Kidder Mathews and CBRE as reported by KGW, Willamette Week and Axios Portland. ^{[78][77][82]}

Key points:

- **The worst downtown measured.** Colliers called downtown Portland's year-end 2023 vacancy of 30.2% the highest of any U.S. downtown market.^[78]
- **More than 1 million square feet** of downtown office space went vacant during 2024.^[79]
- **Suburbs did better.** CBRE reported in January 2026 that suburban leasing was strong while downtown struggled.^[82]
- **Signs of a turn.** Kidder Mathews' Q1 2026 downtown figure (31.9%) was the first decline in close to three years.^[77] CBRE reported positive metro net absorption (more space leased than vacated) of 115,000 square feet in Q2 2026 and 228,000 in Q3 2026, after negative absorption every quarter from Q3 2021 through Q1 2026.^[83]

Retail closures

Table 5.3 — Notable Portland retail closures, 2022–2026

Retailer	Location	Closure	Reason given (as reported)
Nike Community Store	NE Portland (MLK Blvd)	Reported as permanent in Oct. 2022 (KGW) and confirmed Sept. 2023 (OPB)	Public safety; retail theft
Walmart (2 supercenters)	Hayden Meadows; Eastport Plaza (not downtown)	By end of Mar. 2023	Did not meet financial expectations
Target (3 stores)	Downtown (SW Morrison), SE Powell, Hollywood	Oct. 21, 2023	Theft and organized retail crime
REI	Pearl District	Feb. 1, 2024	10 burglaries in 2022; >\$800,000 in added security; building and landlord issues
Nordstrom Rack	245 SW Morrison (downtown)	Jan. 31, 2026 (KPTV; see note)	None given (KPTV); property crime cited in earlier KOIN coverage

Sources: KGW^[84]; OPB (Sept. 8, 2023)^[85]; Willamette Week (Sept. 26, 2023)^[86]; Portland Monthly (Jan. 2024)^[87]; KPTV (Dec. 2, 2025)^[88]; KOIN.^[89] **Conflict note:** KPTV (Dec. 2, 2025) reports the downtown Nordstrom Rack closing Jan. 31, 2026, with 37 employees affected, and this study uses that date. Separate KOIN coverage also describes a Jan. 31 closure at the same address; its year (2023 or 2026) could not be confirmed from the sources reviewed. Nordstrom's full-line downtown store was not found to have closed; Nordstrom told KGW it had no plans to close it.^[90]

REI's Pearl store had been open about 20 years and was REI's only store inside Portland city limits.
^[87] Not every closure was about crime: Walmart cited finances, and REI cited building and landlord

issues alongside break-ins. But several large retailers named theft or safety as a reason, which is a direct signal for city policy.

The 2020 protests

After 41 consecutive nights of protest in 2020, officials estimated about \$23 million in downtown business damage and lost customers.^[91] No later full-season total from an official source could be verified.

Foot traffic: recovering

Downtown visits are measured with cell-phone location data (Placer.ai). These count visits, not unique people.

Table 5.4 — Downtown Portland foot traffic and recovery

Period	Measure	Source
Sep.–Nov. 2022	37% of 2019 activity; ranked 60th of 62 downtowns	Univ. of Toronto / UC Berkeley study
Mar.–June 2023	61% of 2019 (revised method); sixth-to-worst	Same study, updated
2024	~30 million visits	Downtown Portland Clean & Safe
2025	~32 million visits (+5.5%); 11 of 12 months beat 2024	Clean & Safe
2025 Saturdays	88.6% of 2019	Clean & Safe
Aug. 2026	3 million+ visits; 81% of Aug. 2019, best month since 2020	Axios Portland
Jan.–Aug. 2026	22.2 million+ visits (+~4% vs. 2025)	Axios Portland

Sources: KOIN (Apr. 10, 2023)^[92] and (Nov. 15, 2023)^[93]; Downtown Portland Clean & Safe (Jan. 22, 2026)^[94]; Axios Portland (Sept. 23, 2026).^[95] The 2022 and 2023 study figures use different methods (the 37% figure was later restated as about 60%) and should not be read as a trend.

Resident visits downtown rose about 17% in 2025.^[94] This is real progress. It is also incomplete: August 2026, the best month since 2020, was still about one-fifth below August 2019.

5.3 Crime: a sharp rise and a sharp fall

Table 5.5 — Portland homicides by year, 2015–2025

Year	Homicides	Year	Homicides
2015	34	2021	92
2016	20	2022	101 (record)
2017	27	2023	77
2018	33	2024	71

Year	Homicides	Year	Homicides
2019	36	2025*	52*
2020	55		

Sources: 2015–2024 from an OregonLive/Oregonian chart of homicides per year (victim counts; the chart does not state its underlying data source)^[96]. *2025 is the Portland Police Bureau's count of homicides investigated and is a different series.^[97] The Major Cities Chiefs Association, which counts offenses under federal reporting rules, gives 73 for 2023 and 67 for 2024.^[98]

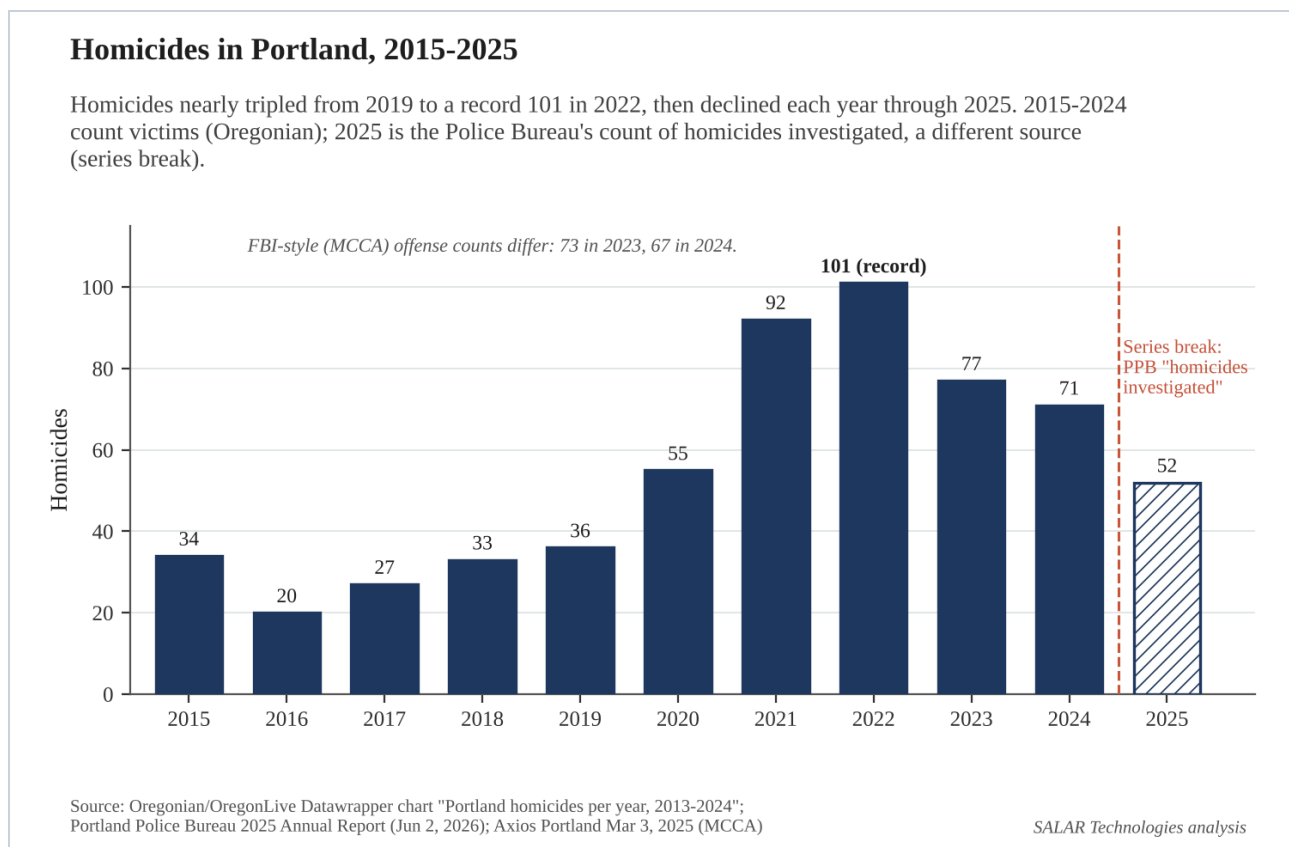


Figure 7. Portland homicides by year, 2015–2025. Note series break: 2015–2024 are Oregonian victim counts; 2025 is PPB homicides investigated. Sources: The Oregonian/OregonLive; Portland Police Bureau.^{[96][97]}

The rise was steep. Homicides went from 36 in 2019 to 101 in 2022, nearly three times as many. The fall has also been steep:

- Homicides fell from 35 in the first half of 2024 to 17 in the first half of 2025 (–51%), the largest drop among Major Cities Chiefs Association cities. Violent crime was down 17%.^[99]
- In 2025, shootings fell 29%, the fourth straight annual decline. Firearm homicides fell 41%, and non-fatal shooting victims fell 30%. PPB noted that 52 homicides was "still higher than historical levels."^[97]
- Shooting incidents fell from 747 in 2024 to 525 in 2025, the fewest since 2019.^[100]

Police staffing is part of this story. In October 2021 the bureau had 789 sworn officers working, the fewest in about 30 years, against an authorized strength of 916.^[101] In 2025 the bureau received 1,801 applications, the most since 2020, and ended the year at 813 sworn members.^[97] High-priority calls average about 20 minutes against a 7-minute goal.^[102] Staffing and the 2026 budget cuts are covered in Part III.

5.4 Jobs and unemployment

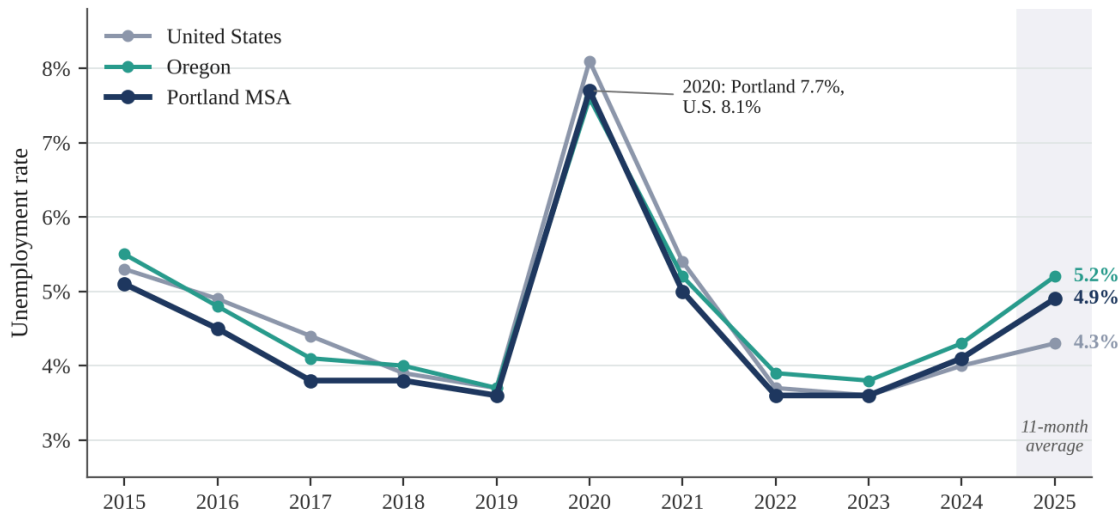
Table 5.6 — Unemployment rate, annual average: Portland metro vs. Oregon vs. U.S.

Year	Portland MSA	Oregon	U.S.
2015	5.1%	5.5%	5.3%
2016	4.5%	4.8%	4.9%
2017	3.8%	4.1%	4.4%
2018	3.8%	4.0%	3.9%
2019	3.6%	3.7%	3.7%
2020	7.7%	7.6%	8.1%
2021	5.0%	5.2%	5.4%
2022	3.6%	3.9%	3.7%
2023	3.6%	3.8%	3.6%
2024	4.1%	4.3%	4.0%
2025	4.9%	5.2%	4.3%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED, series PORT941UR (Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro MSA)^[103], ORUR (Oregon)^[32] and UNRATE (U.S.).^[33] Seasonally adjusted; annual averages of monthly values. October 2025 is missing in all three series, so 2025 averages cover 11 months.

Unemployment rate: Portland area vs. Oregon vs. U.S., 2015-2025

The Portland metro rate was at or below the U.S. rate every year from 2015 to 2023, then rose above it in 2024 and 2025. Annual averages of seasonally adjusted monthly rates; 2025 averages cover 11 months (October 2025 is blank in FRED).



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED, series PORT941UR (Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro MSA), ORUR (Oregon), UNRATE (U.S.)

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Figure 8. Unemployment: Portland MSA vs. Oregon vs. U.S., 2015–2025. Source: BLS via FRED. ^{[103][32][33]}

From 2015 through 2023, the Portland metro rate was at or below the national rate every year, even through the 2020 shutdowns. In 2024 that flipped (4.1% vs. 4.0%), and in 2025 the gap widened (4.9% vs. 4.3%).^[103] The metro rate peaked at 5.1% from September 2025 through March 2026, then eased to 4.8% by August 2026, still above the U.S. rate of 4.1%.^{[103][33]}

Much of the 2024–2025 rise is tied to the region's anchor employers:

- **Intel** notified the state of 1,300 Hillsboro layoffs in October 2024 and cut about 3,000 Oregon jobs in 2024 through layoffs, buyouts and attrition.^{[104][8]} In July 2025 it filed notice of 2,392 more Oregon layoffs across four Washington County sites, which OPB described as more than 10% of its Oregon workforce.^{[105][106]}
- **Nike** notified the state of 740 layoffs at its Beaverton headquarters in April 2024.^[70] In April 2026 it announced about 1,400 layoffs worldwide, including some at Beaverton; no Oregon number was given.^[107]
- Statewide, manufacturing lost 10,000 jobs (–5.6%) from June 2025 to June 2026.^[31]

These layoffs reflect company and industry decisions, not Portland city policy. But they mean the region can no longer count on its technology base to carry the economy while the city works through its problems.

5.5 What residents say

An annual tri-county poll by DHM Research for the Portland Metro Chamber tracks whether residents think things are on the "wrong track."

Table 5.7 — "Wrong track" in the DHM Research / Portland Metro Chamber annual poll

Fieldwork	Tri-county region	Multnomah County	Notes
Dec. 2023	51%	69%	—
Dec. 2024	38%	47%	n=700, ±3.7%
Dec. 2025	47%	49%	n=600, ±4.0%

Sources: Portland Metro Chamber, "2025 Voter Poll"^[108] and "2026 Voter Poll."^[109] The Chamber is a business association; the fieldwork is by DHM Research.

The December 2024 poll was the most hopeful in years.^[110]

- 59% said quality of life was getting worse, down from about 78–88% in each of the three prior years.
- 63% felt safe downtown by day (44% in 2023); about 75% still felt unsafe downtown at night (81% in 2023).
- 35% named homelessness as the top issue (40% in 2023).
- 68% said taxes were too high for the services received.

A year later, regional "wrong track" rose back to 47%. Top issues were homelessness (20%), high taxes (14%) and cost of living (12%).^[109]

The City's own 2024 Portland Insights Survey found that about half of Portlanders agreed the City was moving in the right direction. Most felt unsafe in the central city at night, with District 1 feeling least safe. Police services were rated fair to poor. Parks scored high (87% good to excellent).^[72]

5.6 The scorecard: decline and recovery side by side

Table 5.8 — Portland's turn: worst point vs. latest verified reading

Indicator	Before 2020	Worst point	Latest	Direction now
City population (Census series)	652,503 (2020 count)	630,498 (2023)	635,109 (2025)	Flat / slight recovery
Homicides	36 (2019)	101 (2022)	52 (2025, PPB series)	Improving
Shooting incidents	—	747 (2024)	525 (2025)	Improving

Indicator	Before 2020	Worst point	Latest	Direction now
Downtown office vacancy (Kidder availability)	10.4% (Q4 2019)	~33% (Q4 2025)	31.9% (Q1 2026)	Starting to improve
Downtown foot traffic	100% (2019 baseline)	Ranked 60th of 62 (2022)	81% of 2019 (Aug. 2026)	Improving
Metro unemployment vs. U.S.	3.6% vs. 3.7% (2019)	5.1% (Sept. 2025–Mar. 2026)	4.8% vs. 4.1% (Aug. 2026)	Still above U.S.
Tri-county "wrong track"	—	51% (Dec. 2023)	47% (Dec. 2025)	Mixed

Sources: as cited in sections 5.1–5.5.^{[4][96][100][77][95][103][109]} Housing permit and price trends could not be verified for this chapter and are left to later chapters where sourced.

A fair summary. Portland's decline after 2020 was real and, on several measures, worse than in peer cities: the highest downtown office vacancy measured by Colliers, a near-bottom downtown recovery ranking, and a record homicide year. Its recovery since 2023 is also real: homicides roughly halved from the peak, shootings at a six-year low, and foot traffic and office leasing turning up. Both facts belong in the same sentence.

What this means: Portland is not in free fall, and it is not "back." The hardest numbers (violence, foot traffic) are improving; the slowest-moving ones (office vacancy, population, jobs) have only begun to turn. The recovery is happening alongside a record City budget gap (Part III). The test for the next five years is whether the City and its partners can turn early gains into lasting results while spending less, measuring more, and showing residents the numbers every month.

Part III — How Portland Is Governed Now

From Commission to Council: The 2022 Charter Reform and the 2025 Transition

In brief: In November 2022, Portland voters replaced a form of government the city had used since 1913. Measure 26-228 passed with 58% of the vote. Since January 1, 2025, Portland has had a 12-member council elected by district, a mayor who runs the city but does not vote on council, and a professional City Administrator who supervises most bureaus. The switch was planned to cost about \$17.2 million. The first two years show real gains in structure and some early operating results, but also a council split into two six-member blocs, presidency votes that needed more than nine rounds in 2025 and 13 rounds in 2026, and a loss of trust between the mayor's side and the council that the City's own leaders have acknowledged. The new system is still young. This chapter describes what changed, what it cost, and how it is working so far.

6.1 The old system: one body that both made the rules and ran the bureaus

Portland adopted the commission form of government in 1913. It was the largest U.S. city still using that form when the 2025 transition began.^[68]

Under the commission form, five people ran the city: a mayor and four commissioners. All five were elected citywide. Together they passed laws as the City Council. Each of them also ran a set of city bureaus, such as water, parks or transportation. The mayor could hand out and take back those bureau assignments at any time.^[111]

That design mixed two jobs that most large cities keep apart:

- **Legislating** (setting policy and approving the budget), and
- **Managing** (hiring, running daily operations, delivering services).

When the same five people do both, each commissioner can become an advocate for the bureaus they run, and there is no single manager responsible for the whole city. When the mayor reshuffles assignments, a bureau can get a new boss overnight. The City Auditor later pointed to this kind of risk. In its October 2025 audit of Portland Parks & Recreation, the Auditor found that parks investments had been vulnerable to political pressure under the old commission system.^[112]

Why this matters for residents. Under the commission form, a resident with a problem that crossed bureaus, such as a blocked sidewalk next to a broken water line next to a camp, could be dealing with three different elected bosses. No one person was in charge of making the

bureaus work together. The 2022 reform was designed to fix that by giving the city one executive and one professional manager.

6.2 The vote: Measure 26-228 (November 8, 2022)

Measure 26-228 asked voters to replace the commission form. It passed with 164,651 Yes votes (58.08%) to 118,829 No votes (41.92%), out of 283,480 votes cast on the measure.^[113] The margin was about 45,800 votes.

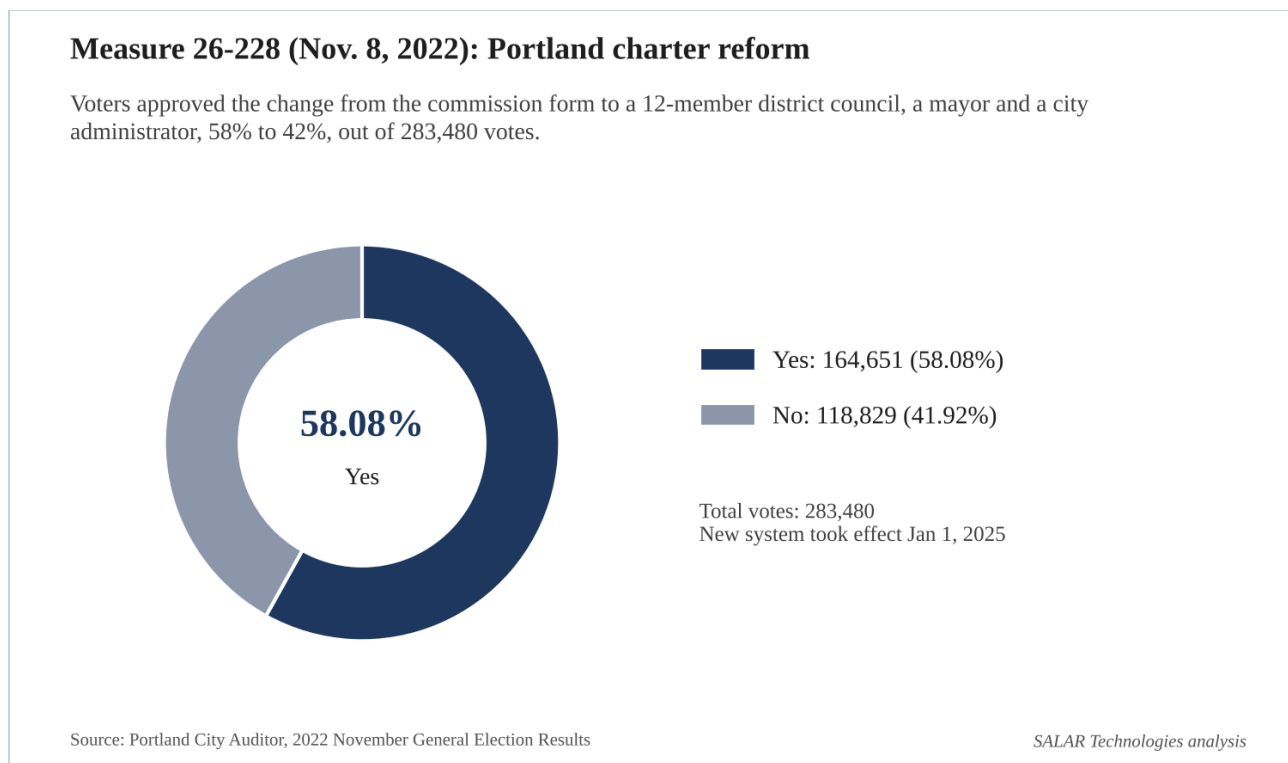


Figure 9. Measure 26-228 (November 2022) result: 164,651 Yes (58.08%) and 118,829 No (41.92%). Source: Portland City Auditor, Elections Division.^[113]

The measure bundled three big changes into one vote:

1. **A larger council elected by district.** The city was divided into four geographic districts. Each district elects three councilors, for 12 in total.
2. **Ranked-choice voting.** Councilors are chosen by a form of ranked-choice voting called single transferable vote. Voters can rank up to six candidates for council, mayor and auditor.
3. **A separate executive.** The mayor became a full-time executive who runs the city but no longer sits on the council. A professional City Administrator manages day-to-day operations.^[114]

Because the three changes came as one package, the 58% Yes vote cannot tell us which part voters supported most. Later debates about the council's size, ranked-choice voting and the mayor's powers should keep that in mind.

6.3 The new system: who does what

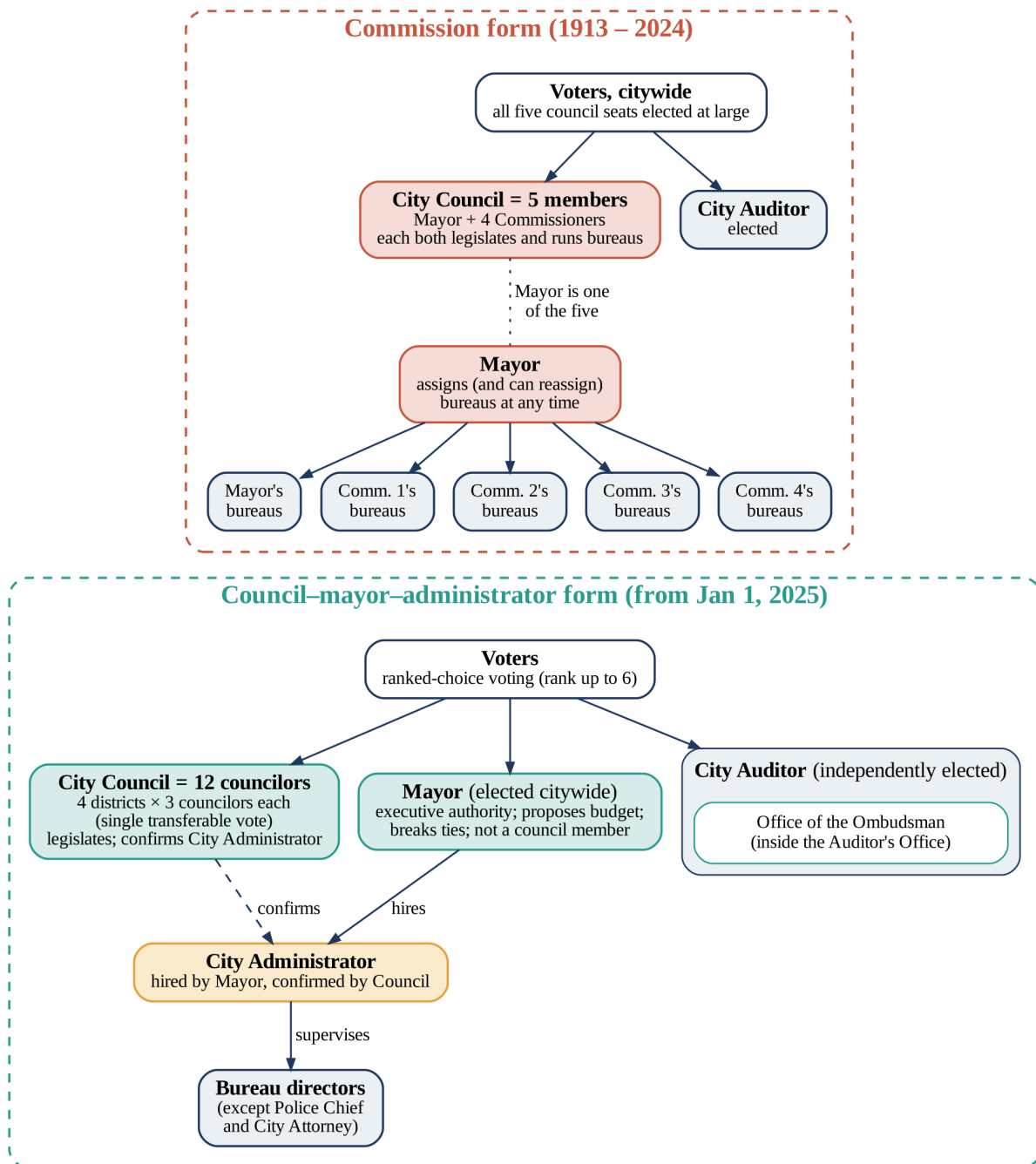
The new structure took effect on January 1, 2025.^[114] The table below compares the old and new forms side by side.

Table 6.1 — Portland's old and new forms of government

Feature	Commission form (1913–2024)	Council–mayor–administrator form (2025–)
Size of council	5 (mayor plus 4 commissioners)	12 councilors; the mayor is not a member
How elected	Citywide	3 councilors from each of 4 districts, by ranked-choice (single transferable vote)
Who runs the bureaus	Each commissioner ran bureaus the mayor assigned	A City Administrator supervises bureau directors (except the police chief and city attorney)
Who proposes the budget	Mayor, with council	Mayor proposes; council amends and adopts
Tie votes	Rare with an odd-numbered body of 5	Mayor breaks ties on non-emergency ordinances
Hiring the top manager	No single city manager	Mayor hires the City Administrator; council confirms

Sources: City of Portland Transition, "Form of government"^[111]; City of Portland, Transition final report (June 2025).^[114]

Portland's form of government: before and after Jan. 1, 2025



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Figure 10. Old commission form versus new council-mayor-administrator form. Source: study diagram based on City of Portland transition documents. ^[111]

The mayor is now the executive over 27 bureaus and programs. ^[115] The council sets policy, adopts the budget and confirms key hires. The City Auditor remains separately elected and independent.

One gap in the design: breaking ties inside the council

The charter gives the mayor a tie-breaking vote on ordinances. But an even-numbered council of 12 can also tie on its own internal business, such as choosing its leaders. A city attorney memo treated officer elections as internal council business under charter Section 2-110. That raised questions about how the charter breaks ties on those votes.^[116] The Portland Mercury reported that the 2026 presidency deadlock exposed the lack of a tie-break mechanism.^[117] Section 6.6 shows what that meant in practice.

6.4 What the transition cost

The City projected the cost of moving to the new form at **\$17,207,142** over fiscal years 2022 through 2025.^[114] The two largest pieces were:

- **\$8.33 million** for City Hall renovations, mostly to house a 12-member council and its staff.
- **\$5.29 million** for transition staff.

The transition team also ran a large public process: 3,216 survey responses, 2,824 public comments and 180 public meetings.^[114]

Table 6.2 — Charter transition costs and engagement (projected, FY2022–FY2025)

Item	Amount
Total projected transition cost	\$17,207,142
City Hall renovations	\$8.33 million (about 48% of total, derived)
Transition staff	\$5.29 million (about 31% of total, derived)
All other costs (derived)	about \$3.59 million
Survey responses	3,216
Public comments	2,824
Public meetings	180

Source: City of Portland, Transition final report (June 2025).^[114] "Derived" figures are the study's arithmetic.

To put \$17.2 million in scale: it is about 0.2% of one year's total City budget of roughly \$8.5 billion (see Chapter 7). It is also about one-tenth of the record General Fund gap the City had to close for FY2026-27. The cost was a one-time investment. Whether it pays off depends on whether the new structure delivers better services, which the City should measure and publish.

The study found no independent audit dedicated to the charter transition itself.^[118] The City's own report is the main public record of what was spent.

6.5 Who holds the new offices

Mayor. Keith Wilson, a business owner and CEO of Titan Freight Systems, was elected in November 2024 under ranked-choice voting. He defeated three sitting city commissioners: Rene Gonzalez, Mingus Mapps and Carmen Rubio.^[119] He took office in January 2025 as the first mayor under the new charter. Final-round vote shares were not retrieved for this study.

City Administrator. Michael Jordan, a former City chief administrative officer and former Metro chief operating officer, served as the first City Administrator. The council confirmed him 11–1 in February 2025.^[120] A national search for a permanent administrator began August 25, 2025, with a posted pay range of \$284,000 to \$393,000.^[120] On December 10, 2025, the council unanimously confirmed Raymond C. Lee III, the former city manager of Greeley, Colorado (a city with about 1,600 employees and a \$515 million budget). He started on December 29, 2025, at \$370,000 a year, succeeding Jordan, who retired.^[121]

City Auditor. Simone Rede has been the elected City Auditor since January 2023. She was re-elected in November 2024 and her current term began in January 2025.^[122] She is on the November 3, 2026 ballot, unopposed, for a four-year term.^[123]

Table 6.3 — Portland City Council by district (2025–2026)

District	Area (general)	Councilors
District 1	East Portland, east of 82nd Avenue	Candace Avalos, Loretta Smith, Jamie Dunphy
District 2	Not described in the study's sources	Dan Ryan, Elana Pirtle-Guiney, Sameer Kanal
District 3	Not described in the study's sources	Steve Novick, Tiffany Koyama Lane, Angelita Morillo
District 4	Westside and inner Southeast	Olivia Clark, Mitch Green, Eric Zimmerman

Sources: Portland City Council (Oregon), Wikipedia (secondary source; the study could not cross-check every name against portland.gov/council)^[68]; District 1 and District 4 area descriptions from OPB and the Portland Mercury.^[124]

The seats in Districts 3 and 4 are on the November 3, 2026 ballot. District 3 has 21 candidates for three seats and District 4 has 12 candidates for three seats.^[123]

6.6 The first two years: a council split down the middle

Two six-member blocs

The 12-member council has organized into two informal blocs of six. The clearest sign is the vote to choose a council president, which deadlocked 6–6 in both 2025 and 2026.^[116]

Table 6.4 — Council president elections under the new charter

Year	President elected	Date	Rounds needed	Final vote	Vice president
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Year	President elected	Date	Rounds needed	Final vote	Vice president
2025	Elana Pirtle-Guiney (District 2)	Jan 2, 2025	After nine deadlocked rounds	Not retrieved	Tiffany Koyama Lane
2026	Jamie Dunphy (District 1)	Jan 14, 2026	13 rounds across three meetings	9–3	Olivia Clark (11–1)

Sources: OPB, Jan 7, 2026^[125]; KPTV, Jan 14, 2026^[126]; Hoodline, Jan 17, 2026.^[116]

In 2026, earlier rounds tied 6–6 before Dunphy won 9–3 on the 13th round.^[126] He was described in coverage as a compromise choice and said he would not seek a second year as president.^[117]

Koyama Lane, the 2025 vice president, said she had "soured" on Pirtle-Guiney's leadership style, and progressive councilors had been frustrated during the 2025 budget sessions.^[125]

Ties on the budget

The split carried into spending decisions. In June 2026, several amendments to the FY2026-27 budget failed on 6–6 ties, and procedural votes deadlocked, ending one session early.^[127] The final budget passed 9–2 with one abstention (see Chapter 7).

Questions about how blocs coordinate

The bloc structure also produced state ethics complaints. The study reports their exact status, and none has produced a finding that a sitting councilor broke state ethics law:^[128]

- **Group texts (2025).** Willamette Week reported that six councilors in an informal caucus (Avalos, Dunphy, Green, Kanal, Koyama Lane and Morillo) used group texts to coordinate budget votes from March to June 2025. About 13 complaints to the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGE) were **dismissed on procedure** in September 2025 because they were not filed in time. There was no ruling on the merits. The City Attorney cautioned councilors against deliberating with a seventh member, which would form a quorum.^[128]
- **Private retreat (August 2025).** OGE voted 7–0 in December 2025 to investigate a complaint about the same six councilors' retreat. Staff investigators **recommended dismissal**. A commission ruling was scheduled for May 2026; the final vote could not be verified. The councilors say they broke no rules, and several, including Dunphy, stopped attending caucus meetings.^[129]

Elected officials have every right to form alliances. The public-policy point is narrower: a 12-member body that reliably splits 6–6 needs clear rules for breaking ties and for keeping coalition work inside public meetings.

6.7 The mayor and the council: a working relationship still being built

The charter divides power between an executive mayor and a legislative council. That division is meant to create checks. It also creates friction, and the first year had plenty:

- At Lee's confirmation in December 2025, councilors said trust between the mayor's administrative side and the council had been lost during year one. Lee committed to monthly meetings with each councilor.^[130]
- In early 2025, councilors complained about communication with committees under the interim administrator, and a land-use statement involving Zenith Energy drew controversy.^[131]
- Dunphy has often criticized the mayor's homelessness plan and proposed alternatives.^[124] Yet he also said he had gotten along well with the mayor even when they disagreed.^[132]
- Councilors Loretta Smith (on cost) and Angelita Morillo (on shelter costs of \$35 to \$190 per day and 90-day stay limits) questioned the mayor's shelter plan.^[133]

The relationship is also shaped by how the council organizes itself. Dunphy proposed a Committee of the Whole and fewer committees, and led a push to cut the council's eight policy committees to five.^{[132] [124]} Fewer committees can mean fewer handoffs between the council and bureau staff.

Council conduct has also drawn attention. In July 2026, an exchange between Councilors Morillo and Smith during a dispute over a tie vote led Smith to call the council "toxic"; Morillo said her remarks were not about Smith. No formal council action was reported.^[134]

6.8 Early praise and early results

The new system also has real accomplishments to its name, and a fair review must list them.

- **It launched on time.** A brand-new council, mayor's office and administrator structure began operating on January 1, 2025, as voters required. The City's own transition report, from April 2025, called the transition "a success, but there's still work ahead."^[114]
- **A permanent professional manager is in place.** The council confirmed the permanent City Administrator unanimously, a rare moment of full agreement for this council.^[121]
- **One office now answers to the Auditor.** Since January 2025, the City Administrator, not individual council members, has been responsible for responding to audit recommendations.^[118] That is a cleaner line of responsibility than the old system offered.
- **Some services improved.** The Auditor found that average 911 wait times fell from 77 seconds in July 2022 to 18 seconds in January 2026, as vacancies fell from 33 to 6.^[135] Shootings fell 29% in 2025, the fourth straight yearly decline.^[97] These gains began before the transition and have many causes, so they should not be credited to the charter alone.

- **Resident views are mixed, not negative.** In the City's 2024 Portland Insights Survey, about half of residents agreed the City was moving in the right direction.^[72] In the Portland Metro Chamber's annual poll, the share of Multnomah County voters saying things were on the "wrong track" fell from 69% (December 2023) to 47% (December 2024) and was 49% in December 2025.^{[108][109]}

The new system has also shown strain at the operating level. The Revenue Division told the Auditor that "new and uncertain expectations" of the mayor and council under the new form of government were a barrier to improving its collection standards.^[118] Clear, written priorities from the top would remove that barrier.

Table 6.5 — Scorecard: the charter's first two years

Goal of the reform	Evidence so far	Early grade (study's assessment)
Separate policy-making from management	Mayor and City Administrator run bureaus; council legislates; permanent administrator confirmed unanimously	On track
Local representation by district	12 councilors from 4 districts; every part of the city has three members	Achieved in structure
A council that can decide	6–6 presidency deadlocks in 2025 and 2026 (nine deadlocked rounds, then 13 rounds); 6–6 budget amendment ties in June 2026	Needs work
Trust between executive and council	Councilors said trust was lost in year one; new monthly meetings promised	Needs work
Clear accountability for results	Administrator now answers audit recommendations; no public performance dashboard tied to the charter goals	Partly met
Reasonable cost	\$17.2M projected one-time cost; no independent audit of the transition	Cost known; value not yet measured

Sources: as cited in Sections 6.3–6.8. Grades are the author's assessment of the cited evidence.

What this means: Portland voters chose a modern structure, and the basic machinery is now in place. The weak points are not in the idea but in the details: an even-numbered council with no clear tie-break for its own business, unresolved questions about coalition work outside public meetings, and an executive–council relationship that lost trust in year one. Three practical fixes follow. First, the council should adopt a written tie-break rule for officer elections and procedural votes (for example, a rotation or a drawing of lots after a set number of rounds), and the City Attorney should say whether a charter amendment is needed. Second, the City should publish a short, plain-language "charter performance report" each year, tracking service results against the goals voters were promised. Third, the City Auditor should consider an independent

review of the transition's \$17.2 million cost and outcomes, so that residents know what the change bought.

The Budget: Where the Money Goes and Why the Gaps Keep Coming

In brief: The City of Portland spends roughly \$8.2 billion to \$8.6 billion a year across all funds. Most of that money is locked into dedicated uses such as water, sewer and transportation. The flexible part, the General Fund, pays for police, fire, parks and homeless services, and it has run short three years in a row. For FY2026-27, the City faced a record General Fund gap of about \$170 million, or about 19% of the fund. It closed the gap with reserves, clean-energy fund interest, two new fees and deep cuts, including about 140 positions, about 100 layoffs, a 31% cut to shelter funding and an end to a \$31 million transfer to Multnomah County. Behind the yearly gaps sit two larger problems the City's own auditors have measured: an infrastructure funding gap of more than \$1 billion a year and a parks maintenance backlog of \$550 million to \$800 million. This chapter explains the numbers and what they mean.

7.1 How the City's money is organized

Readers often hear that Portland has an "\$8 billion budget" and assume all of it is available for any purpose. It is not. The City's budget is split into many funds, and most of them are legally tied to specific uses:

- **Utility funds** (water and sewer) are paid by ratepayers and must be spent on those systems.
- **Dedicated taxes and fees**, such as the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) surcharge, the Arts Tax and transportation revenue, come with rules about how they can be spent.
- **The General Fund** is the flexible pot. It pays for most police, fire, parks and homeless-services costs. In FY2024-25 the City described it as about 10% of the total budget.^[136]

That is why a city with an \$8.5 billion budget can face painful cuts. A gap of \$170 million is only about 2% of the total budget, but it is about 19% of the General Fund, where the services residents notice most are paid for.^[137]

7.2 Three budgets, three gaps

Table 7.1 — City of Portland budgets, FY2024-25 to FY2026-27

Fiscal year	Total budget (all funds)	Reported shortfall	How it was handled (highlights)	Adoption
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Fiscal year	Total budget (all funds)	Reported shortfall	How it was handled (highlights)	Adoption
FY2024-25	About \$8.2 billion (City: "approximately \$8 billion")	About \$70 million in bureau shortfalls	Covered with PCEF revenue	Preliminary approval, unanimous, May 15, 2024; final June 2024
FY2025-26	\$8.6 billion (mayor proposed \$8.54 billion)	\$93 million General Fund (February estimate); about \$150 million across all funds	No new taxes; 25% parking-fee increase; 186 positions eliminated (proposal)	Advanced by council June 11, 2025; final vote count not verified
FY2026-27	\$8.5 billion	About \$170 million General Fund (about 19%); KATU reported \$171 million	Reserves, PCEF interest, two new fees, about 140 positions cut	Adopted June 17, 2026, 9–2 with 1 abstention

Sources: Willamette Week, May 16, 2024^[138]; City Budget Office FY25 overview^[136]; KPTV, May 5, 2025^[139]; City of Portland, Jun 12, 2025^[140]; City of Portland, Jun 18, 2026^[137]; KATU.^[141]

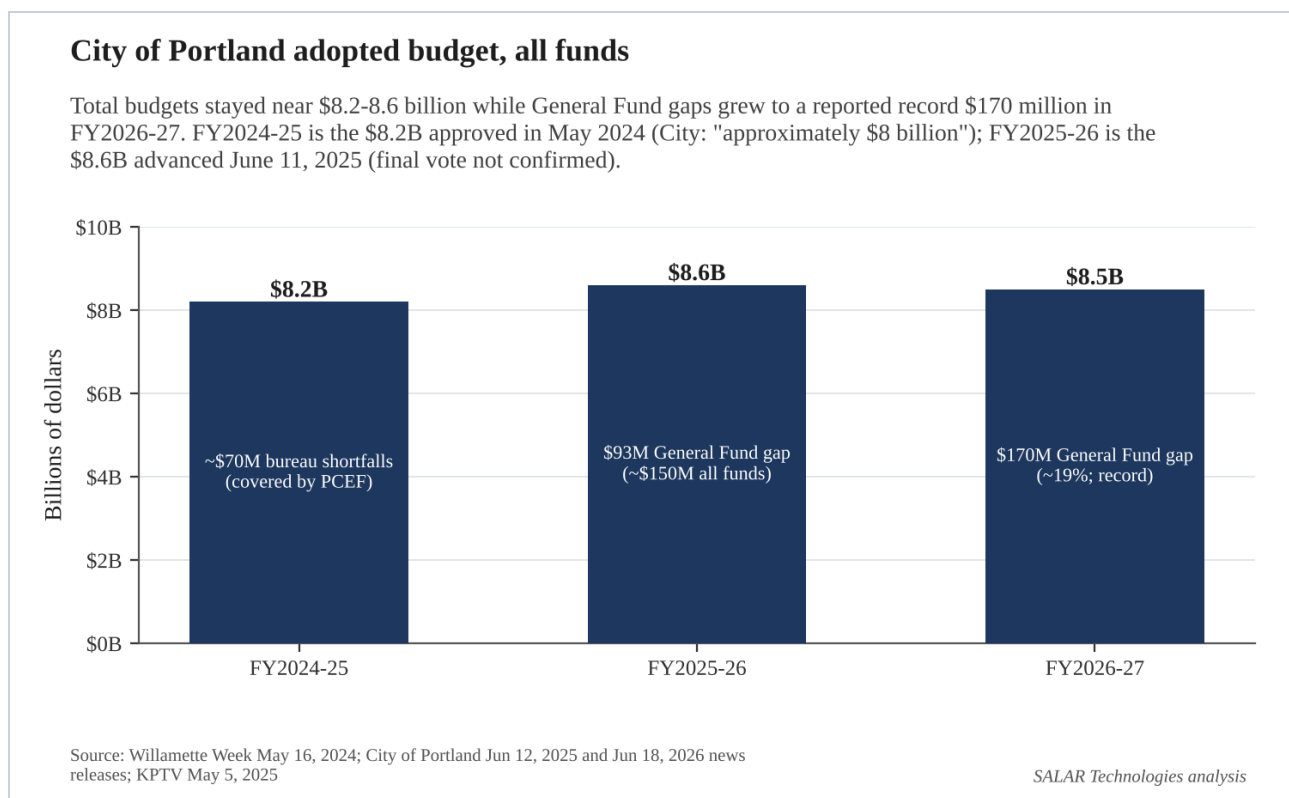


Figure 11. City of Portland budget, all funds, FY2024-25 to FY2026-27 (in billions of dollars). Source: Willamette Week; City of Portland.^[137]

Two points stand out. First, the total budget has stayed flat at about \$8.2 to \$8.6 billion. Second, the General Fund shortfall has grown each year: from about \$70 million in bureau shortfalls, to \$93

million, to about \$170 million. A flat total with a growing General Fund gap means costs for core services are rising faster than the flexible revenue that pays for them.

One data gap limits this analysis. The study could not verify the adopted General Fund dollar totals for FY2024-25, FY2025-26 or the final FY2026-27 budget. Only the proposed FY2026-27 General Fund figures are sourced. The City should publish a simple, multi-year General Fund table on one page so residents can track the trend themselves.

7.3 The record FY2026-27 gap

The proposal (April 20, 2026)

Mayor Wilson's proposed budget showed General Fund expenses of \$906 million against revenues of \$743 million. That is a gap of \$163 million (derived), which the mayor's office described as "over \$160 million." The proposal used \$44 million of reserves and \$27 million of PCEF interest. It eliminated 203 positions while adding 58, a net loss of 145.^[142]

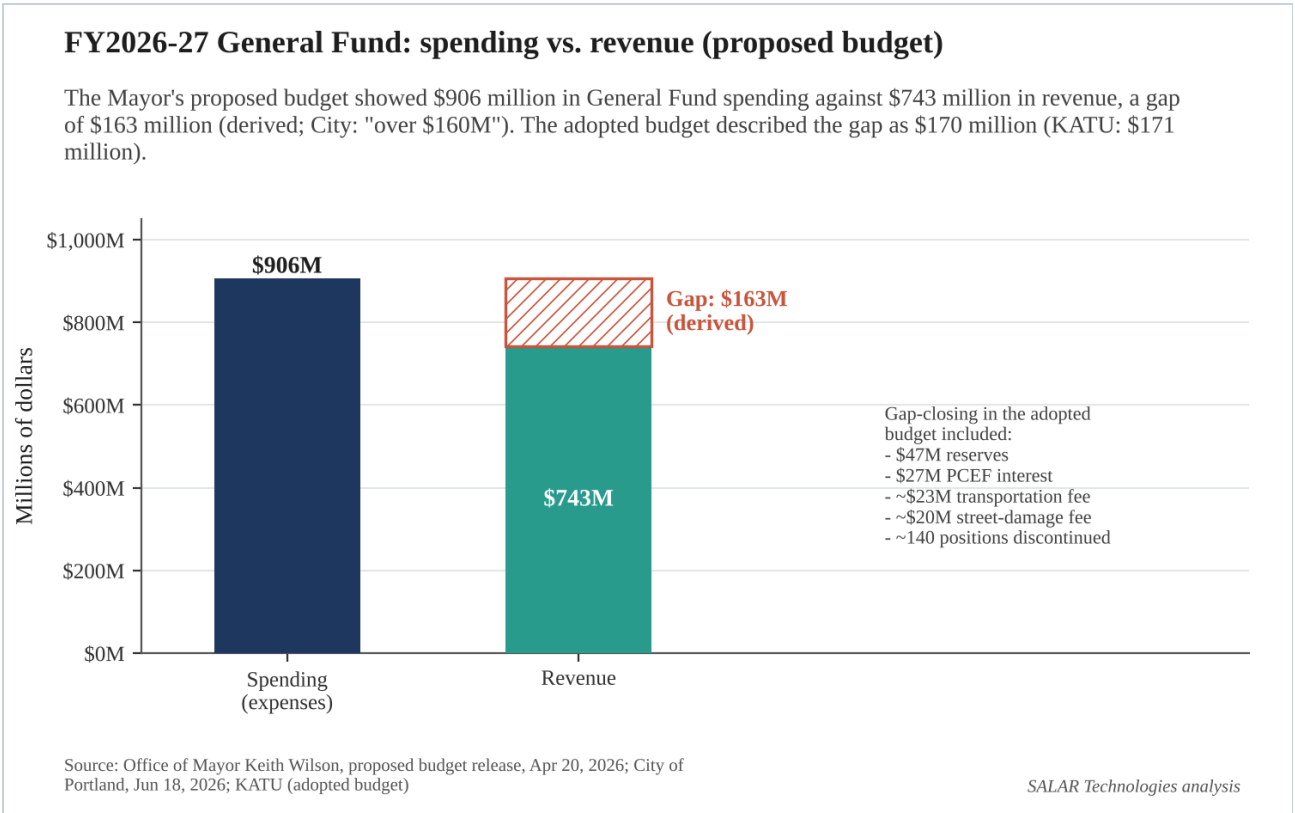


Figure 12. FY2026-27 proposed General Fund: spending (\$906 million) versus revenue (\$743 million). The gap is about \$163 million (derived). Source: Office of Mayor Keith Wilson.^[142]

The adopted budget (June 17, 2026)

By adoption, the City described the General Fund gap as \$170 million, or about 19%.^[137] KATU reported it as \$171 million.^[141] The council adopted the \$8.5 billion budget 9–2, with one abstention.

The City named several pressures behind the gap. One was outside its control: the 2025 federal tax act was expected to cost the City about \$33 million over two years.^[137] The Auditor's climate audit, released in February 2026, also noted that the City was then facing a \$169 million shortfall.^[143]

How the gap was closed

Table 7.2 — Main tools used to close the FY2026-27 General Fund gap (as reported)

Type	Item	Amount
New or one-time money	Reserves	\$47 million
	PCEF interest earnings	\$27 million
	New transportation utility fee	About \$23 million
	New street-damage fee	About \$20 million
Cuts by area	Police (mostly non-sworn)	\$21.0 million
	Parks	\$11.4 million
	Fire	\$4.1 million
	Citywide "streamlining"	\$19.3 million
Homelessness	City shelter funding (cut 31%, to \$40 million)	About \$18 million cut
	Transfer to Multnomah County for homeless services, ended	\$31 million
Staffing	Positions discontinued / employees laid off (from Aug 3, 2026)	About 140 / about 100

Sources: City of Portland, Jun 18, 2026^[137]; KATU^[141]. The items listed are the ones reported; they are not presented as a complete accounting, and they do not necessarily add to the gap.

Put simply, about \$117 million (derived) of the listed tools came from new or one-time money: \$74 million from reserves and PCEF interest, and about \$43 million from two new fees. The rest came from cuts. Reserves and interest earnings can be spent only once. Unless revenue grows or costs fall, the same gap is likely to return next year.

What the cuts mean on the ground

- **Police.** The budget kept sworn officer positions but cut about \$21 million, including an 80% reduction in non-sworn Public Safety Specialists. Police Chief Bob Day said this meant "about 20,000 hours less" of officer time on the street.^[141] The bureau had 809 sworn members in June 2026 against an authorized strength of 877.^{[144][102]} High-priority calls average about 20 minutes against a 7-minute goal, and hiring and training one officer costs about \$345,000.^[102]

- **Shelter and homeless services.** City shelter funding fell 31% to \$40 million. The City also stopped sending \$31 million to Multnomah County for homeless services and said it would provide those services directly.^[137] This came in the same year the mayor's shelter expansion was a top priority (see Part IV). It also shifts responsibility between two governments that both serve the same residents.
- **Parks and fire.** Parks lost \$11.4 million and fire \$4.1 million, on top of the long-term maintenance problems described in Section 7.5.
- **Workers.** About 100 City employees were laid off starting August 3, 2026.^[137]

Council members did not hide their discomfort. Councilor Elana Pirtle-Guiney, the 2025 council president, was blunt: "This is not a great budget." The adoption meeting was also disrupted by protests over the federal immigration facility in South Portland, and at least 30 people were ejected.^[145] In July 2026, the council passed a supplemental budget (Ordinance 192207) that revised the adopted plan.^[146]

7.4 The clean-energy fund as a budget backstop

One revenue source shows up in every recent budget: the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF). It was created to pay for climate and clean-energy projects. It has raised far more than first expected:

- In 2022, the Auditor found PCEF revenue reached \$116 million in one fiscal year, against a projection of \$44 million to \$61 million a year.^[147]
- By December 2023, \$587 million had been collected and \$165.5 million distributed.^[148]
- PCEF revenue is projected at about \$1.7 billion by mid-2029, with about \$740 million going to six City bureaus.^[143]

PCEF money has been used to fill General Fund holes: about \$70 million in bureau shortfalls in FY2024-25, and \$27 million of PCEF interest in FY2026-27.^{[138][137]} The City Auditor's February 2026 climate audit found that PCEF "has repeatedly been used to help close city budget gaps," including about \$25 million of interest over two years. City Administrator Lee accepted the audit's recommendations.^[143]

The issue is not whether PCEF money is spent well. It is that a dedicated, fast-growing fund has become a regular patch for a structural problem in the General Fund. That makes the true size of the General Fund gap harder for residents to see.

7.5 The deeper pressures: assets falling apart

The yearly General Fund gap is the visible problem. The City Auditor has documented a larger, slower one: Portland is not spending enough to maintain what it already owns.

Citywide infrastructure

The Auditor's April 2025 asset management audit found that the City's annual infrastructure funding gap grew from **\$112 million in 2007** to **\$287 million in 2013** to **more than \$1 billion in 2023**. The City owns about \$74 billion in assets. The Citywide Asset Management Office, created to coordinate this work, was unfunded as of January 2025.^[149] A 2022 report by the City's asset managers, cited in the audit, projected a funding gap of about \$10 billion over 10 years. As of 2021, almost a quarter of City assets were in poor or very poor condition.^[149]

Table 7.3 — Portland's annual infrastructure funding gap

Year	Annual funding gap	Change from 2007 (derived)
2007	\$112 million	—
2013	\$287 million	About 2.6 times
2023	More than \$1 billion	About 9 times or more

Source: Portland Audit Services, "Asset Management," Apr 23, 2025.^[149]

Scale check. An annual infrastructure gap of more than \$1 billion is larger than the entire proposed FY2026-27 General Fund (\$906 million in spending). No single year's budget can close it. It requires a long-term plan, a funded office to run it, and honest public reporting of asset condition.

Parks

Parks are one of the few City services residents rate highly: 87% rated City parks good to excellent in the 2024 Portland Insights Survey.^[72] But the system behind those parks is wearing out. The Auditor's October 2025 parks audit found:^[150]

- A maintenance backlog of **\$550 million to \$800 million**. (OPB's coverage of the same audit gave the low end as \$500 million.)^[112]
- 86% of parks assets were in poor or very bad condition as of September 2024.
- About \$4.7 million a year in lifecycle costs for five new projects had no identified funding.
- The bureau manages 11,677 acres, and the 2014 \$68 million parks bond for maintenance has run out.
- The proposed 2025 parks levy rate was \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed value, up from \$0.80, raising about \$84 million in year one. Only about 2% (about \$2 million a year) was set to go to maintenance. A \$90 million shortfall and layoffs of about half the bureau's staff were projected if the levy failed.^[112] The levy election result was not verified for this study.

The bureau and the City Administrator agreed with all of the audit's recommendations.^[112] That is a good sign. The test is whether a funded, long-term maintenance plan follows.

Spending efficiency

Tight budgets make wasted spending more costly. The Auditor's October 2024 technology purchasing audit found the City had no citywide strategy for buying technology. It bought a \$300,000 device-management bundle and then a duplicative \$700,000 tool. The City spent at least \$63 million on technology in FY2023-24, and some projects were delayed more than a year.^[151] More broadly, the City had implemented only 49% of 204 audit recommendations made over five years, against a 64% peer average.^[152] Part V returns to this. Every unimplemented recommendation that would save money is, in effect, part of the budget gap.

7.6 A shrinking base under a growing bill

Budget pressure also reflects the city's population and economy. On Census Bureau estimates, Portland had 635,109 residents on July 1, 2025, down 2.7% from the 2020 base. Portland State University's certified estimate was higher, at 640,623.^{[4][9]} Meanwhile the wider Portland metro area grew 0.98% from 2020 to 2025.^[10] The Portland metro unemployment rate rose from 3.6% in 2023 to 4.9% in 2025, above the U.S. rate of 4.3%.^{[103][33]} Downtown office vacancy remains near 30% on several brokers' measures.^[81] A flat or shrinking core city, a softer job market and empty offices all weigh on the revenue the General Fund relies on.

What this means: Portland's yearly budget gaps are not one-off events. They are the visible edge of a structural mismatch: core service costs are rising faster than flexible revenue, and the City has been covering the difference with reserves, clean-energy fund money and new fees. Below that sits a billion-dollar-a-year shortfall in maintaining what the City already owns. Four steps would help. First, publish a five-year General Fund forecast every year that shows the gap before one-time fixes. Second, set a rule that one-time money (reserves, interest) cannot fund ongoing costs without a public plan to replace it. Third, fund the Citywide Asset Management Office and publish an annual asset-condition report. Fourth, track the dollar value of unimplemented audit recommendations and report it with each budget.

Taxes Stacked on Residents and Employers

In brief: A high-earning Portland resident pays income tax to four layers of government: the State of Oregon, Metro (the regional government), Multnomah County and, through payroll, the regional transit district. The Tax Foundation calculated the combined top marginal rate on wages at 14.77% in 2024, essentially tied with New York City (14.776%) and above California (14.4%). A Portland Central City Task Force advisory group put Portland's top rate second-highest among U.S. cities. Businesses face their own stack of local taxes. Whether these taxes are driving high earners away is disputed: one academic study estimates that about \$1.4 billion in income left Multnomah County after the preschool tax took effect, while two other analyses find the number of high-income households and tax filers rose. This chapter lays out the taxes, the comparison and both sides of the migration debate. Several business tax rates could not be confirmed from official sources for this study and are marked as such.

8.1 Why "stacking" matters

Each tax in this chapter was approved separately, usually by voters, for a specific purpose: homeless services, preschool, transit, arts education or clean energy. Each one can be defended on its own terms. The policy problem appears when they are added together. A household or business does not experience five separate taxes. It experiences one combined bill, and it compares that bill with what it would pay a few miles away, across the Columbia River in Washington, which has no personal income tax on wages.

Residents notice. In the Portland Metro Chamber's poll of tri-county voters (fieldwork December 2024), 68% said taxes were too high for the services they received.^[108] A year later, "high taxes" was the second most-named top issue (14%), after homelessness (20%).^[109]

8.2 The personal income tax stack

The table below lists the taxes that apply to a high-earning Portland resident's wages. The rates are as reported by the Tax Foundation in June 2024 and, for the Metro tax, by Metro's own measure documents.

Table 8.1 — Taxes on a high-earning Portland resident's wages

Tax	Levied by	Top rate	Applies to	Purpose
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Tax	Levied by	Top rate	Applies to	Purpose
Oregon personal income tax	State of Oregon	9.9%	Income above \$125,000 (single)	State general fund (schools, human services, public safety)
Supportive Housing Services (SHS) tax	Metro (regional government)	1%	Taxable income above \$125,000 (single) / \$200,000 (joint)	Homeless services
Preschool for All (PFA) tax	Multnomah County	1.5%, plus another 1.5% (3% total) at higher incomes	Above \$125,000 / \$200,000; second tier above \$250,000 / \$400,000	Universal preschool
TriMet transit payroll tax	TriMet	0.7737%	Wages (counted by the Tax Foundation in the combined rate)	Regional transit
Statewide transit tax	State of Oregon	0.1%	Wages	Public transit statewide
Combined top marginal rate		14.77%		

Sources: Tax Foundation, "Portland Taxes," Jun 25, 2024^[34]; Metro, Measure 26-210 fact sheet (SHS thresholds and rate)^[58]; Multnomah County Elections, Measure 26-210.^[42]

Rates this study could not confirm. The Tax Foundation reported in 2024 that Preschool for All rates were scheduled to rise by 0.8 percentage points in 2026, to 2.3% and 3.8%.^[34] Whether that increase took effect could not be verified from the sources available to this study. If it did, the combined top rate would be about 0.8 points higher than 14.77%. Readers should check the current rate with Multnomah County before relying on it.

The SHS tax in more detail

The Metro SHS tax is the newest regional layer, approved by voters as Measure 26-210 in May 2020. Its main design features are:

- A 1% tax on taxable income above \$125,000 (single) or \$200,000 (joint), and a separate 1% tax on business profits for businesses with gross receipts above \$5 million.^[42]
- It applies to residents of the Metro district and to non-residents on income earned inside the district.^[153]
- It is collected by the City of Portland Revenue Division on Metro's behalf.^[49]

- The income thresholds were not adjusted for inflation for tax years 2021 through 2025. Indexing begins in tax year 2026.^[49] The 2026 dollar thresholds could not be verified.
- It expires in 2030 unless voters extend it.^[42]

The Revenue Division has a policy, adopted August 23, 2023, that gives Metro and Multnomah County *residents* a credit when the same income is also taxed by another state.^[154] As written, the policy covers residents. A Washington resident who works in Portland pays no Washington income tax on wages, so there is no other-state tax to credit. This design choice is examined in Part IV, Chapter 11.

The lack of indexing matters. Because the \$125,000 and \$200,000 lines were fixed for five tax years, inflation pulled more households into the tax each year without any vote to widen it. Indexing from 2026 stops that drift going forward, but does not reverse it.

8.3 How Portland compares: NYC and California

Two credible sources compare Portland's top combined rate with other high-tax places. They use different methods and reach slightly different numbers, so both are shown.

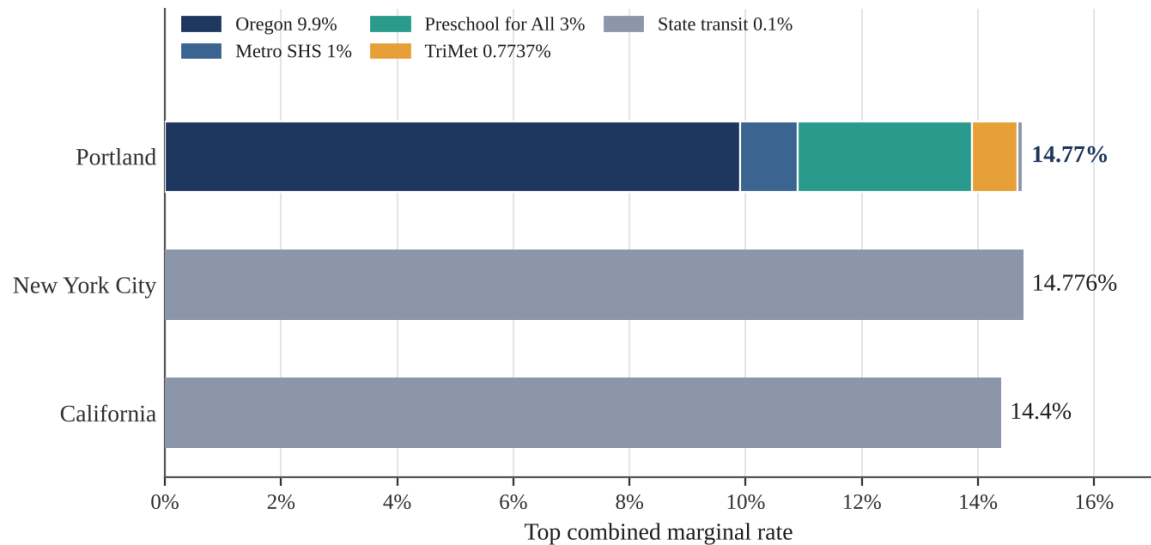
Table 8.2 — Top combined marginal income tax rates (state and local)

Place	Tax Foundation (June 2024)	Central City Task Force Tax Advisory Group (January 2025)
New York City	14.776%	14.8%
Portland (Multnomah County resident)	14.77% (wages; includes transit payroll taxes)	13.9% (singles over \$250,000)
California (state top rate)	14.4%	Not reported in source
Portland's rank among large U.S. cities	Essentially tied with NYC	Second-highest

Sources: Tax Foundation, "Portland Taxes," Jun 25, 2024^[34]; KOIN, Jan 19, 2025, reporting the Portland Central City Task Force Tax Advisory Group.^[35] The difference between 14.77% and 13.9% is mainly whether transit payroll taxes on wages are counted.

Top combined marginal income-tax rate on wages

Portland's stacked top rate (14.77%) is effectively tied with New York City's and above California's. Tax Foundation, June 2024. A January 2025 city task force using a different method put Portland at 13.9% vs. NYC 14.8%. A scheduled 2026 Preschool for All increase was not verified.



Source: Tax Foundation, "Portland Taxes," Jun 25, 2024; KOIN, Jan 19, 2025 (Central City Task Force)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 13. Top combined marginal income tax rate: Portland (14.77%) vs. New York City (14.776%) vs. California (14.4%), as calculated by the Tax Foundation (2024). Source: Tax Foundation. ^[34]

Two cautions apply to any rate comparison:

- **Marginal is not average.** The top marginal rate applies only to each additional dollar above the thresholds. A household's average rate on all its income is lower. Most Portland households earn below the SHS and PFA thresholds and do not pay those two taxes at all.
- **Income tax is not the whole bill.** Oregon has no general sales tax; New York and California do. A full comparison would include sales, property and other taxes. This study did not find a verified comparison of total tax burden across these places, so it does not offer one.

Even with those cautions, the top-rate comparison matters. Top earners and business owners are the people most able to choose where to live and where to locate a business, and they pay a large share of these taxes. The next section looks at whether that choice is changing behavior.

8.4 Taxes on businesses

Businesses in Portland face their own layered set of local taxes, on top of state corporate taxes. The research for this study could confirm some rates from cited sources, but not others. Following the study's source rules, the table shows which is which.

Table 8.3 — Local taxes and fees affecting Portland businesses

Tax or fee	Levied by	Rate / amount	Status in this study
Metro SHS business income tax	Metro (collected by Portland Revenue Division)	1% of profits, businesses with gross receipts above \$5 million	Verified (Metro and Multnomah County Elections)
Portland Business License Tax	City of Portland	Rate not confirmed	Could not verify from an official source this session
Multnomah County Business Income Tax	Multnomah County (collected by Portland Revenue Division)	Rate not confirmed	Could not verify from an official source this session
Portland Clean Energy Surcharge (PCEF)	City of Portland	Surcharge on large retailers' Portland gross receipts; rate not confirmed	Rate could not be verified; revenue figures are verified (Chapter 7)
Arts Education and Access Income Tax	City of Portland	\$35 per year for residents earning over \$1,000	Verified (City Auditor audit, 2026)
New FY2026-27 City fees	City of Portland	Transportation utility fee (about \$23M) and street-damage fee (about \$20M), as counted toward the FY2026-27 gap	Verified (City of Portland)

Sources: Multnomah County Elections, Measure 26-210^[42]; OPB, Mar 18, 2026 (Arts Tax audit)^[155]; City of Portland, Jun 18, 2026.^[137] Unconfirmed rates are deliberately left out; check portland.gov/revenue and multco.us before relying on any figure.

Three features of the business tax system add cost beyond the rates themselves:

- **Penalties and collections.** The Auditor's 2022 collections audit found that Business License Tax penalties escalate from 5% to 20%, plus 10% annual interest. Each bureau collected debts on its own with no citywide standards, and only 8 of nearly 17,000 accounts sent to the collection agency paid within the 30-day no-fee window; the agency adds a 23% charge plus interest.^[156] A 2023 follow-up found no progress on citywide collection standards.^[157]
- **One collector, many rulebooks.** The City's Revenue Division collects its own business tax, the County business tax and both Metro SHS taxes. Collection cost the City \$9.0 million in FY2023-24 and \$9.9 million in FY2024-25 for the SHS taxes alone.^{[158][159]} In 2021, a business coalition led by the Portland Business Alliance challenged Metro's collection rules; a Multnomah County Circuit judge upheld them, and the outcome of any appeal could not be verified.^[160]
- **Revenue that swings.** Metro has warned that SHS revenue depends heavily on high-income capital gains that taxpayers can time, and that actual collections could fall up to about \$50 million below forecast.^[47] A tax base built on a small number of high earners is both easier to lose and harder to plan around.

8.5 The migration debate: are high earners leaving?

This is the most contested question in Portland tax policy. Serious researchers have looked at it and reached different conclusions. The study presents the main findings on each side without choosing between them, then explains why they can differ.

Evidence that taxes are pushing income out

Table 8.4 — Studies finding tax-related out-migration

Study	Data	Main finding	Authors' own caveats
Conway (University of New Hampshire), Iselin (Yale Budget Lab) and Rork (Reed College), "Mult-No-More?" (April 6, 2026)	IRS migration data around the start of Preschool for All	After PFA took effect, net income in-migration to Multnomah fell about 3 percentage points. About \$1.4 billion in adjusted gross income (AGI) left, cutting PFA revenue by about \$16 million (8.5%). Oregon lost an estimated \$78.6 million in 2022 state income tax. Clark County, Washington, was the main destination.	The authors call these upper-bound estimates. COVID, the 2020 protests and Measure 110 are possible confounders, and the effect may be fading by 2024.
Common Sense Institute (McMullen and Kirsch, July 2026)	IRS data, 2022–23, statewide	Oregon had a net AGI loss of \$476 million; households earning \$200,000 or more accounted for a net \$403 million of it. Net loss to Washington: \$487 million. Net gain from California: \$609 million. The numbers of people arriving (64,386) and leaving (64,431) were nearly equal.	Statewide data; does not isolate Portland or any single tax.

Sources: Conway, Iselin and Rork (2026), via OPB^[36]; Common Sense Institute (2026).^[37]

PSU economist Eric Fruits has also argued that high taxes push residents to Clackamas, Washington and Clark counties.^[50] And Metro itself, in its December 2024 forecast, said it could not tell whether a rise in late payments reflected payment timing or high earners leaving.^[161]

Evidence against tax-driven flight

Table 8.5 — Analyses finding high-income households and filers grew

Analysis	Data	Main finding	Notes
Mary C. King, Portland State University (updated May 5, 2026)	Census American Community Survey microdata	Multnomah County households earning over \$500,000 grew from 2,541 (2019) to 7,695 (2024).	Counts households, not dollars of income moved.
Erik Dean, prepared for Portland Councilor	PFA tax return counts	PFA returns rose from 32,941 (2021) to 38,370 (2023), up	Prepared for an elected official. (Study note: unindexed

Analysis	Data	Main finding	Notes
Mitch Green (June 24, 2025)		16.5%, while county population fell 1.3%.	thresholds may also add filers as incomes rise.)
Multnomah County	—	The County disputes the Reed-led study's conclusions.	As reported by OPB, April 16, 2026.

Sources: King (PSU, 2026)^[38]; Dean (2025)^[39]; OPB, Apr 16, 2026.^[30]

Supporters of the taxes also point out that collections have run well above early promises. Voters were told to expect about \$250 million a year from the SHS tax; it raised \$335.1 million in FY2023-24, and Metro's December 2025 forecast for FY2026 was \$351 million (about \$311 million without a one-time \$40 million of late business payments).^{[45][50]} The same December 2025 forecast, however, cited "pronounced weakness" in Multnomah County's economy.^[50]

Why the studies disagree

The two sides are not necessarily contradicting each other. They are measuring different things:

- **Dollars versus heads.** The Reed/UNH/Yale and Common Sense Institute studies measure how much *income* moved. The PSU and Dean analyses count *households* or *tax returns*. A county can gain high-earning households overall while still losing some of its very highest earners, and with them a large share of income.
- **Growth versus what would have happened.** Rising filer counts show that growth continued. They do not show how much more growth there might have been without the taxes. The academic study tries to estimate that missing growth, which is why its authors call their figures upper bounds.
- **Timing and confounders.** The preschool tax began during the pandemic, in the same period as the 2020 protests and drug decriminalization. Separating the effect of one tax from everything else happening in 2021 and 2022 is hard, and every study acknowledges this.
- **Unindexed thresholds.** Because the SHS and PFA thresholds were fixed for years, rising wages alone would add filers. That can make filer counts grow even if some top earners leave.

Where the income goes. The studies above that track destinations point the same way: Conway, Iselin and Rork name Clark County, Washington, as the main destination, and the Common Sense Institute finds Oregon's largest net income loss was to Washington. The household and filer counts do not measure destinations. The region's tax competitiveness is therefore largely a question about the Columbia River border, not about New York or California.

The wider context

The debate is happening against a weak state economy. Oregon lost more than 18,000 jobs in 2025, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and was the only West Coast state to lose jobs. Oregon ranks 39th in CNBC's business-friendliness ranking. In January 2026, Governor Kotek convened a 16-member Prosperity Council to address the economy.^[30] From June 2025 to June 2026, Oregon lost 8,500 nonfarm jobs, including 10,000 in manufacturing.^[31]

State leaders have noticed the tax question. Governor Kotek has raised concerns about the tax impact of Multnomah County's Preschool for All.^[162] Her Republican challenger, Christine Drazan, has pledged to veto new tax increases and protect the state "kicker" refund.^[163] Neither candidate's position on the Metro SHS tax was found in the sources reviewed for this study. Metro councilors chose not to send an SHS renewal to voters in 2025 after polling showed tepid support; the tax expires in 2030, and the next council will decide how to revise it.^{[164][43]} Options floated in 2025 included extending the tax to 2050 and cutting the rate to 0.75% in 2031.^[51]

Oregon's own tax system also returns money in good years. The 2023-25 surplus "kicker" is \$1.41 billion, credited on 2025 returns and worth nearly 10% of 2024 tax liability.^[17] That refund lowers the effective state burden in kicker years, but it does not change the top marginal rate that drives location decisions.

8.6 What a fair tax review would look at

Portland-area voters approved each of these taxes for causes they care about. The question for policymakers is not whether those causes matter. It is whether the combined system is designed well enough to keep raising the money over time. A fair review would ask:

1. **What is the combined burden?** No single government publishes one plain-language table showing every local income and business tax a Portland household or employer pays. The City, County and Metro should publish one jointly, every year.
2. **Are thresholds indexed?** SHS indexing starts in 2026. Every income-tax threshold in the stack should be indexed to inflation, so that taxes meant for high earners stay that way.
3. **Is the border treated fairly?** The other-state credit covers residents only. How non-resident commuters are treated is a design choice voters and the Metro Council should examine openly before 2030.
4. **Is collection efficient?** One collector applying several rulebooks, with penalties and collections that the Auditor found confusing, adds cost for both taxpayers and government.
5. **Are results measured?** A tax is easier to defend when its results are public and audited. Part IV reviews what the SHS tax has delivered.

6. **What does the evidence say each year?** Rather than relying on dueling studies, the region could commission one neutral, annual analysis of IRS migration and tax-return data, using an agreed method, and publish it.

What this means: At the top of the income scale, a Portland resident's combined marginal income tax rate is in the same range as New York City's and above California's. That is a deliberate result of several separate votes, not a single decision, and no government is responsible for the total. The evidence on whether this is driving high earners to Clark County is genuinely mixed: income-based studies find meaningful losses, while household and filer counts show continued growth. Because the region's homeless, preschool and transit programs depend on a narrow base of high earners and large firms, even modest losses matter. Before the SHS tax's 2030 sunset, the City, Multnomah County and Metro should publish a joint "total tax stack" report, index every threshold to inflation, review the treatment of cross-border commuters, and fund one neutral annual migration study, so that the next vote is based on shared facts.

Part IV — Homelessness: Money In, Results Out

The Scale: How Many People, and Who

In brief: Multnomah County counted 3,801 people experiencing homelessness on one night in January 2015 and 10,526 on one night in January 2025. The unsheltered share rose from about half to more than 65%. Part of the recent jump comes from new counting methods, so the trend is real but its exact size is uncertain. A second measure, the county's by-name list, counted more than 14,000 people in January 2025. Black, Native American and Pacific Islander residents are counted among people experiencing homelessness at two to five times their share of the county population.

9.1 Two ways to count

This chapter uses two different measures. They answer different questions, and they should not be mixed.

- **The Point-in-Time (PIT) count.** A one-night snapshot required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It counts people in shelters, in transitional housing and outside. HUD requires the unsheltered part only in odd-numbered years, so 2025 is compared with 2023 ^[165].
- **The by-name list (BNL).** A running list of every person who contacts city or county homeless services, tracked by name and location ^[166]. It shows the flow of people in and out of homelessness over a year, not on one night.

The HUD PIT definition leaves out people who are "doubled up" with friends or family. Both measures are therefore floors, not ceilings ^[167].

9.2 The Point-in-Time count, 2015 to 2025

The table below gives every Multnomah County PIT result found in official or press sources. Shelter numbers for 2025 were not published in any source the research could retrieve, so they are left blank rather than estimated.

Table 9.1 — Multnomah County Point-in-Time counts

Count night	Total	In emergency shelter	In transitional housing	Unsheltered	Unsheltered share
Jan. 28, 2015	3,801	872	1,042	1,887	49.6%
Feb. 22, 2017	4,177	1,752	about 757 (derived)	1,668	39.9%
Jan. 23, 2019	4,015	1,459	519	2,037	50.7%

Count night	Total	In emergency shelter	In transitional housing	Unsheltered	Unsheltered share
Jan. 26, 2022	5,228	1,485	686	3,057	58.5%
Jan. 24, 2023	6,297	1,821	532	3,944	62.6%
Jan. 22, 2025	10,526	not published	not published	"more than 65%"	>65%

Sources: 2015 report ^[168]; 2017 county release and KGW ^[169] ^[170]; 2019 county release and Portland Mercury ^[171] ^[172]; 2022 report release ^[173]; 2023 release ^[167]; 2025 totals from KATU and Portland State University ^[174] ^[175] and unsheltered share from Axios ^[176]. Unsheltered shares for 2015–2023 are the author's arithmetic from the published counts. No 2026 count had been released as of the reports page update of September 2026 ^[177].

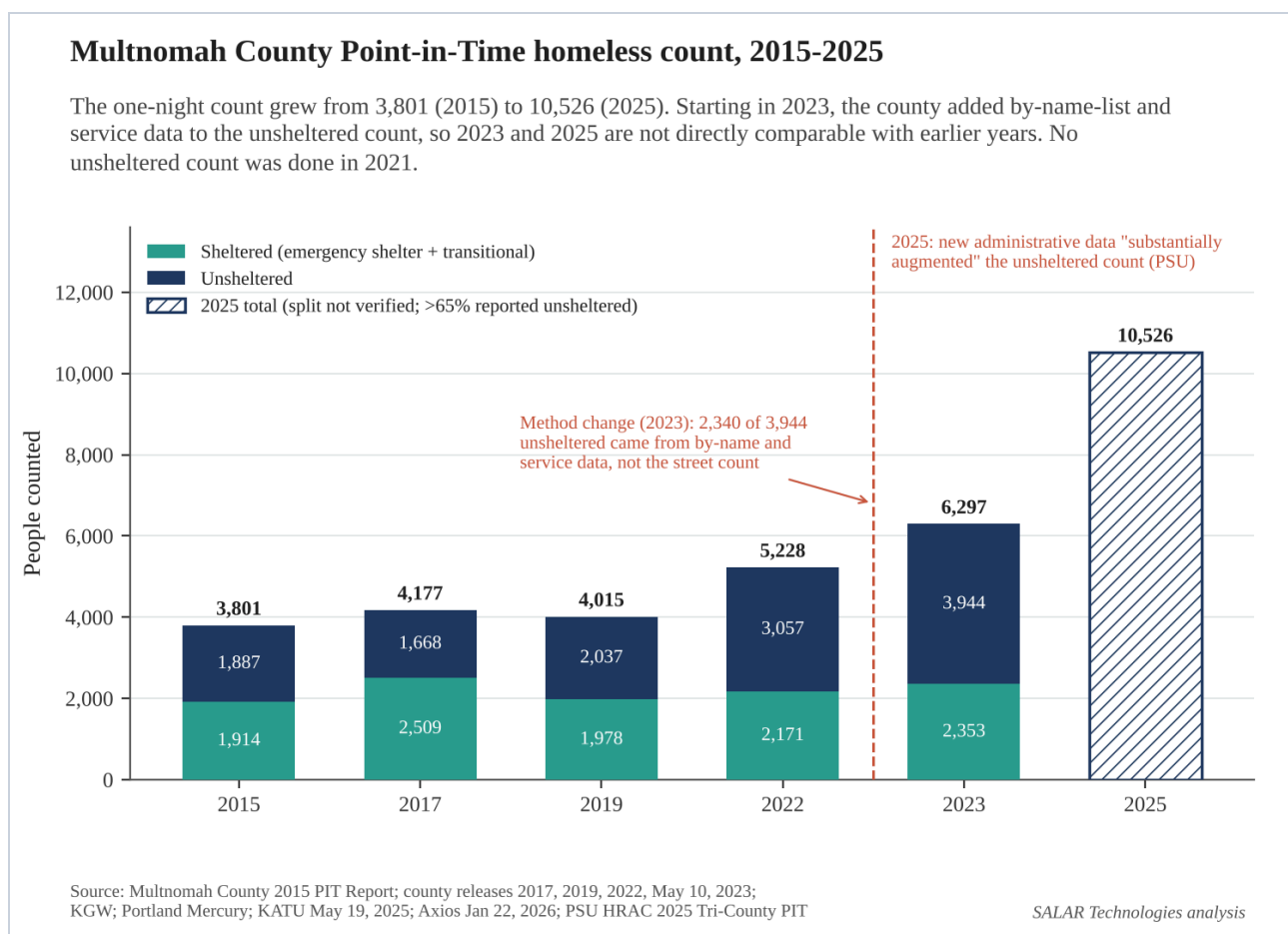


Figure 14. Multnomah County Point-in-Time count, sheltered and unsheltered, 2015–2025. Counting methods changed in 2023 and again in 2025; the 2025 sheltered/unsheltered split was not verified, so 2025 is shown as a total only. Source: Multnomah County and Portland State University ^[167] ^[175]

What happened in each count

- **2015 to 2017.** The total rose almost 10%, but the number of people sleeping outside fell 12%. Emergency shelter use more than doubled ^[169]. In other words, the system moved people indoors faster than the total grew.

- **2017 to 2019.** The total fell 3.9%, but unsheltered homelessness rose by 369 people to 2,037, the highest since 2007. Chronically homeless people without shelter rose by 479, or 37% ^[171].
- **2019 to 2022.** The total rose about 30% ^[172]. About 24% of survey respondents said COVID-19 directly contributed to their homelessness. Those 543 people account for nearly half of the increase ^[173]. Eighty percent reported at least one disabling condition ^[173].
- **Chronic homelessness in 2022.** 3,120 people met the federal definition of chronic homelessness. In shelters, 65% of people were chronically homeless, up from 20% in 2015 ^[173]. The shelter system was serving a sicker, longer-term population than before.
- **2022 to 2023.** The total rose 21% to 6,297, and shelter use hit a record 1,821. Chronic homelessness fell 16%, to 2,610, and fell 17% across the three counties. Washington County counted 773 people and Clackamas 410, both down from 2022 ^[167].
- **2023 to 2025.** The total rose 67% to 10,526. The three-county total was 12,034, up 61%, and about 87% of it was in Multnomah ^[174] ^[175]. Washington County rose 22% and Clackamas 39%. Only 38% of the tri-county total was sheltered ^[178].

The method-change caveat. The 2023 and 2025 counts cannot be compared one-for-one with earlier years.

- In 2023, 2,340 of the 3,944 unsheltered people came from "enhanced system data" such as by-name lists and service records. Only 1,604 came from street surveys. The street-survey number actually *fell* from 1,641 in 2022 ^[167].
- In 2025, Portland State University (PSU) said new administrative data "substantially augmented" the unsheltered count ^[175].
- PSU also listed real drivers. Eviction filings in Multnomah rose 33% from 2023 to 2024 ^[179].

The fair reading: homelessness grew, and the region also got better at finding people. This study does not try to split the 67% between the two.

Other method changes over the decade

Table 9.1a — Counting changes that affect comparisons

Year	Change	Effect on the numbers
2015	HUD reclassified more than 800 transitional beds as rapid re-housing	Lowered the sheltered count; the total fell 14% from 2013 partly for this reason ^[168]
2017	Count moved to February 22 because of weather	About 300 more Native Americans were counted than in 2015, suggesting a 2015 undercount ^[170]

Year	Change	Effect on the numbers
2021	No unsheltered count in Multnomah (COVID)	No data point for 2021 ^[180]
2022	First joint release by the three counties	Tri-county total of 6,633, of which 3,611 unsheltered ^[180]
2023	First fully integrated tri-county count, run by PSU; service data added	2,340 unsheltered people came from system data ^[167]
2025	New administrative data sources	"Substantially augmented" the unsheltered count ^[175]

Sources as cited in each row.

A data conflict worth noting

KOIN, citing the PSU statewide report, said Multnomah's unsheltered count rose 75% from 2023, an increase of 2,968 people ^[165]. Adding that to the 2023 figure gives about 6,912, which fits the "more than 65%" reported by Axios. But the same article gave a shelter figure that does not match the 2023 count. This study therefore treats the 2025 sheltered number as unverified.

The statewide picture

Oregon counted 27,119 people in January 2025. Of these, 10,607 were sheltered, up 49.3% from 2023, and 16,512 (60.9%) were unsheltered. An estimated 21,542 more people were doubled up ^[181]. Multnomah County alone accounts for close to two in five Oregonians counted as homeless (10,526 of 27,119, author's arithmetic).

9.3 The by-name list: a larger, moving number

The by-name list counts everyone who touched the system, so it runs higher than the one-night count.

Table 9.2 — Multnomah County by-name list

Date	Total on list	Unsheltered on list
January 2024	about 11,400	not reported
January 2025	14,361	6,275
March 2025	15,245	7,159

Sources: OPB ^[166]; Multnomah County Clear Impact scorecard ^[182]; KATU ^[174].

- The list grew about 26% in one year. Over that year, 1,277 people were newly identified and 865 left the list, either housed or out of contact for 90 days ^[166].
- OPB notes that part of the rise may reflect better data collection ^[166].

- Metro's own regional report found that in fiscal year 2024, about 15 households entered the homeless system for every 10 that left it for housing ^[183]. That ratio, more than any single count, explains why totals keep rising even as placements rise.

Why the by-name list matters for policy. A one-night count cannot tell a manager whether this month was better than last month. A by-name list can, if it is complete and current. Chapter 13 shows that the communities with the best results built their strategy around such lists. Multnomah County scored 16 of 28 points on the national Built for Zero data-quality scorecard in 2022, the last score found ^[184].

9.4 Who is affected: racial disproportionality

This section reports documented data only. It makes no claim about causes. Survey respondents may choose more than one race, so shares can add to more than 100%.

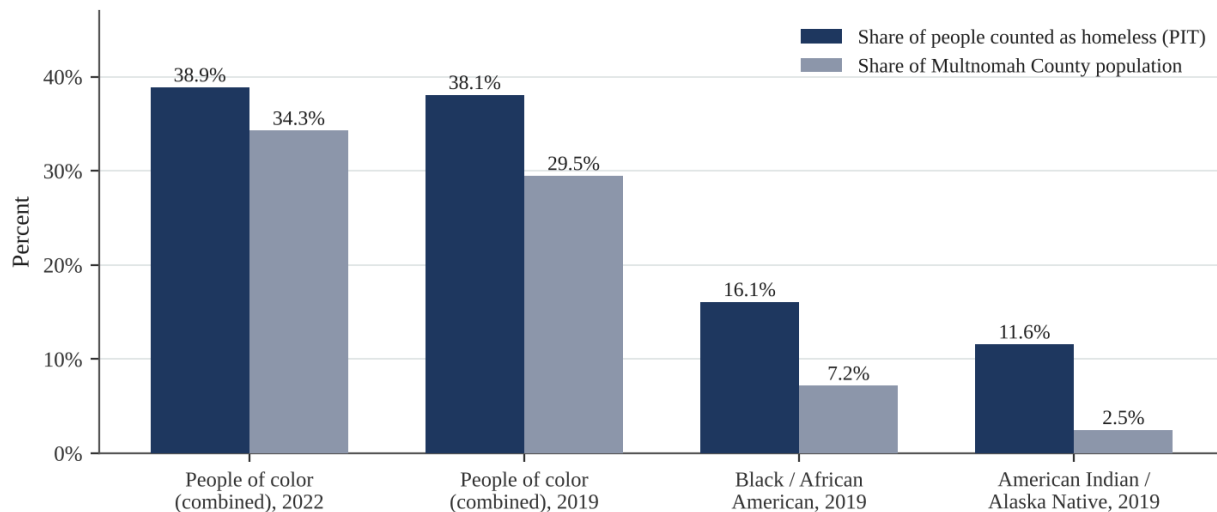
Table 9.3 — Share of people counted as homeless vs. share of county population, by group

Group	PIT year	Share of homeless count	Share of county population	Ratio (author's arithmetic)
Black / African American	2015	24%	7%	3.4×
Black / African American	2019	16.1%	7.2%	2.2×
American Indian / Alaska Native	2015	2% (later flagged as likely undercount)	3%	—
Native American / Alaska Native	2019	11.6%	2.5%	4.6×
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	2015	2%	1%	2.0×
Hispanic / Latino	2015	11%	11%	1.0×
Asian	2015	2%	8%	0.25×
People of color, combined	2015	41%	30%	1.4×
People of color, combined	2019	38.1%	29.5%	1.3×
BIPOC, combined	2022	38.9%	34.3%	1.1×

Sources: 2015 PIT report ^[168]; 2019 county release ^[171]; Willamette Week for the 2019 Black share ^[185]; 2022 report release ^[173]. The Portland Mercury reported different 2022 combined figures (39.6% vs. 32%) ^[172]. Race shares for 2023 and 2025 were not retrieved and are not shown.

Share of people counted as homeless vs. share of county population

In the 2019 count, Native American residents appeared at 4.6 times, and Black residents at 2.2 times, their share of the county population (ratios derived). 2019 is the latest year with group shares from a primary source; respondents could pick more than one race.



Source: Multnomah County 2019 PIT release; Multnomah County 2022 PIT report release; Willamette Week, Jan 6, 2021 (citing the 2019 PIT)

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Figure 15. Share of people counted as homeless vs. share of county population, by race (latest year with data). Source: Multnomah County PIT reports ^[171] ^[173]

Key points from the data

- In 2019, Native American residents were counted at about 4.6 times their population share ^[171].
- In 2019, the number of chronically homeless African Americans rose by 98 people, almost 74% ^[171].
- The 2022 report named American Indian, Alaska Native and Indigenous; Black; and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander people as the most overrepresented groups ^[173].
- In 2023, the county said increases among Black, Latino and Pacific Islander people were larger than among white people, but published no shares ^[167].
- Statewide in 2025, Indigenous people experienced homelessness at 6.92 times their population share, and Pacific Islander people at 5.47 times ^[181].

Who the SHS programs serve

Service data shows that programs funded by the Supportive Housing Services (SHS) tax reach these groups at high rates.

- Regionally in fiscal year 2024, 59.2% of people in SHS placements and preventions were people of color. Metro compared this with 28.3% of the 2023 PIT population ^[183].
- In Multnomah in fiscal year 2025, BIPOC people made up 63% of permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing placements ^[186].

This is one area where the data shows the system doing what it said it would: serving the groups most overrepresented in the count.

What this means: Homelessness in Multnomah County is far larger than a decade ago, and more of it is outdoors. The exact growth since 2023 is blurred by method changes, which is itself a governance problem: leaders cannot manage what they cannot measure the same way twice. The region needs one stable, published monthly measure, built on a complete by-name list, so residents can judge progress without waiting two years for a one-night snapshot.

The SHS Tax: Money In

In brief: In May 2020, voters in the Metro district approved Measure 26-210, a 1% tax on high incomes and on large business profits, to pay for Supportive Housing Services (SHS). Voters were told to expect about \$250 million a year. After a first full year of about \$243 million, the tax raised roughly \$335–350 million a year, and about \$1.3 billion through mid-2025. The counties were slow to spend at first: by July 2024, more than \$400 million sat unspent, and Metro put Multnomah County on a corrective action plan. Spending then caught up and passed annual revenue. Now collections are falling below forecast, carryover is nearly gone, and FY2027 is described as a "restricted funding year." Metro's own auditor found that shared oversight made it hard to tell how well the money works.

10.1 What voters approved

Table 10.1 — Measure 26-210 at a glance

Feature	What the measure says
Election	May 19, 2020 primary ^[187]
Personal income tax	1% on taxable income above \$125,000 (single) or \$200,000 (joint) ^[58]
Business income tax	1% of profits for businesses with gross receipts above \$5 million ^[58]
Who pays	Metro-district residents, and non-residents on income earned inside the district ^[153]
Length	10 years, expiring in 2030; continuing requires voter approval ^[58] ^[42]
Expected revenue	About \$250 million a year ^[48] ^[153]
County split (after costs)	Multnomah 45.33%, Washington 33.33%, Clackamas 21.33% ^[48]
Metro administration	Capped at 5% ^[58]
Collector	City of Portland Revenue Division, under contract to Metro ^[49]
10-year goals	About 5,000 households in permanent supportive housing and 10,000 households stably housed ^[58]

Sources as cited in each row. Ballotpedia gave a \$150,000 single threshold; Metro's own documents say \$125,000, which this study uses ^[153] ^[58].

The vote

Unofficial results reported by Ballotpedia showed 63% yes district-wide. The measure passed with 77% in Multnomah and 52% in Washington County, and it failed in Clackamas with 47% yes ^[153].

OPB's election-night count was closer, about 203,000 yes to 152,000 no^[187]. The certified district-wide percentage could not be verified for this study.

The vote pattern matters for later chapters. Clackamas County voters rejected the tax, yet Clackamas receives about a fifth of the money and its commissioners have proposed cutting it (Chapter 11).

10.2 How the money flows

The SHS tax passes through four public bodies before it reaches a person who needs housing. Each step has its own staff, reports and rules.

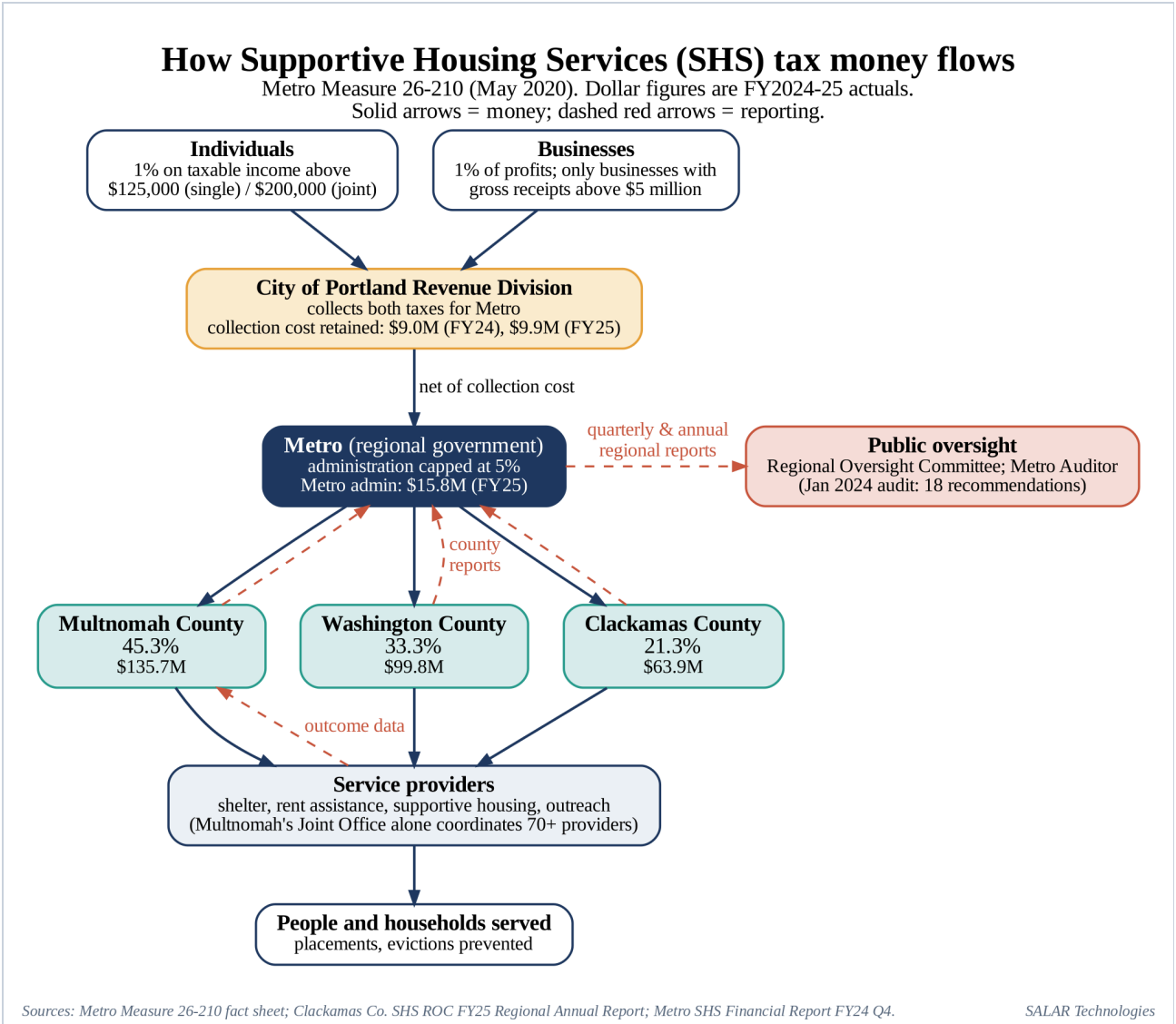


Figure 16. How SHS money flows, from taxpayers to providers. Source: Metro fact sheet and SHS financial reports^[58]
[158]

1. **Taxpayers** file Metro returns and pay the City of Portland Revenue Division^[49].

2. **The Revenue Division** keeps its collection cost: \$9.0 million in FY2023-24 and \$9.9 million in FY2024-25 ^[158] ^[159].
3. **Metro** keeps up to 5% for its own administration: \$16.3 million in FY2023-24 and \$15.8 million in FY2024-25 ^[158] ^[159].
4. **The three counties** receive the rest by formula and contract with service providers. Multnomah's office alone coordinates more than 70 providers ^[188].

What collection costs

In FY2023-24, the City's actual collection cost was \$8.86 million: \$4.35 million for staff, \$3.48 million for software and \$1.03 million for other materials and services ^[158]. Metro forecasts \$11.1–12.8 million a year through FY2030 ^[161].

The overhead stack (author's arithmetic). City collection costs run roughly 2.7–3.0% of gross collections. Metro's administrative share adds up to 5% more. Together, about 7–8 cents of every SHS dollar is spent before a county receives it. Counties then carry their own administration on top. This is not unusual for a new tax, but it is a cost of having three layers of government handle one revenue stream.

10.3 Revenue by year: more than promised, then less than forecast

Table 10.2 — SHS collections and distributions by fiscal year (\$ millions)

Fiscal year	Gross collections	City collection cost	Metro admin	Multnomah	Washington	Clackamas
FY2020-21	about 1.5 (partial year; chart reading)	—	—	—	—	—
FY2021-22	about 242.7 (chart reading)	—	—	—	—	—
FY2022-23	336.6 (year-end memo) or about 347.3 (forecast chart)	—	—	—	—	—
FY2023-24	335.1	9.0	16.3	140.4	103.3	66.1
FY2024-25	about 350.8 (derived)	9.9	15.8	135.7	99.8	63.9
FY2025-26	forecast 328.8 (Dec. 2024); 351 (Dec. 2025, incl. one-time 40)	forecast 11.4	forecast 15.9	forecast 136.6 / 145.9	forecast 100.4	forecast 64.2

Sources: Metro five-year forecast, Nov. 2023 ^[189]; FY23 year-end report ^[190]; FY2024 Q4 financial report ^[158]; FY25 Regional Annual Report ^[159]; Metro forecast, Dec. 2024 ^[161]; Willamette Week on the Dec. 2025 forecast ^[50]; Multnomah Q1 FY26 report ^[191]. FY2024-25 gross is the sum of distributions, administration and collection cost. Metro's audited financial statements report FY2023-24 SHS revenue of \$335.1M as down 3.4% from the prior year, which fits the higher FY2022-23 figure ^[45]; the two FY2022-23 numbers are shown because the sources conflict.

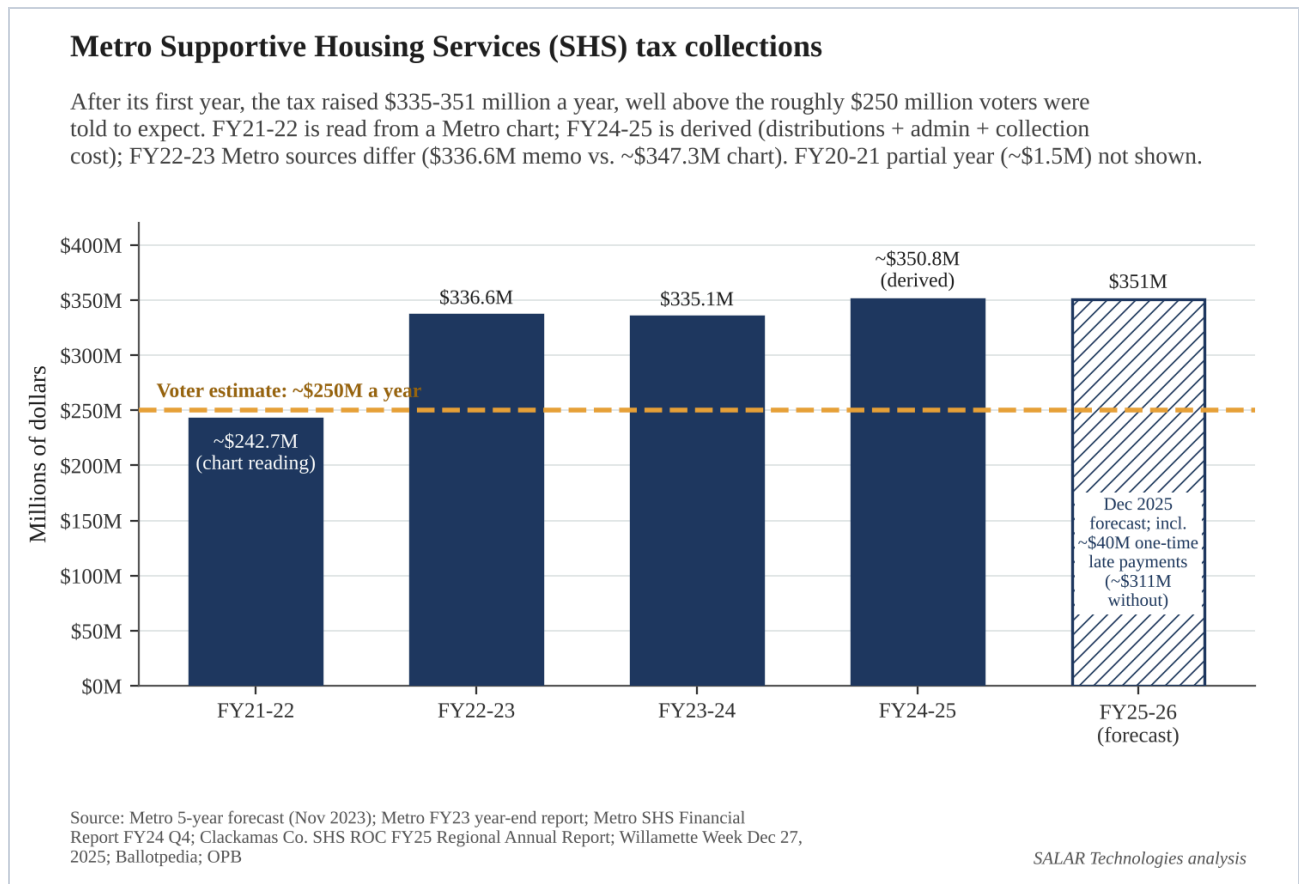


Figure 17. SHS tax revenue by fiscal year vs. the roughly \$250 million a year voters were told to expect. Source: Metro SHS financial reports and forecasts ^[158] ^[161] ^[159]

What the numbers show

- **Collections beat the promise.** In its early years the tax raised close to \$100 million a year more than Metro's \$250 million forecast ^[192]. In FY2022-23, \$336.6 million came in against a \$225 million budget ^[190].
- **Then they missed the forecast.** FY2023-24 came in about 6% below the Fall 2023 forecast of \$356.7 million ^[161].
- **Forecasts were cut by about \$50 million a year.** The November 2023 forecast for FY2026 was \$378.7 million. The December 2024 forecast was \$328.8 million ^[189] ^[161].
- **Metro warned it could get worse.** In March 2025 Metro said the variance "could approach \$50 million" and that lower trends are likely to continue. It recommended raising the stabilization reserve from 10% to 15% ^[47].

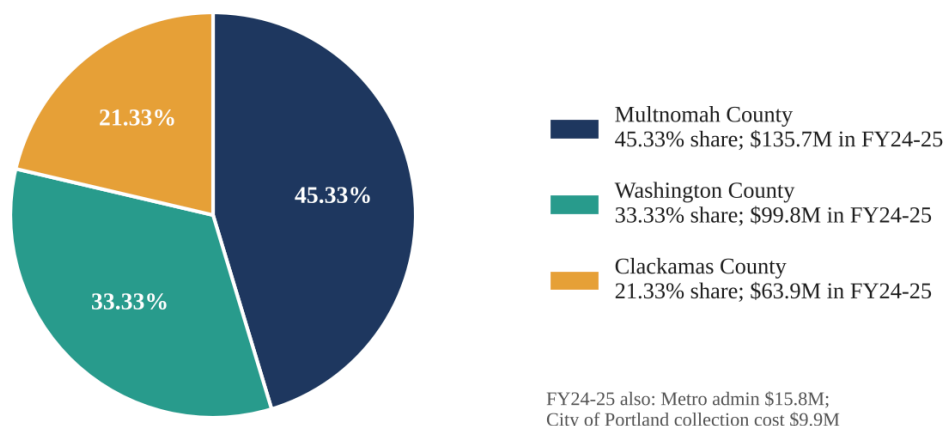
- **A one-time bump hides weakness.** The December 2025 forecast for FY2026 was \$351 million, but that included a one-time \$40 million in late business payments. Without it, the figure was about \$311 million. Metro cited "pronounced weakness" in Multnomah's economy ^[50].

Why the revenue is volatile

- About 55% of SHS revenue comes from the personal income tax, and about 45% from the business tax ^[161].
- Metro calls the 2021 spike in high-income earnings "more of an anomaly than a baseline" ^[161].
- About 14% of FY2024 revenue was late payments for tax years 2021–2022. Metro said it could not tell whether this reflected payment timing or high earners moving away ^[161].
- Income from capital gains is a large share of high-earner income, and taxpayers can time it. That makes year-to-year collections hard to predict ^[161] ^[47].

How SHS tax revenue is split among the three counties

After collection costs and Metro's administration (capped at 5%), Multnomah receives about 45%, Washington 33% and Clackamas 21%. Dollar amounts are FY24-25 distributions.



Source: Metro Auditor SHS audit highlights (Jan 2024); Metro Measure 26-210 fact sheet; Clackamas Co. SHS ROC FY25 Regional Annual Report (Mar 12, 2026)

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Figure 18. SHS revenue split by county after collection and administration costs. Source: Metro Auditor ^[48]

10.4 Money out: slow start, then a spend-down

Table 10.3 — Regional SHS spending by program year (\$ millions)

Year	Regional spending	Note
FY2021-22 (Year 1)	55.9	Programs still being built

Year	Regional spending	Note
FY2022-23 (Year 2)	149.1	Metro requires Multnomah corrective action plan (spring 2023)
FY2023-24 (Year 3)	294.1	About 95% of that year's revenue
FY2024-25 (Year 4)	424.9	Spending exceeds the year's distributions; carryover drawn down

Sources: Metro Regional Annual Report FY2024 ^[183]; FY2024 Q4 financial report ^[158]; FY25 Regional Annual Report ^[159].

Through the first three years, the region spent about \$499 million while collecting roughly \$914 million (author's arithmetic from the tables above). By July 2024, Metro reported more than \$400 million in unspent SHS funds ^[193].

Table 10.4 — County spending vs. budget and ending balances, FY2023-24 (\$ millions)

County	Budget + contingency	Actual spending	% of budget	Ending balance (June 2024)	Reserves	Carryover for future projects
Multnomah	194.9	143.5	74%	128.0	34.3	93.7
Washington	101.6	96.1	95%	125.9	27.1	98.9
Clackamas	94.9	54.3	57%	107.7	23.7	84.0
Total	—	293.9	—	361.7	85.1	276.6

Source: Metro SHS Financial Report FY2024 Q4 ^[158].

- On program costs (not counting buildings), Washington spent 103% of plan, Multnomah 80% (plan: 75%) and Clackamas 61% (plan: 65%) ^[158].
- On building projects, the spend rate was much lower: 83% in Washington, 39% in Multnomah and 44% in Clackamas ^[158].
- In early 2025, Metro said Washington County, which was warning about shortfalls, held a \$91 million surplus ^[194].

The Multnomah corrective action plan

Multnomah County "significantly underspent" for months before Metro required a corrective action plan in spring 2023 ^[193]. The plan addressed an estimated FY2023 underspend of \$71,754,577 ^[195]. Under the plan, \$4,684,756 of SHS money went to Temporary Alternative Shelter Sites and was fully spent ^[195].

The county then reversed course. Its spokesman said it spent all of its FY2023-24 receipts and began drawing down two prior years of carryover ^[196]. By late 2025, the county said its carryover "will be fully spent by the end of FY2026" and that collections were "well below expectations" ^[186].

The boom-and-bust pattern. In four years the region went from "too much money, not spent" to "spending faster than revenue." Multnomah's FY2026-27 work plan calls FY2027 a "restricted funding year" and plans 575 placements and 500 preventions, against FY2025 actuals of 1,613 households placed and 1,099 prevented ^[197]. The same plan funds the ramp-down of 522 shelter units ^[197]. A program that cannot plan steady spending cannot keep steady services.

10.5 Results against the 10-year goals

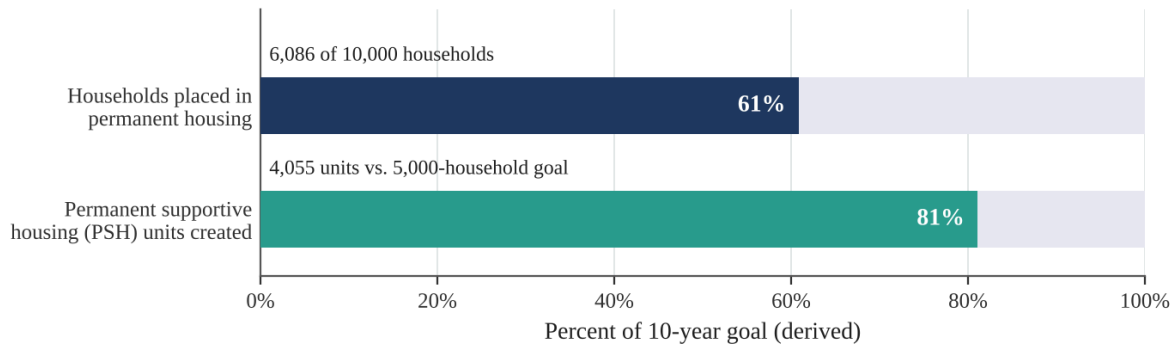
Table 10.5 — Regional SHS results, cumulative through June 2024

Measure	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Cumulative	10-year goal	Share of goal (author's arithmetic)
Households placed in permanent housing	1,199	2,084	2,803	6,086 (9,817 people)	10,000 households stably housed	about 61%
Permanent supportive housing units created	—	—	1,006	4,055	5,000 households	about 81% (units, not households)
Homelessness preventions (households)	2,767	9,176	3,127	15,070	no numeric goal	—
Regional Long-term Rent Assistance households	—	—	—	3,132	—	—

Source: Metro SHS Regional Annual Report FY2024 ^[183]. Metro does not publish the share-of-goal percentages.

SHS 10-year goals vs. progress through June 2024 (Year 3)

Three years in, regional placements reached about 61% of the 10,000-household goal and PSH units about 81% of the 5,000 goal (percentages derived; Metro does not publish them, and units are not the same as households). Later statements cite higher totals, e.g. 10,468 households placed (HSD director, Aug 2026), not from an annual report.



Source: Metro, SHS Regional Annual Report FY2024 (Feb 11, 2025); Metro Measure 26-210 fact sheet; OPB Think Out Loud, Aug 10, 2026

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 19. SHS 10-year goals vs. progress through June 2024. Source: Metro SHS Regional Annual Report FY2024 [183]

The good news, from program reports

- 92% of Year 3 permanent supportive housing placements were still housed after 12 months [183].
- In FY2025, Multnomah placed 2,599 people (1,613 households) into permanent housing, 2.4 times its goal of 1,072 people [186].
- Washington County reports more than 3,000 households moved out of homelessness since SHS began [198].
- Clackamas County reports more than 2,000 people housed, 210 shelter beds and 3,300 evictions prevented [199].

Multnomah's first SHS year also showed fast early output. The county reported 1,674 people placed in housing, 689 new shelter beds and 9,222 people given eviction prevention [200]. Its spending from the Supportive Housing Fund then grew by more than \$47 million in FY2023, almost \$60 million in FY2024 and more than \$71 million in FY2025 [201].

The harder news

- The number of households needing permanent supportive housing grew more than 20% since launch [183]. In Multnomah, need rose from 4,936 households in 2021 to 5,874, up 19% [186].
- Multnomah built 244 new supportive units or vouchers in FY2025 against a goal of 401, with 200 units paused. Its total since 2021 is 1,541, or 69% of its 2,235-unit goal [186].

- In the first quarter of FY2026, Multnomah housed 222 people, 24% of its annual goal of 940, and spent 13% of its annual target ^[191].

Program claims differ in units and dates

Readers will see several different "results" numbers. They are program-reported, not audited, and they count different things:

- More than 8,700 people placed into housing (Metro, as reported in November 2025) ^[202].
- 10,468 households placed and more than 21,000 prevented, regionally (cited by Multnomah's new department director, August 2026) ^[203].
- More than 18,000 people housed and 5,000 helped out of chronic homelessness since 2020 (Metro, as reported June 2026) ^[41].

Mixing people and households, and placements with preventions, makes it hard for any resident to judge progress. That is exactly the problem the auditor identified.

10.6 What the auditors found

Metro Auditor, January 2024

Metro Auditor Brian Evans titled his audit "Shared oversight reduces transparency and accountability" ^[48]. Its key findings:

- Inconsistent definitions, reports and calculations make it hard to judge progress ^[48].
- Of three recommendations from a May 2021 audit, one was fully implemented and two were still in process ^[48].
- It made 18 new recommendations: 7 on oversight, 6 on data reliability and 5 on long-term planning before the 2030 sunset ^[48].

The Metro Auditor's office as a whole reported that only 41% of recommendations from five years earlier had been implemented, against a 75% target ^[60]. That figure covers all Metro audits, not just SHS.

A missing data agreement

The 2020 intergovernmental agreement required a data-sharing agreement between Metro and the counties. As of January 2025 it had not been finalized. Without it, Metro lacked "granular data" on county spending and could not confirm that 75% of funds served the priority population ^[204].

County audits

Multnomah County's Auditor has repeatedly reviewed the office that spends the largest SHS share. Those audits are covered in Chapter 12, because they concern how the county runs its homeless services as a whole. A county audit specifically of SHS was listed as in progress ^[205]; its findings were not available for this study.

What this means: The SHS tax delivered more money than voters were promised, and it has housed thousands of households. But the region spent its first two years building capacity while hundreds of millions of dollars sat idle, then spent faster than revenue, and now faces cuts. Metro's auditor found that nobody can cleanly measure results because the agencies count differently. Any renewal debate before 2030 should start with one public ledger: dollars in, dollars out, households housed and households still housed one year later, by county, by month.

Design Problems in the SHS Tax

In brief: The SHS tax was written fast, in 2020, as a 10-year emergency measure. Several design choices now cause trouble. It ends in 2030, so providers cannot plan long-term. Its income thresholds were frozen for five years before indexing began in tax year 2026. Its credit for taxes paid to other states, as written, covers residents only, which affects how the tax treats commuters. It is collected by a city bureau on behalf of a regional government and handed to three counties. A 2024–25 reform package that would have fixed several of these problems stalled after weak polling. This chapter treats these as policy design questions. It describes legal challenges only as they were reported publicly.

11.1 A 2030 sunset with no plan yet

The tax expires in 2030 unless voters extend it ^[58] ^[42].

- Metro's auditor made 5 of its 18 recommendations in January 2024 about long-term planning before the sunset ^[48].
- Permanent supportive housing is, by definition, permanent. Its residents need rent help and services for years, often for life. A revenue source with a fixed end date is a poor match for an ongoing obligation.
- Metro councilors chose not to ask voters to renew the tax in 2025, after polling showed tepid support ^[164]. The next council will decide how to revise it ^[43].
- As of August 2026, renewal before 2030 was described as a "near-term priority," but no measure had been referred ^[203].

The planning cliff. Providers sign leases, hire case managers and commit to tenants on multi-year horizons. With fewer than four years left and no referral on the calendar, every new long-term commitment carries the risk that the money stops. Multnomah's FY2027 plan already funds shelter ramp-downs and closings ^[197].

11.2 Frozen thresholds, then indexing in 2025

The \$125,000 single and \$200,000 joint thresholds were not adjusted for inflation for tax years 2021 through 2025 ^[49]. Each year of inflation pulled more households into the tax without any vote.

The 2025 indexing ordinance

Table 11.1 — Metro's June 2025 indexing ordinance

Feature	What changed
Vote	Metro Council, unanimous, June 26, 2025 ^[206]
Index	Portland-area Consumer Price Index from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ^[206]
Effective	Tax year 2026; new thresholds published each year by Nov. 15 ^[206]
Floor	Thresholds do not fall if prices fall ^[206]
Taxpayers affected	Nearly 90,000 ^[206]
Revenue effect	About 1.2% of FY2026-27 revenue; staff called it "modest" ^[206] ^[51]
Business tax	Not indexed ^[206]
Estimated payments	No longer required for tax bills under \$5,000 (previously required at \$1,000 or more) ^[51]

Sources as cited. Willamette Week gave illustrative first-year thresholds of about \$127,500 single and \$204,000 joint; the official 2026 dollar thresholds could not be verified for this study ^[51].

Assessment. Indexing fixes the problem going forward. It does not undo the five years in which the real threshold fell. It also leaves the \$5 million business gross-receipts threshold fixed, so inflation will keep pulling more firms into the business tax over time (author's inference from the ordinance terms).

11.3 Credit for taxes paid to another state

The SHS tax reaches two groups: residents of the Metro district, and non-residents on income they earn inside it ^[153].

What the policy says

The City of Portland Revenue Division adopted a written policy on August 23, 2023 ^[154]:

- **Who can claim it:** Metro and Multnomah County *residents* whose income is also taxed by another state.
- **How much:** the lowest of (a) the Metro tax, (b) the Metro tax on the income both places tax, or (c) the tax actually paid to the other state.
- **Exclusion:** no credit if the other state itself gives non-residents a credit.
- **Tax years covered:** not stated on the policy page.

Effect on commuters

Inference, not a published finding. The following is the research file's reading of the policy text. It has not been confirmed by the Revenue Division or Metro.

- Washington State has no personal income tax. A Washington resident who works in Portland pays no Washington income tax, so there is no "other state tax" to credit.
- The policy as written covers residents, not non-resident commuters. It therefore appears to give a non-resident commuter no credit at all. Whether non-residents get any relief beyond limiting the tax to income earned inside the district could not be verified.

Why it matters for policy. The Portland region is a two-state labor market. Commuters from Clark County use roads and services, and they also vote in another state. A regional tax that reaches them without a clear, published rule on relief invites confusion and disputes.

Policy options (for discussion in Chapter 28):

- Publish a plain-language rule for non-residents, with worked examples, on both Metro's and the Revenue Division's websites.
- State which tax years the 2023 credit policy covers.
- Have the Metro Council, not only the collecting bureau, adopt the credit rule by ordinance, so it is set by the elected body that owns the tax.

11.4 Administration by the City of Portland Revenue Division

Metro is the taxing government. The City of Portland Revenue Division collects both SHS taxes for Metro, along with the Multnomah County business tax ^[49].

Strengths of the arrangement

- The Revenue Division already ran Portland's and Multnomah's business taxes, so Metro did not have to build a tax agency from scratch ^[49].
- The cost is known and reported: \$8.86 million actual in FY2023-24, including \$3.48 million for software ^[158].

Weaknesses of the arrangement

- **Split accountability.** Taxpayers deal with a city office, but the tax belongs to an elected regional body. Rules such as the credit policy are posted by the City ^[154].
- **Rising cost.** Collection costs are forecast to grow from \$9.0 million in FY2024 to \$11.1–12.8 million a year through FY2030 ^[158] ^[161].

- **Layered overhead.** As shown in Chapter 10, about 7–8 cents per dollar goes to collection and Metro administration before a county receives funds (author's arithmetic).

Legal questions raised publicly

The tax's design and administration have been tested in court. These cases are described only as reported:

- **2020, before the vote.** Oregon grocers and manufacturers went to court against the measure in March 2020 ^[207]. The outcome could not be verified.
- **2021, collection rules.** A business coalition led by the Portland Business Alliance argued that state law (ORS chapter 268) required Metro to administer the tax like state taxes, not under Portland and Multnomah rules ^[208]. On June 23, 2021, a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge upheld Metro's rules under its 1992 home-rule charter. The coalition said it would appeal ^[160]. The appeal outcome could not be verified.
- **2022, ballot initiatives.** The group People for Portland proposed two initiatives. One would have required counties to spend 75% of SHS money on shelter until capacity met demand, and the other tied city funding to camping enforcement. On May 23, 2022, a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge upheld Metro's refusal to place them on the ballot. The court cited a full-text requirement and limits on Metro's home-rule authority ^[209].

The common thread is that key questions about the SHS tax, such as who sets the rules and what voters can change, have been settled by trial courts rather than by clear text in the measure.

11.5 The 2024–25 reform package that stalled

By mid-2024, Metro's own staff saw the design problems and proposed fixes. The timeline below shows how the reform effort moved and then stopped.

Table 11.2 — SHS reform effort, 2024–2026

Date	Event
July 9, 2024	Metro's chief operating officer recommends indexing the threshold, extending the sunset, cutting the rate, allowing affordable-housing uses, creating a single "Investment Board," renegotiating the county agreement and referring a measure in May 2025 ^[195] ^[193]
Oct. 17, 2024	Metro Council adopts Resolution 24-5436 setting reform priorities ^[210]
Nov. 13, 2024	HereTogether, the Portland Metro Chamber and Oregon Business & Industry agree on a package: extend to 2050; cut the personal rate to 0.9% in 2026 and 0.75% in 2031; index the threshold; allow "deeply affordable housing"; add independent oversight. Latino Network dissents ^[211]

Date	Event
Dec. 2024	Metro's poll finds only two in five voters support SHS as it stands. A plain 20-year extension polls 48% for, 45% against. The best-case package reaches 56% ^[192]
Dec. 31, 2024	Clackamas Commissioner Ben West proposes no extension before November 2026, a rate cut to 0.95% and Metro's admin share cut from 5% to 2.5% ^[199]
Jan. 10, 2025	Metro President Lynn Peterson proposes extension to 2050, the 0.9% / 0.75% rate path, indexing, a new oversight body and housing construction ^{[196] [212]}
Jan. 9–15, 2025	Multnomah County, the Clackamas board and the 25-city Metropolitan Mayors' Consortium ask Metro to delay ^[210]
Jan. 23, 2025	Metro Council pauses the May 2025 referral; a work group co-chaired by Commissioner West begins meeting in February ^{[204] [212]}
June 16, 2025	A new poll: 53% yes on the title alone, 43% no; Multnomah County government has 29% favorability ^[213]
June 26, 2025	Council adopts threshold indexing, the only structural change made ^[206]
2025	Council declines to refer a renewal and creates a new oversight committee instead ^[164]
Aug. 2026	Sunset, 1% rate and services-only limits unchanged; renewal called a "near-term priority" ^[203]

Sources as cited in each row. The name and creation date of the new oversight committee could not be verified. Peterson later left office early to become Lake Oswego's interim city manager ^[164].

Related disputes over money

- Metro held \$31 million in its 5% administrative fund, and Peterson proposed sending administrative funds directly to cities. Multnomah commissioners voted on a \$15 million transfer to Portland ^[214].
- No source reviewed alleges wrongdoing in these disputes. They are disagreements about who should control the money.

Why the package stalled (as reported)

- **Weak public support.** No poll reported in the sources reached the roughly 60% level that campaign planners treat as a strong start ^[192].
- **Low trust in the main spender.** Multnomah County government had 29% favorability in June 2025 ^[213].
- **Counties and cities asked for delay** rather than backing the package ^[210].

What this means: The SHS tax's biggest problems are fixable by design, not by more money: a sunset that does not match permanent obligations, rules on credits and non-residents that are unclear for commuters, and a collection chain that spreads accountability across three governments. Indexing in 2025 showed that Metro can fix one piece at a time. The rest should be fixed in public, with plain rules and measured results, before any renewal goes to voters. Chapter 28 sets out specific options.

Policy Whiplash: Shelters, Camping Rules and Who Is in Charge

In brief: Since 2020 the region's homelessness policy has changed direction many times. During the pandemic, the county bought tents and tarps while the city cleared camps. Portland passed a camping ordinance in 2024, enforced it, paused it in early 2025, and restarted it that November. The U.S. Supreme Court's 2024 *Grants Pass* ruling changed federal law, but Oregon's own 2021 statute still governs. The city–county Joint Office was audited repeatedly, became a county department, and lost the city's \$31 million transfer in 2026. Mayor Wilson promised 1,500 new city shelter beds by December 2025; 890 opened. Total regional spending passed \$724 million in 2024, yet in one recent year only about 1,200 adults left shelter for permanent housing.

12.1 A timeline of changing direction

Table 12.1 — Key policy changes, 2016–2026

Date	Event
FY2016	City and county create the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) ^[215]
June 2020–Sept. 2022	JOHS buys 22,700 tents and 69,514 tarps during a pause in sweeps advised by federal health officials ^[216]
2021	Oregon passes HB 3115, requiring local camping rules to be "objectively reasonable" ^[217]
Jan. 10, 2023	Governor Kotek declares a homelessness emergency (EO 23-02), later extended ^[218]
Spring 2023	Metro requires a Multnomah SHS corrective action plan ^[193]
Aug. 2023	County Auditor issues a critical JOHS audit ^[219]
Spring 2024	City and county launch the Homelessness Response Action Plan ^[215]
Apr. 17, 2024	City Auditor finds a large shelter gap ^[220]
May 8, 2024	Portland passes its camping ordinance unanimously ^[221]
June 26, 2024	County chair freezes new tent and tarp purchases ^[222]
June 28, 2024	U.S. Supreme Court decides <i>City of Grants Pass v. Johnson</i> ^[217]
July 2024	New three-year city–county agreement; enforcement of the camping ordinance begins ^[223] ^[224]
Nov. 6, 2024	Three city commissioners withdraw a plan to exit the Joint Office ^[225]
Jan. 22, 2025	Mayor Wilson announces plan to end unsheltered homelessness by December 2025 ^[133]

Date	Event
Feb. 2025	Wilson pauses camping enforcement; county discloses a \$104 million shortfall ^[224] ^[226]
Nov. 1–2, 2025	Camping enforcement resumes ^[224]
Dec. 1, 2025	Deadline for 1,500 new city beds; 890 open ^[227]
Apr. 2026	New director appointed to the county Homeless Services Department on a 3–2 vote ^[203]
June 2026	City budget ends the \$31 million transfer to the county; city will provide services directly ^[137]

Sources as cited in each row.

12.2 Tents and sweeps at the same time

The clearest example of whiplash is that one government handed out camping supplies while another cleared camps.

- From June 2020 to September 2022, JOHS bought 22,700 tents for \$1.6 million and 69,514 tarps for \$416,053, more than \$2 million in supplies in total, during a federally advised pause in sweeps ^[216].
- From about May 2023 to June 2024, the county's office distributed more than 6,400 tents, 6,600 sleeping bags, about 24,000 tarps and more than 35,000 blankets. Over a similar period, the city cleared more than 4,000 encampments. These figures come from a secondary, opinion-leaning outlet that attributes them to the county and city ^[222].
- On June 26, 2024, County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson froze new tent and tarp purchases pending a joint city–county policy ^[222].

Supplies can save lives in cold weather. Clearing camps can address real safety and health problems. The policy failure is that the two governments did both without one agreed plan.

12.3 Camping rules: Grants Pass, HB 3115 and Portland's ordinance

The federal ruling

In *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* (June 28, 2024), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6–3, in an opinion by Justice Gorsuch, that enforcing public-camping bans is not cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment, even when no shelter is available. The ruling overturned the Ninth Circuit's 2018 *Martin v. Boise* rule ^[217].

The state law that still applies

Oregon's HB 3115 (2021) still requires local camping rules to be "objectively reasonable as to time, place and manner." For that reason, then-Mayor Wheeler said the ruling would have little impact on

Portland ^[217].

Portland's ordinance and enforcement

- **Passed May 8, 2024, unanimously.** Camping on public property is allowed when no shelter is available. Propane heaters, fires, digging and blocking property are banned. Refusing an offered shelter bed or breaking the rules can bring a fine of up to \$100 or up to 7 days in jail ^[221].
- **Enforcement began July 2024,** with about three arrests through February 2025 ^[224].
- **Paused February 2025** by Mayor Wilson, then **resumed November 1–2, 2025.** As of the day before resumption, there were no written police procedures. "Reasonable shelter" is not defined and is decided case by case ^[224] ^[228].
- **December 2025:** about 3,000 sites had been evaluated and 610 encampments removed. The data does not show how many people were offered or moved into shelter ^[227].

The measurement gap. The city can count camps removed. It has not published how many people were offered shelter, accepted it, and were still indoors 30 or 90 days later. Without that, residents cannot tell whether enforcement moves people into housing or just moves them down the block.

12.4 Shelter: more beds, short stays, few exits to housing

Growth in capacity

- The county had about 2,500 shelter beds in February 2025, at 92% occupancy, up from about 1,100 in 2021. About 3,600 people used shelter in February 2025, up from about 1,600 in 2021 ^[166].
- The county funded 2,548 shelter units in FY2026, about 3,300 including city-funded sites ^[215].
- By November 2025, about 1,000 beds had been added since Wilson took office, bringing the county total to about 3,500. That is "less than half" of the estimated unsheltered population ^[224].

Outcomes of a shelter stay

Table 12.2 — Share of shelter exits to housing, since July 2024, by shelter type

Shelter type	Exits to housing	Average stay	Cost per bed per night
County alternative shelters	43%	about 267 days (alternative shelters)	—

Shelter type	Exits to housing	Average stay	Cost per bed per night	
City alternative shelters	14% (47% the year before)		—	—
Motel shelters	42%	—	about \$141	
Congregate shelters	12%	about 50 days	about \$60	
All shelters	16%	73 days	—	

Source: OPB analysis of Multnomah County data ^[166]. More than 35% of people who exited returned to homelessness.

- The Portland Tribune, citing the action plan's quarterly report, said that over one year about 14,000 people were sheltered but only about 1,200 adults left shelter for permanent housing ^[229].
- The City Auditor found that from July 2022 to July 2023, more people left shelter to homelessness than to permanent housing ^[220].
- The county's January 2026 Adult Shelter Review recommended shifting the shelter system toward housing placement ^[177].

12.5 Mayor Wilson's 1,500-bed goal

On January 22, 2025, Mayor Keith Wilson announced a plan to end unsheltered homelessness by December 2025. It included 1,500 new overnight shelter beds, a "flex" seasonal model, 90-day stay limits, a day center in each council district, and stronger camping and RV enforcement ^[133]. In April 2025 the plan's \$28 million cost had no identified funding source ^[166].

Table 12.3 — The 1,500-bed goal vs. results

Measure	Figure	Source
City goal, new overnight beds by Dec. 1, 2025	1,500 (plus 1,500 more through partners and the county)	Portland Mercury ^[227]
City beds opened by the deadline	890	Portland Mercury ^[227]
Locations identified for more beds	610	Portland Mercury ^[227]
Mayor's claim (Apr. 2026)	1,500+ overnight beds; 100,000+ shelter nights; downtown tents down 75%	City of Portland ^[115]
Estimated unsheltered people (Sept. 2025)	almost 7,500 (county data, reported by a student paper)	FHS Post ^[230]
Change in unsheltered people since he took office	about 3,000 more (county data, as reported)	OPB ^[231]

Sources as cited. [Conflict] A student publication reported the goal as met on Dec. 17, 2025 ^[230]; this study relies on the Portland Mercury's count of 890 opened as the more detailed source. The mayor's later figure of 1,500+ may count beds opened after the deadline; the sources do not reconcile the two.

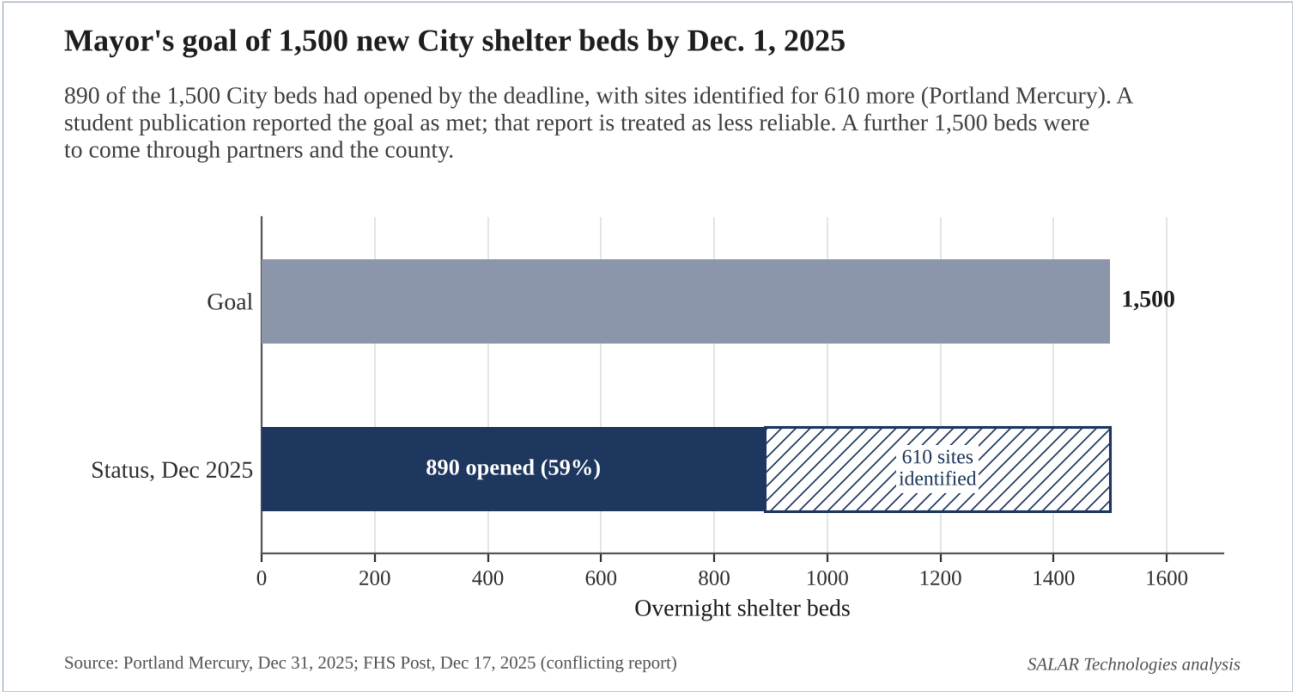


Figure 20. Mayor's shelter-bed goal vs. beds opened by Dec. 1, 2025. Source: Portland Mercury ^[227]

Same yardstick. The mayor delivered a large, fast expansion: 890 new beds in under a year is real capacity. He did not meet his own stated goal by his own deadline, and the goal of ending unsheltered homelessness was not met. Councilors raised cost concerns, including 24-hour shelter costs of \$35–\$190 a day and the 90-day limits ^[133].

12.6 The Joint Office: audits, then reorganization

What the auditors found

Table 12.4 — Audits of the Joint Office of Homeless Services

Audit	Key findings
Multnomah County Auditor, 2021	JOHS tracked program entries rather than move-ins ^[219]
Multnomah County Auditor (Jennifer McGuirk), Aug. 2023	Staff grew from 21 FTE (2019) to 99; four directors since 2021; some providers worked without signed contracts and went unpaid for months; fewer than half of contractors said goals were communicated well ^[219] . Reporting also cited about 250 staff departures and no basic housing-placement data ^[232]

Audit	Key findings
Portland City Auditor, Apr. 17, 2024	Budget covered shelter for about 60% of the unsheltered (about 3,200 beds vs. about 5,400 people); 300+ families on waitlists in early 2023, waits up to six months ^[220] ^[233]
Multnomah County Auditor, June 27, 2024 (contracting)	Contracting policy not updated since 2011; about one-third of JOHS and human-services invoices paid late; 74% of very late payments had county-side causes ^[234]
Multnomah County Auditor follow-up, 2025	Of 8 recommendations: 1 implemented, 5 in process, 2 not implemented, including one on a conflict between advocate and accountability roles, which JOHS disputed ^[188]

Sources as cited. The formal title of the 2025 follow-up could not be verified.

Responses on record. After the 2023 audit, JOHS said 80% of invoices were now paid on time ^[219]. Chair Vega Pederson agreed with many findings and said fixes were "well underway" ^[232]. After the 2024 contracting audit she said the findings showed the need to address gaps, and the county added staff and a consultant ^[234].

From joint office to county department

- The Joint Office's FY2025 budget was \$343 million: about 68% from Metro SHS, about 12% county, about 9% City of Portland, and the rest federal and state. SHS made its budget about 10 times its original size ^[223].
- A July 2024 three-year agreement added oversight committees, set a goal of moving at least half of the unsheltered population into shelter by 2026, and moved city-built Safe Rest Villages and alternative shelter sites to the county, at about \$60 million a year to operate ^[223].
- Three city commissioners proposed leaving the agreement on June 30, 2025, which would have saved the city \$32 million. They withdrew the plan on November 6, 2024, the day before the vote ^[225].
- The office became the Multnomah County Homeless Services Department (HSD). OPB dates the change to 2024 ^[203]; the county's February 2025 budget letter already uses the new name ^[215]. The formal vote establishing HSD could not be verified.
- In April 2026, Nathaniel VerGow, formerly of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, was appointed director on a 3–2 board vote. He described a cut of about \$67 million, falling mostly on shelter ^[203].

12.7 The city–county money split

Table 12.5 — Homeless Services Department budget and City of Portland contribution (\$ millions)

Item	FY2025	FY2026
HSD budget	420.6 (current service level)	316.2 base; 312.3 after General Fund cut

Item	FY2025	FY2026
Of which SHS	—	182.2 (about 58%)
City of Portland funding to HSD	44.8 (incl. 13.7 federal ARPA)	30.5 (preliminary)

Source: Multnomah County FY2026 HSD Budget Transmittal Letter ^[215].

- The FY2026 HSD budget was down \$104.4 million, or 25%, from the prior year's service level. Cuts included 230 shelter units closing and 221 fewer new supportive housing units ^[215].
- The county disclosed the \$104 million shortfall on February 21, 2025, citing lower SHS revenue, General Fund cuts, the end of federal ARPA funds and reduced city funding. Governor Kotek withheld new state money until she received "clear answers" ^[226].
- In June 2026, Portland's FY2026-27 budget ended the city's \$31 million transfer to the county for homeless services; the city will provide them directly. The same budget cut city shelter funding by 31%, to \$40 million ^[137].

Two systems again. In 2016 the city and county combined their efforts to end duplication. In 2026, after a decade, a series of audits and a 10-fold budget increase, the city is pulling its money back and running its own services. Whatever the merits, providers and clients now face two funders, two sets of rules and two sets of reports.

12.8 The state's role

The State of Oregon added a third layer of policy on top of the city and county.

- Governor Tina Kotek's Executive Order 23-02 (January 10, 2023) declared a homelessness emergency in regions where unsheltered homelessness rose 50% or more from 2017 to 2022. It was extended by later orders ^[218], and renewed for the third time on January 9, 2026 ^[235].
- The governor's office **claims** results statewide: more than 6,250 shelter beds created or preserved, more than 5,500 people housed, and about 26,000 households kept from homelessness. New targets are to rehouse 1,400 more people and prevent 8,000 more evictions ^[235]. These are program claims, not audited figures.
- Statewide, year-round shelter beds reached 11,047 in January 2025, up 39% from 2023, and the sheltered count rose 49.3% ^[181].
- In February 2025, the governor withheld new state money from Multnomah County until it gave "clear answers" about its homeless-services cuts ^[226].

Assessment. State money and the emergency order expanded shelter quickly, which matches the statewide rise in sheltered people. But the state's goals, the county's goals, the city's goals and

Metro's goals are each set and measured separately. No single public report shows how the four fit together for a resident of Multnomah County.

12.9 Total regional spending

No government publishes a single, official total of public homelessness spending for the region. The best available tally is a 2024 estimate by the consulting firm EConorthwest, found only through a news summary.

Table 12.6 — EConorthwest tally of 2024 homeless-services spending, three counties

Area or source	Amount or share
Total, three counties	more than \$724 million
Multnomah	\$501 million
Washington	\$135.7 million
Clackamas	\$87.5 million
Funding share: SHS tax	43%
Funding share: federal	14%
Funding share: Multnomah County	10%
Funding share: City of Portland	9%
Funding share: philanthropy	6%
Funding share: state	5%

Source: KOIN via Yahoo News, summarizing EConorthwest ^[236]. The listed shares add to 87%; the remaining 13% is not explained in the article. The original report was not retrieved.

- Mayor Wilson has said Portland and Multnomah County spending is about 10 times 2017 levels, including Metro funds ^[229].
- Do not add this total to the SHS or HSD figures in earlier chapters. The numbers overlap, because SHS money flows through HSD and is part of the EConorthwest total.
- For scale (author's arithmetic): \$724 million divided by the 12,034 people counted on one night in January 2025 is about \$60,000 per person counted. This is not a cost per person served, because the money also pays for prevention, housing for people no longer counted, and services for people who cycle in and out over a year.

What this means: Each policy swing was a response to a real problem. Together they produced a system that changes direction faster than providers can adapt. The region spent more than \$724 million in 2024, yet only about one in six shelter exits leads to housing, and no

one publishes how many people moved by enforcement end up indoors. Portland needs one plan, one set of outcome measures, and one public dashboard covering both city and county programs, whichever government delivers them.

What Worked Elsewhere

In brief: Some American communities have made large, measured gains. The Houston region cut homelessness by more than 60% after 2011 by putting dozens of agencies under one coordinated system. Rockford, Illinois and Bergen County, New Jersey reached "functional zero" for chronic homelessness in 2017 using real-time by-name lists. Multnomah County joined the same national program, Built for Zero, but scored 16 of 28 on its data-quality scorecard in 2022, and no later score was found. These comparisons have limits: the places differ in size, housing costs and counting methods. The lesson is not "copy Houston." It is that results followed unified command and reliable, person-level data.

13.1 Houston: one system instead of many

The results

- The Houston region reported a reduction of more than 60% in homelessness since 2011. It counted 3,280 people in January 2024 and has housed more than 32,000 people since 2012 ^[237].
- CBS News reported a 63% reduction since 2011–2012 ^[238].
- The January 2025 count, covering Harris, Fort Bend and Montgomery counties, was 3,325: 2,043 sheltered (down 6%) and 1,282 unsheltered (up 15.8%) ^[239].
- A later Coalition release said the system had housed more than 38,000 people; the start year was not stated ^[239].

How it was done (as reported)

- **One coordinated system.** "The Way Home" brought "dozens" of agencies under one continuum of care ^[238].
- **Fixing fragmentation.** Before the change, the region had more than 20 separate homelessness grants. Housing one person could involve 10 agencies and five grants ^[240].
- **Housing first, then closing camps.** Houston closed 127 encampments after their residents were housed ^[238].
- **Emergency money used for rent.** About \$100 million in COVID-era aid went to rental assistance ^[238].

Honest caveats

- The 2025 count shows unsheltered homelessness rising 15.8% in one year ^[239]. Progress is not permanent.

- Houston's cost per person housed and its two-year housing retention rate were not found in the sources reviewed.
- Houston's housing market and land-use rules differ sharply from Portland's. This study did not collect rent or vacancy data for Houston, so it makes no claim about how much of Houston's result came from cheaper housing.

13.2 Built for Zero: Rockford and Bergen County

Built for Zero is a national initiative associated with the nonprofit Community Solutions, which publishes its community results ^[241] ^[242]. Participating communities build by-name lists of people experiencing homelessness and track them in real time ^[184]. The program certifies a community as reaching "functional zero" for a population, such as veterans or people experiencing chronic homelessness ^[242].

Rockford, Illinois

- Rockford was the first U.S. community to reach functional zero for both veteran homelessness (December 2015) and chronic homelessness (January 2017) ^[241].
- It built separate by-name lists for veterans (February 2016), chronic single adults (September 2016) and youth (June 2018) ^[241].

Bergen County, New Jersey

- On March 28, 2017, Bergen County was certified as the first U.S. community to end chronic homelessness under the functional-zero standard ^[242].
- Its one-stop Housing, Health and Human Services Center opened in 2009 at a cost of \$11 million ^[242].
- The average time to connect a person with housing is about 64 days. A \$3 surcharge on recorded documents funds a trust that brings in about \$250,000 a year. Its shelter has 90 beds, rising to 120 in winter ^[243].

National results

- As of April 2022: 13 communities had reached functional zero for veteran or chronic homelessness, 46 had measurably reduced homelessness, 80 tracked it in real time, and more than 126,000 people had been housed since 2015 ^[184].
- A later report counted 14 communities at functional zero for at least one population and 44 with measurable reductions. A \$100 million MacArthur Foundation grant targets 75 communities ^[244]. The date of that report was not captured.

Caveats

- Rockford and Bergen County are much smaller than the Portland region. The sources do not give their counts, so this study does not compare sizes directly.
- Functional zero was reached for specific groups (veterans, chronic homelessness), not for all homelessness.
- This study did not find a recent check on whether either community has kept functional zero since 2017–2019.

13.3 Where Multnomah County stands on Built for Zero

Multnomah County joined Built for Zero. In April 2022, the county's board heard that it was in the "Initial Action Cycle," scoring 16 of 28 points on the program's scorecard, with a by-name list for chronic homelessness still in development ^[184]. No later score was found.

The county has since built a by-name list that reached 14,361 people in January 2025 ^[182]. OPB reported that part of that list's growth may reflect better data collection ^[166]. Whether the list now meets Built for Zero's quality standard could not be verified.

13.4 Side-by-side comparison

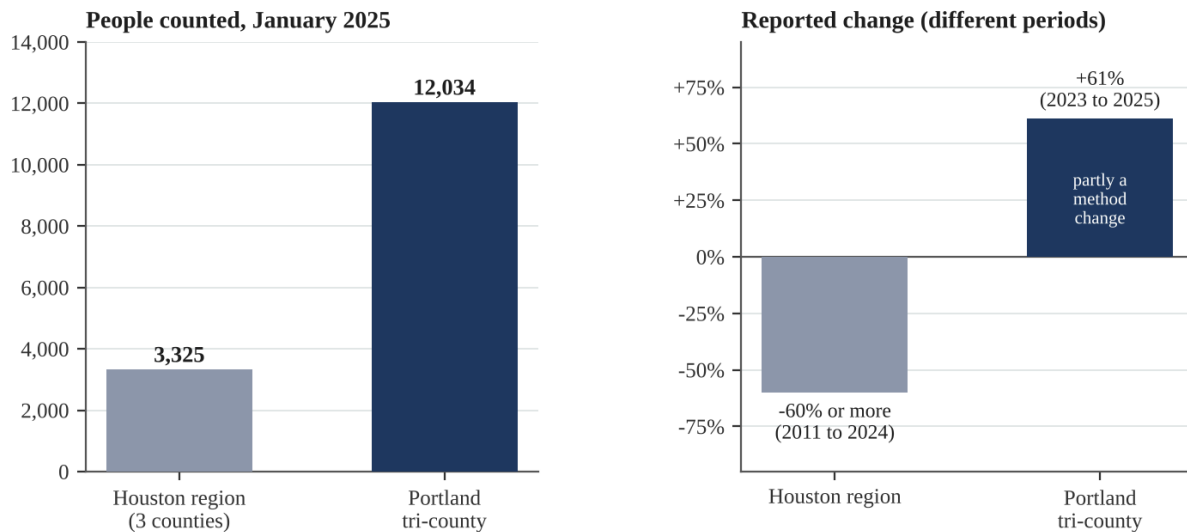
Table 13.1 — Homelessness systems compared

Community	Model	Latest count	Trend	Key system feature
Houston region (TX)	The Way Home: one coordinated continuum of care, housing first	3,325 (Jan. 2025)	More than 60% reduction since 2011; unsheltered up 15.8% in 2025	Dozens of agencies, one system; 32,000+ housed 2012–2024
Rockford (IL)	Built for Zero	not reported in sources	Functional zero: veterans 2015, chronic 2017	By-name lists by population
Bergen County (NJ)	Built for Zero plus one-stop center	not reported in sources	Functional zero: chronic 2017	About 64 days to housing
Portland tri-county (OR)	SHS tax plus three county systems	12,034 (Jan. 2025)	+61% vs. 2023 (partly a method change)	\$1.3 billion raised since 2021; 8,700+ placed (Metro claim)

Sources: Coalition for the Homeless ^[237] ^[239]; CBS News ^[238]; Community Solutions ^[241] ^[242]; NACo ^[243]; Portland State University ^[178]; Willamette Week ^[202].

Homelessness: Houston region vs. Portland tri-county

In January 2025 the Portland tri-county count was about 3.6 times Houston's (ratio derived). Houston reports a 60%+ decline since 2011; the Portland area reported +61% from 2023 to 2025, partly from a change in how Multnomah counts. Counting methods and regions differ; per-capita rates not calculated (no population figures in research).



Source: Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County (2024 and 2025 PIT results); CBS News, Apr 14, 2024; PSU HRAC 2025 Tri-County PIT (Nov 4, 2025)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 21. Homelessness change, Houston region vs. Portland tri-county. Periods and methods differ; see text. Multnomah's 2022 Built for Zero score (16 of 28) is discussed in Section 13.3. Source: Coalition for the Homeless; Portland State University; Multnomah County ^[237] ^[178] ^[184]

Read this comparison carefully.

- **Different periods.** Houston's figure covers about 13 years. Portland's covers two.
- **Different methods.** PIT counting methods differ between communities. Portland's 2025 jump is partly a change in measurement ^[178].
- **Different regions.** Houston's count covers three Texas counties; Portland's covers three Oregon counties with different housing markets, laws and weather.
- **Different money.** Houston's total spending was not found in the sources, so no cost-effectiveness comparison is made.

The defensible conclusion is narrow but important: the communities with sustained reductions reorganized around one command structure and one person-level list. Portland has more money than ever, but not yet those two things.

13.5 Lessons that transfer

Table 13.2 — What the successful communities did, and Portland's current status

Practice	Where it worked	Portland region today
One coordinated system, one lead	Houston's Way Home ^[238]	Metro, three counties and the City each run or fund programs; the City ended its transfer to the county in 2026 ^[137]
Real-time, quality by-name list	Rockford, Bergen County ^[241] ^[242]	List exists (14,361 in Jan. 2025); last quality score 16 of 28 (2022) ^[182] ^[184]
Housing first, then close camps	Houston closed 127 camps after housing residents ^[238]	610 camps removed by Dec. 2025; shelter placements per removal not published ^[227]
Fast connection to housing	Bergen: about 64 days ^[243]	Average shelter stay 73 days; 16% of exits to housing ^[166]
Simple funding streams	Houston pooled 20+ grants into one system ^[240]	SHS passes through City, Metro and three counties before reaching providers ^[158]
Consistent public measures	Built for Zero monthly tracking ^[184]	Metro Auditor found inconsistent definitions and calculations ^[48]

Sources as cited in each row.

What this means: Portland does not need to invent a new approach. Places that cut homelessness built one accountable system, measured every person by name every month, and housed people before closing camps. Multnomah County joined Built for Zero, but its last score found was 16 of 28 in 2022, and no later score was found. The fastest, cheapest step is to finish the by-name list to national quality standards, publish the score, and run all city, county and Metro programs against that one list. Chapter 25 turns these lessons into a plan.

Part V — Accountability: Does Anyone Check?

What the City's Own Auditors Found

In brief: Portland has an elected, independent City Auditor whose staff publish performance audits of City bureaus. Between 2022 and 2026 those audits found the same kinds of problems again and again: no Citywide standards, goals that were never measured, data that could not be trusted, and maintenance bills that grew while no one planned for them. The harder question is what happens after an audit. By the Auditor's own count, the City implemented 49% of 204 recommendations from 33 audits over five years. Peer cities averaged 64%. Some audits also show real progress, most clearly in 911 call answering. This chapter lists the findings, the follow-through and what residents say in the City's own survey.

14.1 Why the auditor matters

An auditor is the City's internal check. Audit staff do not run programs. They test whether programs do what the Council and voters were promised, and they recommend fixes. Under the 2022 charter reform, the job of responding to audit recommendations moved in January 2025 to the City Administrator, an appointed manager, rather than to individual Council members who used to run bureaus.^[118]

An audit is only useful if someone acts on it. That is why this chapter looks at two things: what the audits found, and how many of the fixes were made.

14.2 Major audits, 2022–2026

The table below lists the main performance audits published by Portland Audit Services from 2022 through mid-2026, with one line on what each found. Some entries cite news coverage of the official report, because that is where the figure was confirmed for this study.

Table 14.1 — Portland City Auditor performance audits, 2022–2026 (selected)

Date	Audit	Key finding (one line)	Source
Feb 2022	Collections ("Taxes, fines, and fees")	Each bureau collects on its own, with no Citywide standards. Only 8 of nearly 17,000 accounts sent to the collection agency paid within the 30-day no-fee window; the agency adds a 23% charge plus interest.	[156]
Mar 2022	Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF)	Revenue hit \$116M in one year against a \$44M–\$61M projection. The program lacked climate goals, and its grant committee oversaw its own decisions.	[147]

Date	Audit	Key finding (one line)	Source
Apr 2022	Police intelligence-gathering and surveillance	The Police Bureau had 37 types of surveillance technology, with policies for 16 and none for 21. Six of 33 sampled intelligence products concerned political activity with no substantiated crime.	[245]
2022	Portland Fire & Rescue accountability	The bureau did not have a coherent accountability system.	[246]
2023	Transportation (PBOT) capital project specifications	Specification processes exist, but workarounds were possible.	[246]
Apr 2024	Joint Office of Homeless Services (shelter)	About 2,000 shelter beds, mostly full, against 5,000+ unsheltered people on a given night (other coverage of the same audit gives about 3,200 budgeted beds vs. about 5,400 people; see Chapter 12). More than 300 families on waitlists, waiting up to 6 months.	[220]
May 2024	Inclusionary Housing	566 units built, only 131 (23%) family-sized. Compliance reviews 2 years behind. Rent and income reporting on an honor system.	[247]
2024	Fraud Hotline: Kenton Firehouse (Civic Life)	The office managed the firehouse in a way that was wasteful and inefficient.	[246]
2024	Fire & Rescue Community Health Division	The division needs guidance and leadership to reduce demands on firefighters.	[246]
Oct 2024	Technology purchasing	No Citywide tech-buying strategy. A \$300K device-management bundle was followed by a duplicative \$700K tool. At least \$63M spent on technology in FY2023-24.	[151]
Nov 2024	Vision Zero (PBOT)	Traffic deaths rose from 63 (2022) to a preliminary 69 (2023). PBOT does not systematically evaluate completed safety projects.	[248]
Apr 2025	Asset management	The yearly infrastructure funding gap grew from \$112M (2007) to more than \$1B (2023), against \$74B in assets. The Citywide Asset Management Office was unfunded as of January 2025.	[149]
Oct 2025	Parks fiscal management	Maintenance backlog of \$550M–\$800M. 86% of assets in poor or very bad condition. About \$4.7M a year in lifecycle costs for 5 new projects has no funding source.	[150]
Feb 2026	Climate justice	Of 47 Climate Emergency Workplan actions, 13% achieved, 79% ongoing, 9% delayed. Emissions down about 26% against a 50%-by-2030 goal. About \$25M of PCEF interest used to fill budget gaps.	[143]
Mar 2026	Arts Tax	On-time compliance rose to 82% (2024) from 72% (2015). The City overpaid school districts by \$8K to more than \$1.3M each in 2023-24, and had no equity guidelines for grants.	[155]

Date	Audit	Key finding (one line)	Source
Jun 2026	Emergency Communications (911)	Average 911 wait fell from 77 seconds (July 2022) to 18 seconds (January 2026); vacancies fell from 33 to 6. About 46% of trainees left, at a cost of about \$3.4M.	[135]

Sources: Portland Audit Services reports and OPB coverage of those reports, as cited in each row. Selection by the author; the full list is on the Auditor's "Audit Reports Online" page.^[246]

14.3 Five patterns that repeat

Read together, these audits are less a list of separate failures than a picture of how the City works. Five patterns stand out.

Pattern 1: No Citywide standard

The 2022 collections audit found each bureau collecting debts its own way. Consultants had recommended consolidating City collections in 2005 and again in 2014.^[156] The 2024 technology audit found the same problem with software: no Citywide strategy, and a duplicative \$700K purchase after a \$300K one.^[151] When every bureau buys and runs its own systems, residents meet a different set of rules at every door.

Pattern 2: Goals that are not measured

PCEF's goals were tied to a Climate Action Plan that expired in 2020, and it had no measurable goals for workforce training and hiring from disadvantaged groups.^[147] The Vision Zero audit found PBOT does not systematically check whether completed safety projects worked.^[248] The 2026 climate audit found the chief sustainability officer has no direct authority over bureaus.^[143]

Pattern 3: Honor systems and missing data

Inclusionary Housing relies on owners to report rents and incomes on an honor system, and the Housing Bureau was two years behind on compliance reviews.^[247] The technology audit found the City does not track whether it meets its goal of sending 20% of contracts to historically disadvantaged businesses.^[151] In the police surveillance audit, 16 of 25 sampled social-media lookups lacked documentation of suspected criminal activity.^[245]

Pattern 4: Deferred maintenance becomes a crisis

The asset management audit shows the infrastructure funding gap rising from \$112M a year in 2007, to \$287M in 2013, to more than \$1B in 2023.^[149] A 2022 internal report cited in that audit projected a gap of about \$10B over 10 years. Parks is the sharpest case: the 2014 \$68M maintenance bond has run out, and 86% of park assets were rated poor or very bad in September 2024.^[150] OPB reported

the audit's finding that investments were vulnerable to political pressure under the old commission system.^[112]

Pattern 5: Dedicated money drifting to general gaps

Voters created PCEF for climate work. The 2026 climate audit found about \$25M of PCEF interest was used to help close City budget gaps, at a time when the City faced a \$169M shortfall.^[143] The Arts Tax audit found the City overpaid school districts, which left less money for grants.^[155] The climate audit made no finding of illegality, and none is reported for the Arts Tax audit. Both show that a dedicated tax needs its own clear rules and reporting.

A success story worth copying: 911. The June 2026 audit found the average 911 wait fell from 77 seconds in July 2022 to 18 seconds in January 2026, and vacancies fell from 33 to 6.^[135] Work remains. Only 2 of 39 trainees certified within the 18-month target, and the center still did not meet the national standard of answering 90% of calls within 15 seconds as of April 2026. But the trend shows that a focused City effort can turn a service around in about three years.

14.4 Does anyone act? Recommendation follow-through

Every year the Auditor checks whether past recommendations have been carried out. The most recent report, the 2024 Audit Impact Report, was published on October 1, 2025. It covers 204 recommendations from 33 audits over five years.^[152]

- **Portland implemented 49%** of those recommendations. Its rate was 51% in 2022.
- **Peer governments averaged 64%** in the 2024 survey by the Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA), up from 58% in 2022.
- The gap widened: Portland fell while peers rose.
- The City got better at answering the Auditor. Its response rate to update requests rose to 88% from 77%.

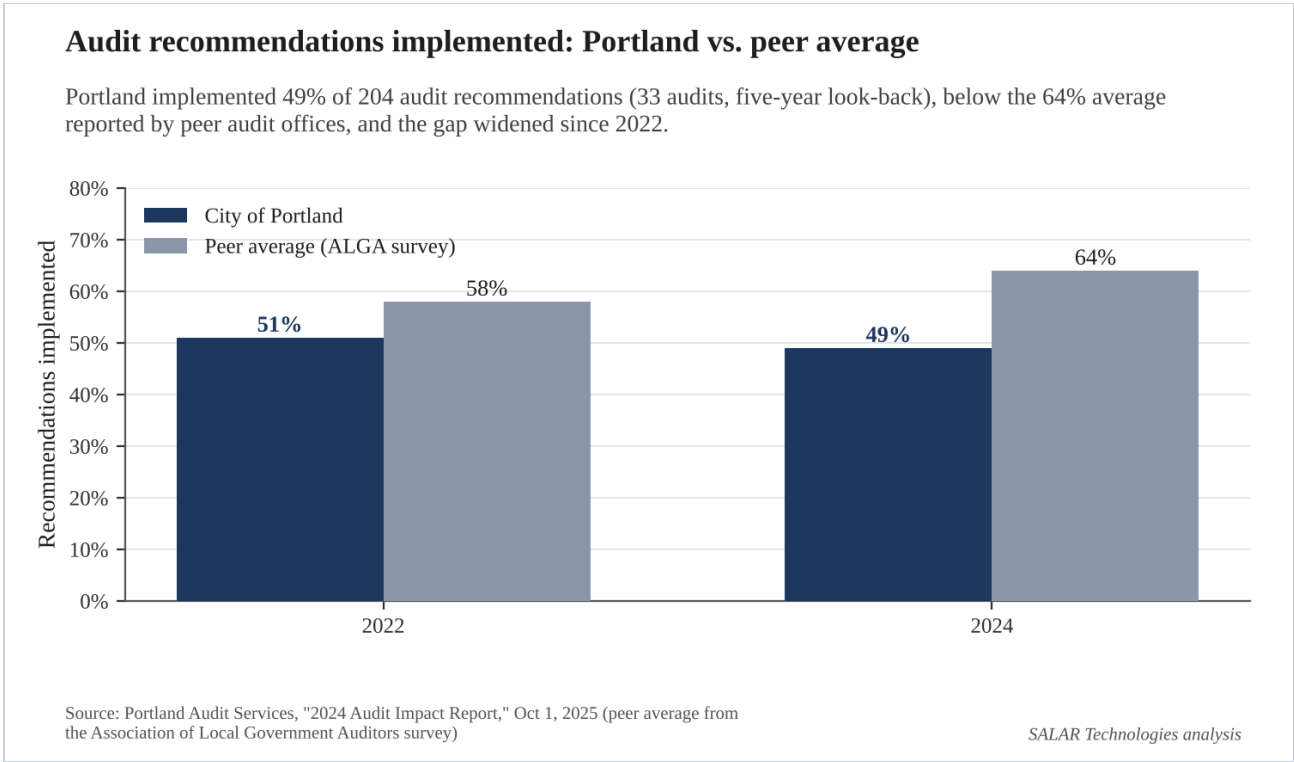


Figure 22. Audit recommendations implemented, Portland vs. peer average (ALGA survey). Source: Portland Audit Services, 2024 Audit Impact Report. ^[152]

Why recommendations stall

The report sorts outstanding recommendations by the main obstacle. Prioritization was the top obstacle (35 recommendations), followed by coordination (19) and outcomes (10).^[152] In plain terms, most fixes did not fail because they were impossible. They failed because no one put them first, or because they needed several bureaus to work together.

The charter transition added a new obstacle. The Revenue Division cited "new and uncertain expectations" of the Mayor and Council in the new government as a barrier to improving collection standards.^[118]

Audits with open recommendations

The report names audits whose recommendations were not fully carried out. Some are almost eight years old.

Table 14.2 — Audits named in the 2024 Audit Impact Report with recommendations not fully implemented

Year of audit	Audit
2018	Private Stormwater; Restoration Projects / Green Streets; Short-Term Rentals
2019	Parks Golf; Housing Bond

Year of audit	Audit
2020	Equity in Construction Contracting
2021	Building Permit Review; Emergency Management; Sewer Maintenance
2022	Collections (Feb); Police Intelligence / Surveillance (Apr)
2024	Technology Purchasing (Oct)
Aged out	Three audits left the five-year look-back with recommendations not fully implemented, including the Cannabis Tax audit

Source: Portland Audit Services, 2024 Audit Impact Report, Oct 1, 2025.^[152]

The collections audit shows how slow this can be. In an April 2023 follow-up, the Auditor found the Office of Management and Finance had made no progress on Citywide collection standards. Consolidation was pushed past the January 2025 government change, with no timeline.^[157] Other follow-up titles from 2022–2023 tell a similar story: "little progress" on the review of Enhanced Services Districts, a gang-information policy "still needed," and a Water Bureau groundwater plan "not yet defined."^[246]

Bureau responses vary. The Parks bureau and City Administrator agreed with all Parks recommendations.^[112] The City Administrator accepted the climate audit's recommendations. By contrast, the Auditor wrote that the Housing Bureau's response to the Inclusionary Housing audit did not say whether it agreed with the findings.^[247]

14.5 Other auditors watching the region

The City Auditor is not the only one checking. Multnomah County and Metro have their own elected auditors, and their findings overlap with City programs, especially homelessness.

- **County Auditor, Joint Office (August 2023):** providers were sometimes paid months late, work started before contracts were in place, performance measures changed, no basic housing-placement data was produced, and about 250 staff left. The County Chair agreed with many findings.^[232]
- **County Auditor, contracting (June 2024):** the contract policy had not been updated since 2011, the billing system was unreliable, and 74% of very late payments had county-side causes.^[234]
- **Metro Auditor, Supportive Housing Services (January 2024):** titled "Shared oversight reduces transparency and accountability," it found inconsistent definitions, reports and calculations made progress hard to judge, and made 18 recommendations. This study reviewed the highlights document only, not management's full response.^[48]

14.6 What residents say: the Portland Insights Survey

The City's resident survey is now run by the City Budget Office with Portland State University's Regional Research Institute, not by the Auditor.^[249] The Auditor's older Community Survey series was not reviewed for this study.

Table 14.3 — Portland Insights Survey results

Survey	Responses	Headline results	Source
2022 (released July 2023)	5,290 of 20,000 households mailed	Nearly half satisfied with Portland as a place to live; about a third dissatisfied. About half aware of 311. 48% said they could find a job that pays enough.	[250]
2023	Focus groups only	Qualitative follow-up to 2022	[249]
2024 (released April 2025)	More than 4,000 of 20,000 invited	Parks rated good to excellent by 87%. About half say the City is moving in the right direction. Top challenges: homelessness 85.4%, cost of living 73.3%, community safety 59.7%.	[72]
2026	About 16,000 invited (June–August 2026)	Results expected early 2027	[249]

Note: The City's 2024 page reports both "more than 4,000" and "more than 4,200" responses. Sources as cited.^[251]

More detail from the 2024 executive summary:^[251]

- 73.6% feel safe walking in their neighborhood during the day.
- On a 4-point scale, parks and natural areas scored 3.35, garbage and recycling 3.14, and water 2.94. The City's release said police and street maintenance were rated mostly fair to poor, without a percentage.
- 36.6% were "not at all satisfied" with the cost of living.
- Awareness of 311 rose from 47.8% (2022) to 58.6% (2024).

This study found no numeric measure of trust in City government in the 2022 or 2024 survey materials it reviewed. That is itself a gap. A city trying to rebuild trust should measure it the same way every time.

What this means: Portland pays for good audits and then carries out fewer than half of the fixes, well below peer cities. The problem is mostly priority and coordination, which are management choices. Three steps would help: publish every open recommendation with an owner and a due date on one public dashboard; have the City Administrator report to Council each quarter on the oldest open items; and set a public target of matching the 64% peer rate within two years. The 911 turnaround shows the City can do it when it decides to.

The Ombudsman: Rising Demand, a Small Team

In brief: The City Ombudsman is where residents go when they believe a City bureau treated them unfairly. Its power to investigate is broad, but it can only recommend, not order. From 2022 to 2025, complaints within its jurisdiction more than doubled, from 289 to 617. Completed investigations rose too, to 113 in 2025, and money recovered for residents rose to \$306,780. But the team named in the annual reports stayed at about four people, and two warning signs appeared in 2025: fewer recommendations accepted by bureaus, and lower satisfaction among complainants. This chapter uses only the office's published annual data. It does not discuss any individual complaint.

15.1 What the Ombudsman can and cannot do

The office's authority comes from Portland City Code Chapter 3.77.^[252] The key points:

- **Broad reach:** it may investigate any administrative act of a City agency, on a complaint or on its own initiative, even if the act is final (3.77.110A).
- **Investigative tools:** it may enter and inspect agency premises without notice (3.77.110C–D) and request sworn testimony (3.77.110E).
- **Remedies:** it may recommend changes and issue reports (3.77.150). The code describes no explicit subpoena power, and the office cannot order a bureau to act.
- **Exclusions:** elected officials and their personal staff (3.77.020B); matters in litigation; collective-bargaining grievances; and employee discrimination complaints (3.77.120C).
- **Structure:** the office sits inside the elected Auditor's Office (3.77.100C). The Ombudsman is an at-will employee who can be removed by the Auditor (3.77.070).
- **Protection:** reprisals against people who complain are prohibited (3.77.210).

In short, the Ombudsman has a wide door and a light hammer. Its main power is persuasion backed by facts made public. That makes two things essential: enough staff to investigate, and public reporting that shows whether bureaus follow its advice.

15.2 Demand has more than doubled

The office publishes an annual report each spring. The table below brings together four years of figures.

Table 15.1 — Portland Ombudsman annual data, 2022–2025

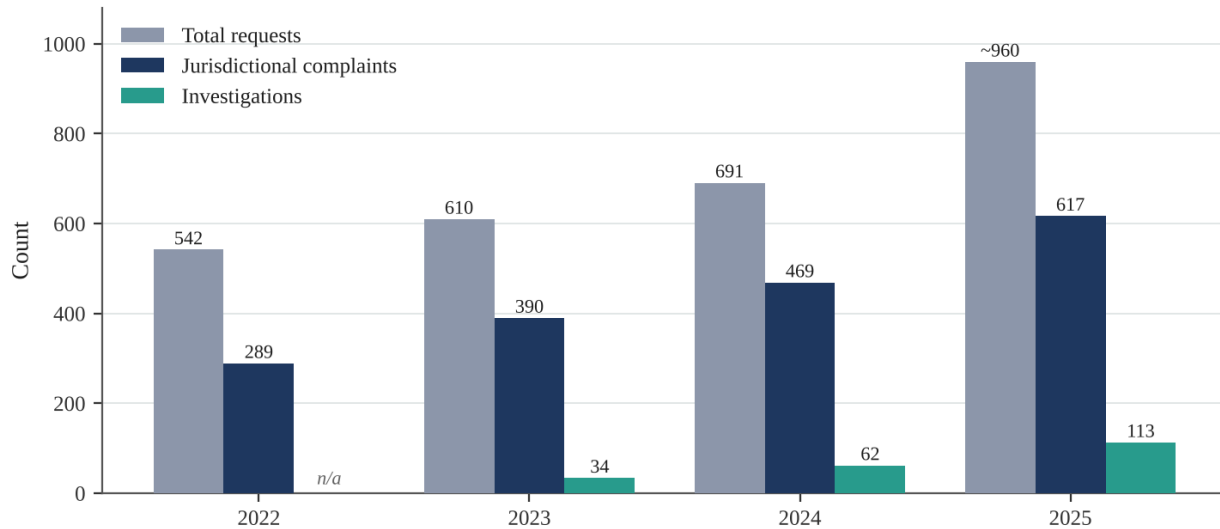
Year	Total requests	Complaints in jurisdiction	Investigations	Substantiated	Declined	Savings to residents	Staff named in report
2022	542	289	About 15% of eligible complaints	About one-third	n/a	n/a	New City Ombudsman hired in December
2023	610	390	34 (about 9%)	44%	Not published	About \$70,000 (11 people)	4: Ombudsman, 2 Deputies, 1 Community Service Aide
2024	691	469	62 (13%)	23 (37%)	About 49% (chart text only)	\$140,335	Ombudsman, 2 Deputies, 1 fellow
2025	About 960	617 (+32%)	123 accepted; 113 completed	47 (42%)	245 (40%)	\$306,780	About 4 named, including a Deputy Ombudsman who joined Sept 2025

Sources: KGW on the 2022 report^[253]; 2023 Annual Report^[254]; 2024 Annual Report^[255]; 2025 Annual Report^[256].

Investigation counts are not reported the same way each year, so year-to-year comparisons are approximate.

Portland Ombudsman: requests, complaints and investigations, 2022-2025

Complaints within the office's jurisdiction more than doubled from 2022 to 2025, while the staff named in its reports stayed at about four. 2025 total requests are "about 960"; 2025 investigations are those completed (123 accepted). 2022 investigation count not published ("about 15%" of eligible complaints).



Source: Portland City Auditor, Ombudsman Annual Reports for 2023 (Apr 4, 2024), 2024 (Apr 9, 2025) and 2025 (Apr 8, 2026); KGW (2022 figures)

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Figure 23. Ombudsman complaints in jurisdiction and investigations, 2022–2025. Source: Portland City Auditor, Ombudsman Annual Reports 2023–2025; KGW for 2022. ^[256]

Three facts stand out:

- **Complaints more than doubled** in three years, from 289 to 617.
- **Investigations grew faster than complaints.** The office went from 34 investigations in 2023 to 113 completed in 2025. That is real productivity.
- **Money recovered for residents rose about fourfold**, from about \$70,000 in 2023 to \$306,780 in 2025. Of the 2025 total, \$248,192 came from lowered short-term rental fines. ^[256]

15.3 Who complains, and about which bureaus

The 2025 report shows the office increasingly serves Portland's most vulnerable residents. Among complainants who answered demographic questions: ^[256]

- 36% were experiencing homelessness, up from about 15% in 2024.
- 60% were economically vulnerable.
- 46% were living with a disability.

KOIN also reported that complaints from houseless residents more than doubled in 2025. ^[257]

Table 15.2 — Bureaus drawing the most Ombudsman complaints

Rank	2024	2025
1	Transportation (PBOT) 27%	Transportation (PBOT) 24%
2	Police 10%	Portland Solutions 23%
3	Permitting & Development 9%	Permitting & Development 13%
4	Office of Management and Finance 9%	Police 12%

Sources: 2024 Annual Report^[255]; 2025 Annual Report^[256].

The rise of Portland Solutions, the City's homelessness and livability service area, to nearly a quarter of complaints in a single year matches the rise in houseless complainants. It also shows how City homelessness policy, discussed in Part IV, reaches the oversight system.

15.4 Two warning signs in 2025

Volume and dollars went up. Two quality measures went down.^{[256][255]}

- **Bureaus accepted fewer recommendations.** 77% were fully or partly accepted in 2025, down from 81% in 2024. Because the office can only recommend, this rate is the best single measure of its real-world impact.
- **Complainants were less satisfied.** The share who would recommend the office fell from 76% (2024) to 64% (2025). The share who felt a sense of fairness fell from 51% to 42%.

A caution: survey response rates were low, about 10% in 2024 and about 7% in 2025. These results should be read as signals, not precise measures.

The office also declined 245 complaints (40%) in 2025, and 249 (40%) received "other intervention," such as a referral or an informal fix. Declining a complaint can be correct, for example when it falls outside the code. But when 40% are declined, residents need to understand why.

15.5 Unfinished business from earlier recommendations

The Ombudsman's January 2025 follow-up found the City had not fully implemented the office's 2021 recommendations on property maintenance enforcement.^[256] This mirrors the audit follow-through problem in Chapter 14. Even when the City's own oversight offices are right, fixes can wait years.

The office also publishes systemic reports that look past one case to a pattern. In 2023 it issued three: on protecting undocumented victims of crime (June), emergency board-ups (July), and vessels

at public docks that were unlawfully seized and destroyed (August).^[254] Systemic reports are the most efficient use of a small team, because one report can fix a problem for hundreds of people.

15.6 The capacity gap

The annual reports name about four staff. Jurisdictional complaints more than doubled between 2022 and 2025 while that named team stayed about the same size. This study could not find an official full-time-equivalent (FTE) count, a budget figure, or any report on backlog or capacity. A rough calculation shows the strain. With about 617 complaints and about three investigative staff, each person handles roughly 200 complaints a year.^[256] This figure is derived by the author from named staff. It is not an official number.

The key gap: Demand rose 32% in a single year. The office still does not publish how long cases take, how many are waiting, or how many complaints each investigator carries. Without those numbers, the Council cannot tell whether the office needs more people, and residents cannot tell how long they will wait.

15.7 What other ombudsman offices do

Ombudsman offices differ in size and scope, so comparisons are rough. Still, they show what is possible.

Table 15.3 — Ombudsman offices compared

Office	Year	Intake	Cases / investigations	Staff	What is published
Portland, OR (city)	2025	About 960 requests; 617 in jurisdiction	113 investigations completed	About 4 named	Substantiation rate, acceptance rate, dollars saved
Iowa (state)	FY2025	—	6,266 cases opened	16 (2 administrative)	Not captured
Anchorage, AK (city)	2024	1,417 inquiries; 1,184 information and referral contacts	233 opened; 231 closed; 11 open at year end	3 named	Counts and case narratives
Dayton–Montgomery County, OH	Since 1971	—	—	—	Not captured (office created 1971, one of the oldest local offices in the U.S.)

Sources: Iowa Capital Dispatch^[258]; Municipality of Anchorage^[259]; Dayton Daily News^[260]; Portland 2025 Annual Report^[256].

What the comparison shows:

- **Iowa** opened about 6,266 cases with 16 staff. Excluding two administrative staff, that is roughly 450 cases per person (the author's calculation). Iowa is a statewide office, so its mix of cases is different, but it shows a larger team can handle far more volume.
- **Anchorage**, a city office with three named staff, separates information-and-referral contacts (1,184) from opened cases (233). That split helps readers see how much work is quick help and how much is real investigation. Anchorage's own report is not perfect: its closure counts are internally inconsistent (213 vs. 231), and it does not publish days to close.
- **Portland already publishes more outcome data** than Anchorage: substantiation rates, acceptance rates and dollars saved. That is a strength to build on.

The standard to aim for: USOA principles

The United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) sets out four core traits of a classical ombudsman: independence; impartiality and fairness; a credible review process; and confidentiality. It also publishes Governmental Ombudsman Standards and a Model Ombudsman Act for State Governments, approved in 1997.^[261]

Portland's code meets several of these. The office sits inside an independent elected Auditor's Office and bars reprisals against complainants. But a "credible review process" depends partly on capacity. An office that declines 40% of complaints and does not report its wait times will struggle to look credible to the people it serves, however good its work.

This study found no USOA caseload standard for how many complaints one investigator should carry. That number should be set locally and published.

What this means: The Ombudsman is doing more with about the same team, and it recovers real money for residents, many of them poor, disabled or unhoused. But demand is outrunning capacity, and two 2025 quality measures slipped. Portland should (1) publish median days to close, open cases and caseload per investigator every quarter; (2) set a caseload target and fund staff to meet it; (3) require bureaus to answer every recommendation in writing within a set time, with the answers posted; and (4) track the share of recommendations accepted as a headline City performance measure. Part VII proposes a triage and published-outcome model for the office.

Public Records: Fast Answers, but Fees as a Wall

In brief: Portland handles about 53,000–54,000 public records requests a year, most of them for police records. Since 2023 the City has become much faster: in FY2024-25, 97% of public requests met the state deadline. That is a real improvement. But Portland still charges by the hour, using staff wages plus a 39% overhead charge, and the Auditor's Office asks for a 50% deposit before work starts. Fees waived fell sharply in the most recent year. The state's own Public Records Advisory Council has called fees a major barrier. Other places show a different approach: San Francisco does not charge for search or redaction, and Washington State agencies spent more than \$103 million on records in 2022 while recovering a tiny share in fees. This chapter sets out the rules, the numbers and the comparisons.

16.1 How Portland handles requests

- **One portal.** The City replaced five separate request portals with a single portal built on GovQA software.^[262]
- **Online or mail only.** Phone and email requests are not accepted. A requester who does not pay or answer a clarification question within 60 days may have the request closed.^[263]
- **A small central team.** In FY2024-25 the City Attorney's Legal Records Team had 8.4 FTE, and 113 City staff closed at least one request.^[262]

16.2 The fee formula

Portland charges for staff time. The rules are set out in the City's fee schedule and the Auditor's standard fee schedule:

- **Hourly rate:** the staff member's hourly pay plus a 39% overhead charge, multiplied by the time spent. This applies to the Auditor's Office as of July 1, 2025.^[264]
- **Who sets the rate:** Citywide policy bills at the wage plus overhead of the lowest-paid employee able to do the work.^[263]
- **First hour:** a one-hour waiver applies when a request takes less than one hour and has no pre-paid estimate.
- **Deposit:** the Auditor's schedule requires a 50% deposit on estimated costs before work begins, and full payment before release unless waived.^[264]
- **Waivers:** discretionary waivers are available for public interest, financial hardship and government requesters. Police and fire reports are free to crime and fire victims.^[263]

The "lowest-paid qualified employee" rule has a history. A 2019 Multnomah County Circuit Court ruling, as reported by Techdirt, found the City's fee method was not reasonably tied to actual costs and ordered it to bill at the lowest qualified employee's rate and refund an overcharge. In that case the City had estimated \$205.61 for about two hours of work.^[265] This is a secondary source, and the case number was not verified for this study.

16.3 Volume and speed: a real improvement

Table 16.1 — City of Portland public records requests, 2021 to FY2024-25

Measure	2021	FY2022-23	FY2023-24	FY2024-25
Total requests created	33,629	51,397*	53,263	54,477
Public requests created	n/a	38,066	35,380	34,766
Police records requests	25,097	40,622	42,404	42,474
Public requests meeting the 15-business-day deadline	n/a	93%	97%	97%
Public requests closed within 30 work days	n/a	46%	94%	97%
Fees charged or pre-paid	About \$501K	\$849,251	About \$430,788	\$256,064
Fees waived	n/a	\$679,238 (all); about \$236K (public)	\$652,771 (all); \$222,626 (public)	About \$139,164 (35% of potential)

Sources: City testimony to the Public Records Advisory Council (2021 data)^[266]; Records Requests Annual Reports FY2022-23^[267], FY2023-24^[268] and FY2024-25^[262]. *The FY2022-23 report gives two totals (51,397 in its table and 68,094 created). All three annual reports contain minor internal inconsistencies.

The speed gains are large and should be credited:

- The share of public requests closed within 30 work days rose from 46% (FY2022-23) to 97% (FY2024-25).
- Open requests fell from 4,659 at the start of FY2023-24 to 1,391 at year-end.^[268]
- This is a sharp change from the past. An Oregonian investigation found the average wait for a Portland police report in 2017 was 133 days. Seattle police said at the time that a basic report usually took under a week and cost under \$1.^[269]

One gap remains. The City's reports do not publish a median number of days to close a request. The "on-time" figure shows the City met a deadline; it does not show how long a typical requester waited, especially since waiting for fees or clarification pauses the clock.

16.4 Fees: what the numbers show

Fee revenue and fee waivers both fell over the last three years. Fees charged dropped from \$849,251 in FY2022-23 to \$256,064 in FY2024-25. Fees waived dropped from \$652,771 in FY2023-24 to about \$139,164 in FY2024-25.

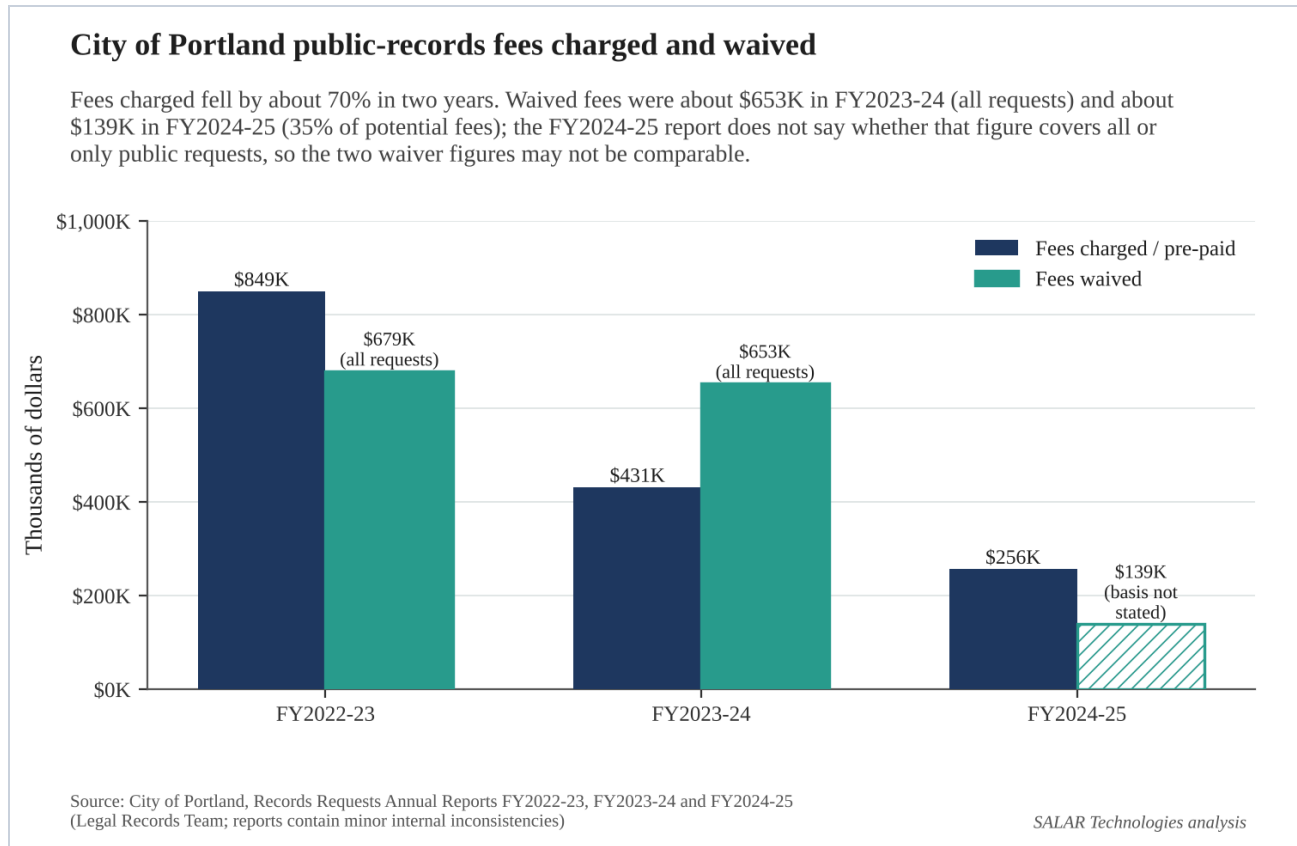


Figure 24. Public records fees charged and waived, FY2022-23 to FY2024-25. The FY2024-25 waiver figure does not state whether it covers all or only public requests. Source: City of Portland Records Requests Annual Reports. ^[262]

Read this chart with care:

- The FY2023-24 figure (\$652,771) covers all requests. The same report gives \$222,626 for public requests only.
- The FY2024-25 report gives about \$139,164 and describes it as 35% of potential fees. It does not clearly say whether this covers all requests or only public ones.
- So the drop is real, but its exact size depends on which basis is used: from about \$653K to about \$139K on the all-requests reading, or from about \$223K to about \$139K if the newer figure covers public requests only.

Lower waivers can mean several things: fewer large requests, more requests finished within the free first hour, or stricter waiver decisions. The reports do not say which. Media requesters received

waivers on 79% of closed requests in FY2024-25, which suggests the press is generally well served.
[262] Ordinary residents are the group the data does not separate out.

Fees cover a small part of the real cost

The City's own 2022 testimony to the state Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC) is telling. In 2021, records work cost the City about \$2.85M in staff time, which the City itself called an undercount. Fees collected were about \$501K. The average non-commercial fee was \$11.96 per request across 17,917 requests. And 15,712 police requests came from commercial reporting companies.^[266]

The key point: Fees recovered less than a fifth of the City's records cost in 2021 (about \$501K against about \$2.85M, by the author's calculation). The average resident paid about \$12. Fees are a small source of revenue but can be a large barrier for the person who receives a big estimate and a 50% deposit request. Much of the paying volume comes from commercial companies buying police reports, which could be priced separately.

16.5 What Oregon law requires

Oregon's Public Records Law sets the deadlines and limits on fees.

- **Acknowledge within 5 business days.** Under ORS 192.329, as amended by SB 481 (2017), agencies must acknowledge a request within 5 business days.^[263]
- **Complete or estimate: 10 or 15 business days?** The City's own summary applies a 15-business-day deadline to complete the request or give an estimated completion date. Some summaries of the law describe a 10-business-day period. This study could not fetch the statute text to settle the difference. Readers should check ORS 192.329 directly. The City's annual reports measure performance against the 15-day standard.
- **Paused clocks.** Waiting for fees or clarification pauses the deadline, and the deadlines may not apply when request volume is unusually high.^[263]
- **Fees.** ORS 192.324 governs fees. This study did not fetch the statute text, so details such as a notice threshold for larger fees and the exact public-interest waiver language are not stated here.

16.6 The state's own advisers say fees are a barrier

Oregon created a Public Records Advocate in 2018 and a Public Records Advisory Council to advise on the law. SB 500 (2021) made the Advocate an independent office appointed by the Council.^[270] SB 5535 (2025) set its biennial spending limit, effective July 1, 2025, reported at \$1.17M.^{[271][272]}

Their findings on fees are consistent:

- **First Advocate, 2019:** Ginger McCall called fees perhaps the single most pressing issue in public records requests.^[273] Her 2018 report noted Oregon has more than 550 records exemptions and that agencies did not track request data.^[269]
- **PRAC cost study, June 2022:** costs remain a significant barrier even with partial waivers; fees and waiver methods vary widely; and the fee appeal process is seen as ineffective.^[274]
- **PRAC biennial report, December 2022:** requesters described arbitrary and sometimes extreme fees with little explanation, and fees rarely cover full costs. The Advocate had received more than 850 requests for help with disputes between April 2018 and November 2022.^[270]
- **Reform concept (endorsed November 18, 2022):** limit fees to search, duplication and review; cap charges at the pay of the lowest-paid qualified employee; require posted fee schedules; presume news-media requests are in the public interest; allow waivers for any reason; and require written reasons when a waiver is denied.
- **Other states:** a May 2022 review of 49 states plus D.C. found some states grant automatic fee waivers to non-commercial requesters, or to all requesters.

The Council then introduced SB 417 (2023) to standardize costs and set up a public-interest waiver process. HB 3056 (2025) would require state agencies to waive fees for legislators.^{[275][276]} This study could not verify the final outcome of either bill.

16.7 How other places compare

Table 16.2 — Public records benchmarks

Jurisdiction	Volume	Speed	Cost / staffing	Fee approach
Portland (city)	54,477 requests (FY2024-25)	97% met 15-business-day deadline	8.4 FTE central team; about \$2.85M cost (2021)	Wage + 39% overhead; first hour free if under 1 hour; 50% deposit (Auditor)
Washington State (all agencies)	396,442 (2022)	47% estimated to take more than 5 days	More than \$103M; 1.2M staff hours	Only \$336,444 recovered
Seattle (city)	15,000–16,000 a year	Police: 79 days average to close	More than \$14M; 70+ staff	—
San Francisco	—	Immediate requests: 24 hours. Standard: 10 days, extendable by 14	—	10¢ per page; no charge for search or redaction

Jurisdiction	Volume	Speed	Cost / staffing	Fee approach
New York City (OpenRecords portal)	More than 85,000 (2024)	94 days average, 21 median	—	—
Federal (all agencies)	1.50M (FY2024)	Simple requests: 44 days average; backlog 267,056	\$723M; 5,638 FTE	Statutory waivers
U.S. State Department	More than 15,000 a year	190 days average	\$65M; 267 FTE	—

Sources: Portland annual report^[262]; Association of Washington Cities^[277]; Axios Seattle^[278]; SF.gov^[279]; Reinvent Albany^[280]; DOJ Office of Information Policy^[281]; Brechner FOI Project^[282]; U.S. State Department^[283]. Measures differ across places and are not strictly comparable.

Washington State: costs far exceed recovery

Washington's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) collects records data from agencies every year. In 2022, 230 agencies reported 396,442 requests, costing more than \$103M and 1.2 million staff hours. They recovered only \$336,444 in expenses. Cities and towns received 161,412 of those requests, at a cost of \$36M.^[277]

Two lessons follow. First, in every place with data in this chapter, fees cover only a small share of records work; the work is a cost of open government. Second, Washington measures the full cost every year, so its legislature can see it. Portland's City testimony also raised a fair concern: where fees are lower, as in Washington, requesters tend to file broad requests that are delivered in installments over years.^[266] Any move to lower fees should come with better tools to handle large requests.

San Francisco: no fee for search or redaction

San Francisco's Sunshine Ordinance requires answers to "immediate disclosure" requests within 24 hours. Standard requests are due in 10 days, with a possible 14-day extension. Copies cost 10 cents a page, and departments may not charge for locating, collecting or redacting records. A Sunshine Ordinance Task Force meets monthly and hears complaints.^[279] This is the clearest working model of the reform concept Oregon's own Council endorsed.

New York City: a warning on backlogs

NYC's OpenRecords portal received more than 85,000 requests in 2024, up from about 41,000 in 2018. The citywide average time to close was 94 days (median 21). 62% of the 50,528 requests open at the end of 2024 were past due. The fastest agencies closed requests in 9 to 13 days, which shows wide variation inside one city.^[280] On timeliness, Portland is now doing better than NYC's average. NYC publishes a median, which Portland does not.

The federal government: demand is rising everywhere

Federal agencies received a record 1,501,432 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in FY2024, up 25% from the year before.^[281] The backlog rose 33% to 267,056. Processing cost an estimated \$723M, plus \$54M in litigation, with 5,638 full-time FOIA staff.^[282] The lesson for Portland: hiring alone cannot keep up with rising demand. Tools have to change.

The State Department's machine-learning review

The U.S. State Department offers the strongest evidence that technology can help. It trained a machine-learning model on past human decisions about 1995–1997 diplomatic cables. After a 2022 pilot and full use in 2023, the model reviewed 450,000 cables and cut the volume needing human review by 80%. Humans still check quality and review cases the model is unsure about. The first cables declassified with AI help were posted to the State FOIA Reading Room in September 2024.^[283]

The same presentation describes the problem State is trying to solve with an AI search pilot: \$65M a year in processing cost, 267 FOIA staff, more than 20,000 pending cases and an average of 190 days per request. The results of that search pilot could not be read from the source document.

16.8 What is still unknown

- No City Auditor audit of the public records program for 2022–2026 was found.
- No median days-to-close is published.
- The exact text of ORS 192.324 and ORS 192.329 was not reviewed for this study.
- Washington's statutory per-page rates were not verified.

What this means: Portland deserves credit for getting faster. The next step is to lower the wall of fees. Fees brought in roughly \$500K against about \$2.85M in costs in 2021, so ending most fees for residents would cost little and remove a real barrier. Portland could (1) follow San Francisco and stop charging residents for search and redaction; (2) keep cost-based pricing for commercial bulk buyers of police reports; (3) drop the 50% deposit for small requests; (4) publish median days to close and fees charged and waived by requester type; and (5) proactively post common records so no request is needed. Part VII sets out a records workflow using AI-assisted search and redaction, with human review, modeled on the State Department's results.

State Oversight Capacity: When the Watchdogs Are Short-Staffed

In brief: Portland residents also depend on state agencies to protect their wages, civil rights, benefits and health coverage. Oregon's Secretary of State audits show many of those agencies are stretched. The Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), which enforces wage and civil rights laws, had fewer staff in 2024 (157) than in the early 1980s (214), while Oregon's workforce grew by about 75%. A 2025 state audit found one case had waited 1,046 days for an investigator. The Legislature then raised BOLI's budget by more than 50%, but BOLI says its wage investigation backlog will not clear until mid-2029. Other audits show the same pattern in state technology: an unemployment system that took about 15 years from federal funding to launch, a \$416 million benefits system, and a health plan that paid millions in questioned benefits because of coding errors.

17.1 Why state capacity is a Portland issue

When a Portland worker is not paid, or faces discrimination at work, the main public agency that investigates is BOLI. When a Portland family loses a job or needs health coverage, it deals with the Employment Department, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) or the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). The City cannot fix these agencies. But its residents bear the cost when they fail, and state leaders who oversee them are among the readers of this study.

17.2 BOLI: the numbers

Staffing has not kept up with the workforce

BOLI's own 2024 "State of the Worker" report to legislators set out the long-term decline:^[284]

- 214 FTE in the early 1980s, when Oregon's workforce was about 1.2 million.
- 157 FTE in 2024, with a workforce of more than 2.1 million.
- Workers per BOLI employee rose from 5,750 (1980) to about 20,000 (2023).
- Wage and Hour had 10 labor standards investigators. One investigator can complete about 85 cases a year.

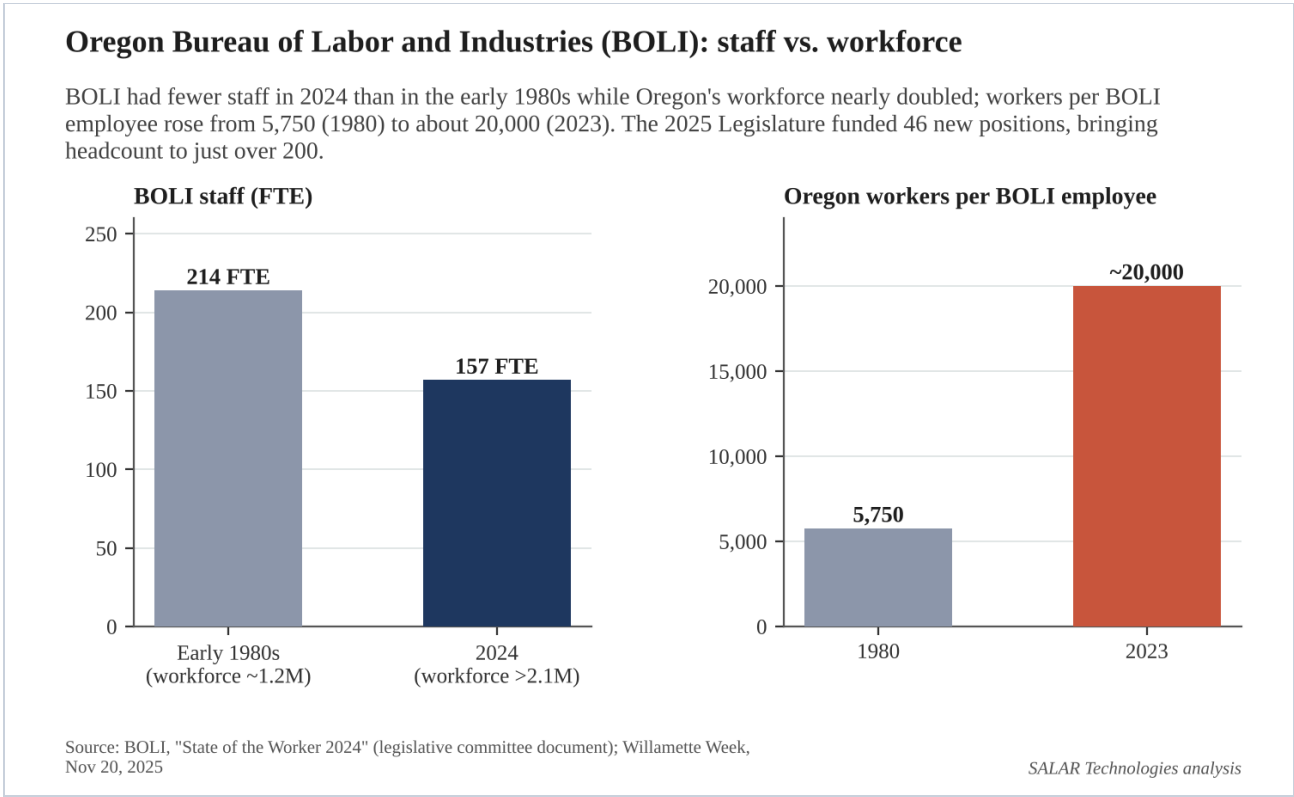


Figure 25. BOLI staffing, early 1980s vs. 2024. Source: BOLI, State of the Worker 2024. ^[284]

A simple calculation shows the gap. Ten investigators at about 85 cases each can finish about 850 wage cases a year (the author's calculation). In August 2024, BOLI had 4,074 wage claims at intake and 1,341 in investigation.^[285]

Demand rose sharply

- Wage claims rose 208% from FY2020 to FY2024.
- Civil rights questionnaires rose 110% since 2020 and 278% over the decade.^[284]

Pay makes hiring hard

In 2024, BOLI investigators earned \$57,312–\$87,928, compared with \$66,708–\$104,256 at other state agencies.^[284] A separate study found civil rights investigators were paid 16% to 64% less than comparable state employees.^[286]

The backlog over time

Table 17.1 — BOLI case backlogs, 2022–2025

Date	Wage and Hour	Civil Rights	Source
Late 2022	More than 5,000 wage claims awaiting investigation	Nearly 2,000	[286]

Date	Wage and Hour	Civil Rights	Source
Feb 2024	About 3,000	Nearly 1,300	[286]
Aug 2024	4,074 at intake; 1,341 in investigation	3,515 questionnaires	[285]
Sept 2024	n/a	1,260 questionnaires pending	[284]
Aug 2025	1,997 at intake; 2,302 in investigation	3,277 questionnaires	[285]
Nov 2025 (state audit)	More than 4,500 claims backlogged at intake	3,277 stalled at intake	[287]

Note: Figures come from different reports and may measure different stages. The civil rights figures for August 2024 (3,515) and September 2024 (1,260) differ sharply and likely count different steps; this study could not resolve the difference. The August 2025 wage intake figure (1,997) and the audit's "more than 4,500" also appear to measure different things.

The trend is not a simple line. Wage intake fell between 2024 and 2025 while cases in investigation rose, which suggests cases were moved forward faster than they could be worked.

17.3 The 2025 Secretary of State audit of BOLI

On November 20, 2025, the Secretary of State's Audits Division released Audit 2025-25. It made 4 findings and 10 recommendations and attributed BOLI's problems to years of poor management and inadequate resources.^[288]

- The longest wait on the list of cases pending an investigator was **1,046 days**, nearly three years.
- 76 wage complaints had waited more than a year and a half.
- 122 administrative prosecution files were unassigned.^[287]
- Apprenticeship: 290 instances of incomplete federal compliance materials. Compliance reviews were 98% incomplete in 2024, up from 52% in 2019.
- Triage: for 11 months ending October 1, 2025, BOLI stopped investigating wage claims from workers earning more than \$25.34 an hour (\$52,710 a year).^[289]

Collections are a second problem. Of nearly \$12M in back wages and penalties ordered over eight years, more than 40% (about \$5M) has not been recovered.^[284] A worker who wins a case may still not be paid.

The response: more money, but a long road

- **Request:** BOLI asked in 2025 for 73 new positions and about \$17.9M, a 30% increase over its current service level.^[284]
- **Outcome:** the Legislature raised BOLI's 2025–27 budget by more than 50%, to nearly \$82M, funding 46 new positions and bringing headcount to just over 200. The Secretary of State's

release described "nearly \$30 million" for added staff and the backlog.^{[287][288]}

- **New duties without staff:** BOLI entered the 2025 session with 150 staff. Of 10 new bills with substantial fiscal impact on BOLI, the Legislature funded 3 (4 positions) and declined to fund 7 (8 positions).^[285]
- **Targets:** clear the civil rights intake backlog by mid-2026, wage intake by mid-2027, wage investigations by mid-2029, and launch a new case management system by 2028.

Labor Commissioner Christina Stephenson agreed with the audit. She told legislators on November 18, 2025 that 26 of the new positions had been filled and that the wage investigation backlog would not clear until mid-2029. She said the recommendations covered areas her team had been working on for nearly three years.^[287] In February 2024 she had described a 3,000-case backlog as a difficult place to be, and BOLI requested \$632K for nine temporary apprenticeship positions and \$248K to begin replacing its case-management system.^[286]

This study found no confirmed update after November 2025 on whether the mid-2026 civil rights target was met.

Fairness to all sides: The audit found problems built up over many years and both management and resources. BOLI shrank over four decades under leaders of different eras while its duties and the workforce grew. The 2025 budget increase is a real response. The open question is whether funding will keep up with new duties the Legislature keeps adding.

17.4 State technology: three costly lessons

The Secretary of State has also audited the large computer systems that deliver benefits to Oregonians. The table summarizes three.

Table 17.2 — State IT systems examined by Oregon auditors

System	Agency	Cost	What auditors and reporters found	Source
Legacy unemployment mainframe → Frances Online	Employment Department	Frances Online: \$106M total	1990s mainframe flagged in audits in 2012 and 2015. Federal funding arrived in 2009; the new system launched March 4, 2024, about 15 years later.	[290] [291]
ONE eligibility system	ODHS / OHA	\$416M to implement	Serves more than 1.4M Medicaid/CHIP and more than 700,000 SNAP recipients. Most errors came from manual input, not automation.	[292]
OHP Bridge (through ONE)	OHA	Up to \$15M questioned	Adverse audit opinion. The system miscoded the 133% income threshold and failed to close	[293]

System	Agency	Cost	What auditors and reporters found	Source
			cases above 200%. OHA disputes \$7M.	

Sources as cited in each row.

The Employment Department and the pandemic

The July 2022 audit (2022-04) found the Employment Department's problems began before COVID-19.^[294] Key facts:

- 580,000 people received benefits in 2020, about 600% more than the year before. The agency reported more than 20 million calls in April 2020.^[290]
- More than 1,000 claims appeared to take a year or more to adjudicate. The federal benchmark is 80% within 21 days.
- About \$24M in fraudulent payments occurred, 0.32% of claims paid.
- The audit documented longer waits for lower-income applicants and for some racial groups. Asian applicants waited about 12 days longer on average.^[294]
- The audit made 7 recommendations.^[295]

After the March 2024 switch to Frances Online, claimants reported jammed phone lines and adjudication holds. The department said it could not say how many claims were awaiting adjudication. Its director pointed to new technology, new processes and understaffing, and lawmakers approved more than \$10M for staff.^[296] This study found no audit of the post-launch period.

ONE and OHP Bridge

The ONE system determines eligibility for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and food benefits (SNAP), programs with about \$18.7B in FY2023 spending. The 2024 audit found most errors came from people entering data by hand, not from automation.^[292]

The OHP Bridge finding cuts the other way: here the system's own rules were wrong. The Statewide Single Audit, released in April 2026, gave an adverse opinion and questioned up to \$15M in costs after ONE miscoded an income threshold. About 41,100 people are enrolled in OHP Bridge. OHA disputes \$7M of the total.^{[293][297]}

Together, these two audits teach a basic lesson for any government system: test the rules in the code against the rules in the law, and reduce hand entry wherever possible.

17.5 The bigger picture: open findings at the state level

The Secretary of State's "Keeping Oregon Accountable" report for FY2025 (Report 2026-16, May 2026) found \$2.5B in accounting errors, all corrected, plus 12 significant deficiencies and 2 material weaknesses across 11 agencies. Of 66 prior-year federal findings, 37 remain outstanding. The oldest, a reporting issue in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, dates to 2010. Auditors questioned \$15.6M in costs.^[298]

A December 2025 audit of Measure 110 drug treatment programs found the state cannot say how many people were served or how much about \$800M helped. It found weak governance and data gaps and made six recommendations. OHA agreed with three and disputed parts of the rest; it is building new data systems, with grantees required to report by November 2026.^{[299][300]}

The state's open-findings problem looks much like the City's. In both places, auditors find problems; fixing them takes years.

What this means: The agencies that protect Portland workers and families are short of staff and running on fragile systems. For BOLI, the Legislature should match new duties with new positions, close the investigator pay gap, and require quarterly public reporting of backlog and wait times against the 2026–2029 targets. For state IT, every new system should publish test results showing that its eligibility rules match the law, and should report adjudication backlogs from the first day of launch. For both the state and the City, open audit findings should be tracked on one public list with an owner and a date.

The Record of Controversies

In brief: Trust in government depends partly on how officials behave and how the system responds when something goes wrong. This chapter lists documented controversies involving the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Metro and the State of Oregon from 2022 to 2026. Each item uses the exact status in the source: resigned, fined, dismissed, overturned, settled, preliminary, or allegation only. Several well-known complaints against officials were dismissed, declined or revoked by a court. Some ended in real penalties. Others are audit findings about systems, not people. The aim is a fair record, held to the same standard for everyone, not a list of accusations.

18.1 How this chapter was built

- **Sources:** only matters documented by official bodies (auditors, the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC), courts, government releases) or by established news outlets.
- **Exact status:** each entry uses the source's own words for its status. No one is described as guilty or in violation beyond what an official finding or court states.
- **Allegations** are labeled as allegations, with the response where one was reported.
- **Left out:** items that rest only on secondary or aggregator sources that the research file flagged for replacement, or whose key details could not be confirmed. These are listed at the end of the chapter.
- **Important:** no source reviewed for this study supports describing any current Portland City Council member as having been found in violation of state ethics law.

18.2 The summary table

Table 18.1 — Documented controversies, 2022–2026 (status exactly as reported)

Year	Entity	What happened	Exact status	Response	Source
2023–2025	Former Secretary of State Shemia Fagan	Held a \$10,000-a-month consulting contract with cannabis-business owners while her office audited cannabis regulation; sought state reimbursement for trips that included family.	Resigned May 2023. OGEC found she used her position to obtain private employment. Fined \$3,600 (May 2025) after rejecting a \$1,600 settlement. Federal criminal investigation ended with no charges .	First denied using her office; in 2025 called her actions indefensible and apologized.	[301] [302]

Year	Entity	What happened	Exact status	Response	Source
2023– 2024	Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission (OLCC) senior staff	Six former employees, including the then-director, diverted rare bourbon for their own purchase.	DOJ found no grounds for criminal charges (May 2024). OGEC to resume civil review. Final OGEC outcome not verified .	Attorney General stressed public trust; Governor referred documents to OGEC.	[303]
2024	Gov. Tina Kotek / First Lady	Ethics complaints about a proposed "Office of the First Spouse" and related staffing.	OGEC declined a full investigation ; found no violation of conflict-of-interest or nepotism law.	Governor said her wife was an unpaid volunteer, then dropped the plan.	[304] [305]
2025– 2026	State Rep. Greg Smith, as head of the Columbia Development Authority	Pursued a \$66,000 raise through a grant application and approved his own paid leave.	OGEC found violations 7–0 (Dec 2025). Fined \$12,000 under a settlement (Aug 2026). Resigned from the authority (Jan 2026).	Agreed to the penalty without conceding intent; cited the lack of written leave policies.	[306] [307]
2022	Rene Gonzalez (then a Council candidate)	City Elections Division fined his campaign \$77,000 over an unreported office-rent discount.	A judge revoked the entire fine (Oct 27, 2022), finding the City did not meet its burden of proof.	Campaign welcomed the ruling; the Elections Commission chair said they were stunned.	[308]
2026	Mayor Keith Wilson (2024 campaign)	Three donations above the \$579 cap were refunded late.	Auditor preliminary decision (July 9, 2026): \$526 fine plus \$121 per donor; appealable. Final status not verified .	His office said he would comply and called the overages small.	[309]
2025	Six City Council members (group-text caucus)	Complaints alleged a quorum coordinated budget votes by group text outside public meetings.	About 13 OGEC complaints dismissed on procedure (untimely), Sept 2025. No merits finding .	No statement in cited coverage.	[128] [310]
2025– 2026	Same six Council members (private retreat)	A complaint alleged an August 2025 retreat formed a quorum of Council committees.	OGEC voted to investigate (Dec 2025). Staff investigators recommended dismissal . Final commission vote not verified .	Members maintain they broke no rules.	[311] [129]
2026	Five Council members	A complaint alleged free legal help was an improper gift.	OGEC approved legal-defense trust funds (Jan 2026); per OPB, the	Members denied any violation; the work	[312] [129]

Year	Entity	What happened	Exact status	Response	Source
			complaint was dismissed (Apr 2026).	was reported through the trust funds.	
2026	Council members Olivia Clark and Loretta Smith	A complaint alleged a \$350 event ticket was a gift above the \$50 limit.	Dismissed as to Clark. Smith's outcome unclear in coverage.	Clark said her office bought her ticket. Smith did not respond to the outlet.	[313]
2026	Council Member Loretta Smith's office	The council-staff union alleged an aide's firing retaliated against union organizing.	Allegation (unfair labor practice complaint). Outcome not verified .	No response in the cited item.	[314]
2026	Home Forward (county housing authority) CEO	Reported more than \$100,000 in agency-funded travel over three years; 955 vacant units; union "no confidence" statement.	Resigned , effective May 1, 2026, with \$171,424.80 severance plus benefits.	Board had defended the travel; CEO pledged a smooth transition.	[315] [316]
2025	City of Portland (Bull Run Filtration payments)	\$6.7M diverted by fraud through a New York law firm's account.	Active investigation ; funds recovered into U.S. Marshals custody. City was the victim ; no suspects named.	City confirmed the investigation.	[317]
2024–2025	Portland Fire & Rescue	Three Black firefighters filed racial discrimination suits in about 18 months.	One settled for \$60,000 (approved Dec 3, 2025; City denied allegations). One jury found discrimination and retaliation and recommended \$275,000. One pending .	City denied allegations in the settlement; fire chief said there is always room for improvement.	[318]
2023	Joint Office of Homeless Services	County performance audit.	Audit found late provider payments, work before contracts, changing measures, missing placement data, about 250 staff departures.	County Chair agreed with many findings.	[232] [319]
2025	Joint Office / Multnomah County	\$104M projected shortfall disclosed; 230 shelter beds at risk.	Budget disclosure ; no finding of wrongdoing.	Governor withheld new state money pending clear answers.	[226]

Year	Entity	What happened	Exact status	Response	Source
2025	Metro and counties (SHS funds)	Disputes over Metro's \$31M administrative reserve, a reported \$91M county surplus and lower forecasts.	Policy dispute ; no finding of wrongdoing.	Metro proposed sending administrative funds to cities.	[194] [214]
2024	State Hospital / OHA	People found unfit for trial held in jail awaiting hospital beds.	Judges held the state in contempt and ordered sanctions (\$100 a day per defendant in one county; \$17,500 in another). The state appealed one ruling.	State said the hospital was full.	[320]
2023–2026	City of Portland / PCEF	Clean energy tax revenue far above forecast; proposals to move money to bureaus; 2026 audit on budget use.	Policy controversy plus audit findings ; no finding of illegality.	City Administrator accepted the 2026 audit recommendations.	[148] [143]

Sources as cited in each row. Statuses use the wording of the cited source. "Not verified" means this study could not confirm the final outcome.

18.3 Ethics cases that ended in penalties

Two state-level cases ended with formal findings and fines.

Former Secretary of State Shemia Fagan. Willamette Week reported her cannabis consulting contract in late April 2023, and she resigned about five days later. In May 2025 the ethics commission rejected a \$1,600 negotiated settlement 8–0 and approved a \$3,600 fine 7–1.^{[301][321]} A federal criminal investigation ended without charges. The case matters for this study because the Secretary of State runs the state's Audits Division, the office whose work fills Chapter 17.

Rep. Greg Smith. The ethics commission found violations 7–0 in December 2025, and approved a \$12,000 settlement fine in August 2026. He resigned from the development authority in January 2026 and agreed to the penalty without conceding intent.^[306]

18.4 Complaints that were dismissed, declined or overturned

Many complaints against sitting officials did not lead to findings. Reporting them accurately matters as much as reporting penalties.

- **Governor Kotek:** the ethics commission declined a full investigation and found no conflict-of-interest or nepotism violation. The Governor dropped the proposed office.^[304]
- **Portland Council members:** the group-text complaints were dismissed as untimely, with no ruling on the merits. The City Attorney still cautioned against deliberating with a seventh member, which would form a quorum.^[128] On the retreat complaint, ethics commission staff recommended dismissal; this study could not confirm the final vote.^[129] Per OPB, the pro bono legal help complaint was dismissed. The event-ticket complaint was dismissed as to one member, with the other's outcome unclear.
- **Rene Gonzalez:** in 2022, the City Elections Division fined his campaign \$77,000 over an unreported office-rent discount. A judge revoked the entire fine, finding the City did not meet its burden of proof.^[308] The fair summary: found by the City; revoked by a court.

A process lesson: The 2022 Gonzalez fine was undone in court because the City could not meet its burden of proof. Whatever one thinks of the underlying facts, a campaign-finance penalty that does not survive court review protects no one. The City should make sure its enforcement process includes clear evidence standards and a hearing before any penalty takes effect.

18.5 Open and preliminary matters

- **Mayor Keith Wilson:** the Auditor's July 2026 decision is preliminary and was appealable until July 30. The fine is \$526 plus \$121 per donor for three late refunds. His office said he would comply.^[309] This study could not confirm whether it became final.
- **OLCC bourbon matter:** no criminal charges; the civil ethics outcome is not confirmed.^[303]
- **Union complaint against a Council office:** an allegation only, with no reported outcome.

18.6 Leadership and management failures

Home Forward. Home Forward is the county's housing authority, a separate public agency, not a City bureau. Its CEO resigned effective May 1, 2026, after Willamette Week reported more than \$100,000 in agency-funded travel over three years and amid reports of 955 vacant units. Severance was \$171,424.80 plus benefits.^[315] At a time of record homelessness, the reported 955 vacant public housing units are a measurable problem, whatever the cause.

Joint Office and county contracting. County audits in 2023 and 2024 found late payments to providers, weak contract monitoring and unreliable data.^[234] The 2025 shortfall of \$104M then led the Governor to withhold new state money until the county gave clear answers.^[226]

State Hospital. In July 2024, two state judges issued contempt and sanction orders because people found unfit to stand trial were held in jail while waiting for hospital beds.^[320]

Bull Run fraud. The City lost \$6.7M to fraud in payments for the Bull Run water filtration project. The City was the victim; no official is alleged to have done wrong in the source reviewed, and the money was recovered into U.S. Marshals custody.^[317] The lesson is about payment controls, such as verifying any change in a vendor's bank details by phone before paying.

18.7 Racial discrimination claims at Portland Fire & Rescue

Three Black firefighters sued Portland Fire & Rescue for racial discrimination within about 18 months. The outcomes, as reported by KOIN:^[318]

- **David Barron** sued in June 2024. The case **settled** for \$60,000, approved by the City Council on December 3, 2025. The City denied all allegations and said the settlement was in the interest of all parties.
- **Jason Wilson:** a Multnomah County **jury found** discrimination and retaliation and recommended \$275,000.
- **Eric Heard:** the suit is **pending**.

The fire chief said there is "always room for improvement." These cases sit beside the 2022 audit finding that the bureau did not have a coherent accountability system (Chapter 14).^[246] One jury verdict, one settlement without admission and one pending case do not establish a pattern on their own. They are, however, a documented reason for the City to publish workforce complaint data and outcomes for its bureaus.

The other documented equity finding in this chapter's sources is the 2022 state audit of the Employment Department, which found longer waits for lower-income applicants and for some racial groups (Chapter 17).^[294]

18.8 Council conduct and the climate around it

Two 2026 items concern the tone of City politics rather than any finding of wrongdoing:

- **A decorum dispute.** During a disagreement over a tie vote, one Council member made remarks another called traumatizing; the first said the remarks were not about her colleague. No formal Council action was reported.^[134]
- **Abusive private messages.** The Portland Mercury obtained texts among private individuals containing racist, sexist and homophobic slurs about Council members of color.^[314] These were not officials, and no official action was located. They are noted because they show the hostile climate some elected officials work in.

18.9 Items left out, and why

To keep this record to a single, fair standard, the following were not included as findings:

- **Police Bureau settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice (since 2014):** recent compliance details came through an aggregator summary flagged for replacement. Readers should consult the court monitor's reports on portland.gov.
- **City financial-report "material weaknesses" (FY2024-25):** the only source was outside the study's approved outlet list and was flagged for confirmation against City or auditor documents.
- **A 2021 county audit on overstated housing placements:** only the headline was reviewed, not the article.
- **City Auditor campaign-finance penalties against Rene Gonzalez (2024):** the Auditor's findings are documented in official releases, but the later court ruling reported to have overturned them was available only through a syndicated aggregator flagged for replacement, and the order date was not confirmed. Rather than print a finding without its reported reversal, this study leaves the matter out until the court record is checked.
- **An OLCC appointee detail from 2023:** it rested on a secondary summary.

What this means: The record does not show a government full of officials found guilty of wrongdoing. It shows something more ordinary and more fixable: a few real ethics penalties, many complaints dismissed on procedure, campaign enforcement that did not survive court review, unresolved cases with no public final status, and repeated management failures in homelessness and housing agencies. Three reforms follow: (1) a public tracker that shows the final status of every ethics and campaign-finance case involving City officials; (2) clear evidence standards and a hearing step before any City campaign penalty takes effect, so decisions hold up; and (3) annual public reporting of workforce discrimination complaints and outcomes by bureau. Trust grows when residents can see how each case ends.

Part VI — The People Asking for Your Trust

Offices on the 2026 Ballot and in Power: Records and Stated Positions

In brief: On November 3, 2026, Oregon voters choose a governor, and Portland voters fill council seats in Districts 3 and 4 and the City Auditor's office. Other people who shape Portland's results, including the mayor, the council's leaders, the City Administrator, the Metro Council President and the Multnomah County Chair, are either in office now or about to be. This chapter sets out each person's record and stated positions in the same tables, with the same fields and the same tone. Where a person's own numbers appear, they are labeled as claims. Where the research for this study could not verify something, the table says so for that person, and nothing was filled in from memory. The chapter gives no verdicts. It ends with questions every candidate should answer, tied to the findings in Parts IV and V.

19.1 How to read this chapter

Parts I to V of this study measured results: homelessness counts, tax collections, audit follow-through, Ombudsman caseloads and public-records fees. This part turns to the people who ask voters to trust them with those results. The aim is to help a reader compare people on the same terms. It is not to tell anyone how to vote.

Four rules apply throughout.

- **Same fields for everyone.** Each table uses the same rows for every person in it: role, background, record, stated positions by issue, the person's own claimed numbers, criticisms reported, and what could not be verified.
- **Claims are labeled.** When a candidate or official cites a number about his or her own record or an opponent's, the table marks it *claimed*. This study did not independently check those numbers unless it says so.
- **Criticism is attributed.** Every criticism is tied to the person or outlet that made it. The study's author does not add his own.
- **Gaps are shown, not filled.** Some official websites could not be reached during research. Where a field is empty, it says "not found in sources reviewed" or "could not be verified." An empty field is not a criticism. It means only that the study did not find a record.

A note on uneven depth. The governor's race and the City of Portland's leaders are covered in more detail than the Metro, Multnomah County and Labor Commissioner offices. That reflects

what sources were available during research, not a judgment about which offices matter more. The gaps are listed in each section and summarized at the end of the chapter.

19.2 Governor of Oregon

Who is on the ballot

Three candidates are on the November 3, 2026 ballot for governor ^[162]:

Table 19.1 — Candidates for Governor, November 3, 2026

Candidate	Ballot party label(s)	Current role
Tina Kotek	Democrat; also nominated by the Working Families Party	Governor since January 2023 (incumbent)
Christine Drazan	Republican; also nominated by the Libertarian Party (late July 2026)	State Senator, Senate District 26 (appointed October 2025)
Brett Smith	Pacific Green Party	No public office found in sources reviewed

Sources: OPB, Aug 21, 2026 ^[162]; Wikipedia, Christine Drazan ^[322]; Hoodline, Jul 2026 ^[323].

The Oregon Progressive Party, the Independent Party of Oregon and the No Labels Party did not nominate anyone for governor ^[162]. Cross-nomination lets a minor party list a major-party candidate under its own label as well. OPB reported that the Libertarian Party's vice chair described its nomination of Drazan as a way to consolidate votes against the incumbent ^[162].

May 19, 2026 primary results

- **Democratic primary:** Kotek won with 83.6% ^[324].
- **Republican primary:** Drazan 40.5%, Ed Diehl 33.0%, Chris Dudley 16.9%, David Medina 5.1%, Danielle Bethell 2.3% ^[324].

These figures come from a secondary source that cites the Secretary of State's results site. Readers who need certified numbers should check results.oregonvotes.gov directly.

The polls: a close race

Public polls through early October 2026 show a close race. In every poll listed below, the two leading candidates are within five points of each other. In most, the gap is within the poll's stated margin of error. Several polls were run by party-aligned firms or paid for by a campaign or an interest group, and the table says so.

Table 19.2 — General-election polls for Governor, 2026

Field dates / release	Pollster (sponsor)	Sample, margin	Kotek	Drazan	Smith	Other / undecided
Jan 28–Feb 4, 2026	FM3 Research (Democratic-aligned)	1,065 likely voters, ± 3.1	45	40	not polled	15
May 11–12, 2026	Hoffman Research (Republican-aligned)	603 likely voters, ± 4.0	45	45	not polled	10
Released about Aug 24, 2026	Drazan campaign internal poll	not reported	44 (implied)	48	not polled	not reported
Sept 11, 2026	DHM Research (Grow Oregon, business-backed)	600 likely voters, ± 4	43	45	4	13 undecided
Sept 17–27, 2026	DHM Research (OPB)	915 likely voters, ± 3.24	44 (46 with leaners)	46 (47 with leaners)	not reported	not reported
Listed Oct 8, 2026	DHM Research	549 likely voters	46	44	not reported	10

Sources: Wikipedia, 2026 Oregon gubernatorial election ^[324]; 270toWin ^[325]; Oregon Capital Chronicle via News From the States, Aug 24, 2026 ^[326]; Willamette Week, Sept 15, 2026 ^[327]; OPB press release ^[328].

Other measures from the same polls:

- **Job approval and direction.** In the DHM/Grow Oregon poll, 37% approved of Kotek's job performance and 59% disapproved. In the same poll, 58% said Oregon is on the "wrong track" ^[327].
- **Impressions.** In the OPB poll, 60% had a negative impression of Kotek and 63% had a negative impression of President Trump ^[328]. Comparable favorability figures for Drazan and Smith were not found in the sources reviewed.
- **Race ratings.** Cook Political Report moved the race from Solid Democratic to Likely Democratic in July 2026, and Inside Elections shifted in a similar direction ^[326].
- **Money.** As of late August, Kotek had raised more than \$10.1 million, about \$3.9 million more than Drazan ^[326].
- **Debates.** The candidates agreed to debates in Eugene (October 1) and Medford. No Portland debate was expected ^[329].

What voters say matters to them is close to what this study measured. In the DHM/Grow Oregon poll, the shares rating each issue important were: affordability 87%, K-12 education 85%, housing affordability 78%, taxes 77%, homelessness 77%, crime 73% and data centers 50% ^[327].

Parallel record: the three candidates

Table 19.3 uses the same rows for all three candidates. Brett Smith's column is shorter because the sources reviewed contain little about his record or positions. The study did not fill those gaps from any other source.

Table 19.3 — Governor candidates: role, background and record

Field	Tina Kotek (D, WFP)	Christine Drahan (R, Libertarian)	Brett Smith (Pacific Green)
Role	Governor since January 2023; seeking a second term.	State Senator, SD 26 (appointed October 2025); Republican nominee.	Minor-party nominee; no public office found.
Background	Former Speaker of the Oregon House. Won the 2022 governor's race 46.9% to 43.5% over Drahan, with Betsy Johnson (independent) at 8.6% ^[322] .	Born 1972 in Klamath Falls; attended George Fox University. Former communications director for House Speaker Mark Simmons. State Representative, HD 39, 2019–2022, and House Minority Leader September 2019–November 2021. 2022 Republican nominee for governor. Representative, HD 51, from 2025, and Minority Leader again January–October 2025. Appointed to SD 26 in October 2025 by commissioners from four counties ^[322] .	Pacific Green profile emphasizes roots in Molalla. Statewide trackers also linked him to the Independent Party of Oregon ^[323] . No further background verified.
Homelessness record	Declared a homelessness state of emergency on her first full day in office (January 2023), covering regions where unsheltered homelessness rose 50% or more from 2017 to 2022 ^[218] . Renewed for the third time on January 9, 2026 ^[235] . In February 2025, withheld new state money from Multnomah County pending "clear answers" on homeless-service cuts ^[226] .	As a legislator, no executive homelessness record. Her 2026 positions are in Table 19.4.	No record found.
Housing record	Set a goal of 36,000 homes a year (2023). The target was lowered twice; the current Oregon Housing Needs Analysis target is 29,359 a year. Permits were about 18,000 in her first year and under 15,000 in each of the next two. First-half 2026 permits	No executive housing record. A housing-specific voting record was not compiled.	No record found.

Field	Tina Kotek (D, WFP)	Christine Drazan (R, Libertarian)	Brett Smith (Pacific Green)
	were up 11.3% from a year earlier, against a 1.3% national decline ^[330] .		
Drugs and public safety record	Signed HB 4002 on April 1, 2024, which made possession of hard drugs a misdemeanor again (up to six months in jail), effective September 1, 2024. The House passed it 51-7 and the Senate 21-8 ^[331] .	Opposed COVID vaccine mandates and Measure 114 (gun restrictions). National Rifle Association "A" rating ^[322] .	No record found.
Taxes and budget record	Signed the 2025 special-session transportation package (6-cent gas tax increase, roughly doubled registration and title fees, higher transit payroll tax; about \$4.3 billion over 10 years). A petition referred it to voters, who rejected it as Measure 120 on May 19, 2026, 83.02% No to 16.98% Yes. Kotek first proposed repealing it; Democrats instead moved the vote from November to May. She then formed a 12-member funding workgroup due by the end of 2026 ^{[16][15]} . The 2025-27 state budget is \$138.9 billion in total funds, of which \$39.1 billion is General Fund and Lottery. Housing and homelessness items include \$204.9 million for shelter operations, \$50.3 million for rehousing, \$87.4 million for rental assistance and \$645 million in bonds for affordable housing ^[13] .	As Minority Leader, used quorum denial (walkouts) and forced full readings of bills to delay votes; left the state during the 2020 walkout ^[322] . Did not vote for the POWER Act (a data-center electricity rate class), calling it "window dressing" ^[329] .	No record found.
Other record items	Signed the POWER Act. Issued an executive order banning phones in K-12 schools. Created a "prosperity council" in 2025 ^[332] ; a separate OPB report says the 16-member council was convened in January 2026 ^[30] .	Opposed 2020 cap-and-trade legislation. Supports an independent redistricting commission. A 2021 censure motion she brought against Kotek failed 33-14. Lifetime Oregon League of Conservation Voters score of 20%. Endorsed by Oregon Right to Life. Has said Joe Biden, not Donald Trump, won the 2020 election ^[322] .	No record found.

Field	Tina Kotek (D, WFP)	Christine Drazan (R, Libertarian)	Brett Smith (Pacific Green)
Documented ethics matters (see Chapter 18)	2024: ethics complaints about a proposed "Office of the First Spouse." The Oregon Government Ethics Commission declined a full investigation and found no violation; Kotek dropped the plan ^[304] .	None found in the sources reviewed.	None found in the sources reviewed.

Sources are cited in each cell. Background and legislative record for Drazan rely on Wikipedia, a secondary source.

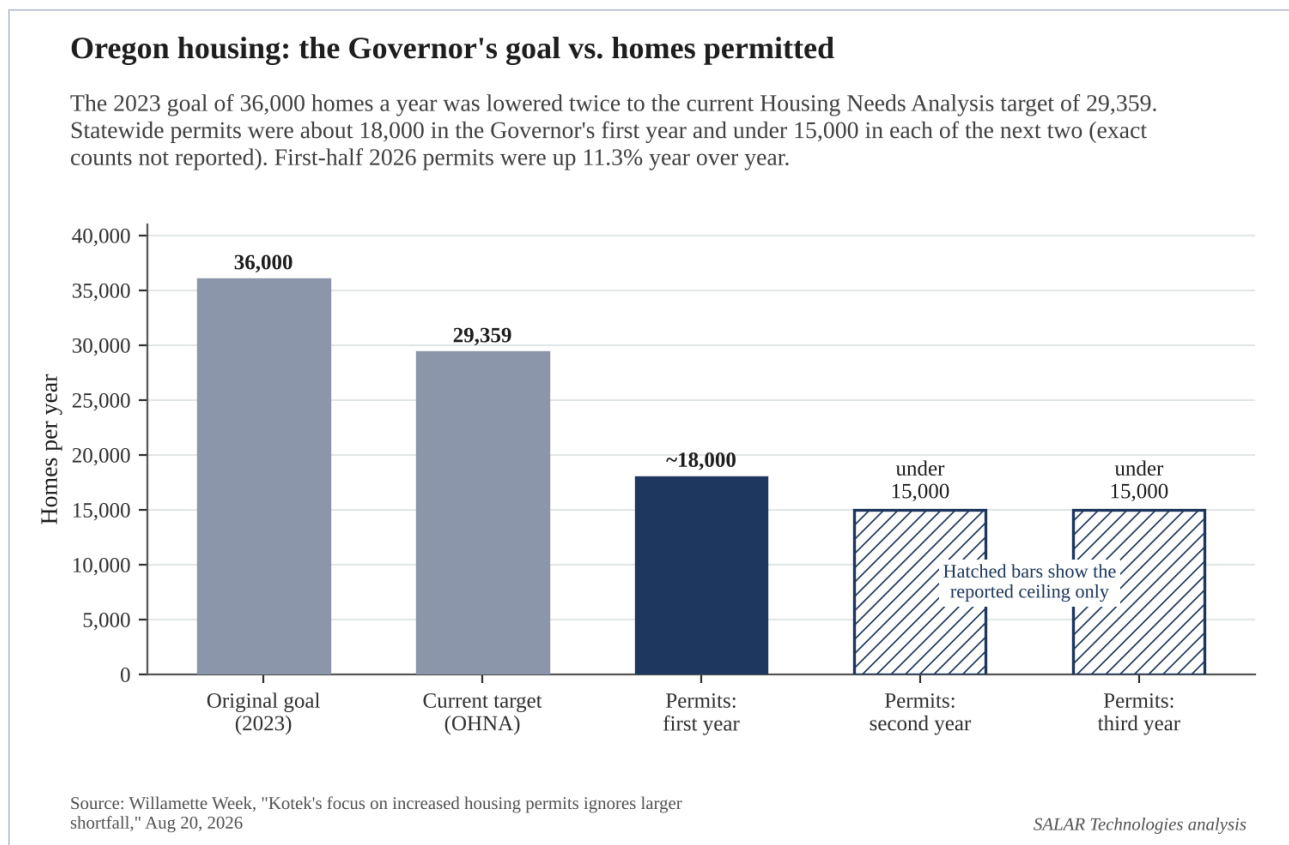


Figure 26. Governor's housing goal vs. permits issued. The chart shows the stated goal and the revised target next to actual permits. It records the gap; it does not assign the cause. Source: Willamette Week, Aug 20, 2026 ^[330]

The housing figure is an example of a pattern this study uses throughout: a public goal set next to the measured result. The goal was 36,000 homes a year. Permits have run at roughly half of that or less. Permits rose in the first half of 2026 while they fell nationally. Both facts are true. Readers can weigh them as they choose.

Stated positions by issue

Table 19.4 lists what each candidate says he or she would do. It covers the six issues this study tracks. Numbers the candidates cite are marked *claimed*.

Table 19.4 — Governor candidates: stated positions by issue (2026 campaign)

Issue	Tina Kotek	Christine Drazan	Brett Smith
Homelessness	Continue the emergency response. New targets: rehouse 1,400 more people and prevent 8,000 more evictions. Fund permanent supportive housing for people with addiction or mental illness ^[235] . Lists "reducing homelessness" as a priority ^[333] .	Audit homelessness spending. More emphasis on addiction recovery, mental-health treatment and measurable outcomes ^[163] . Declare a state of emergency on addiction and mental health ^[334] .	Not stated in sources reviewed.
Housing	Continue expanding affordable housing under the platform "Building Oregon's Future Together." Points to land, zoning changes and more than \$1 billion appropriated ^[330] .	Cut permitting delays, make land available for development, expand paths to home ownership. Her stated test is whether homes are being built and whether government makes building easier or harder ^[163] .	Not stated in sources reviewed.
Taxes	Raised concerns about the tax impact of Multnomah County's Preschool for All tax ^[162] . Pledged a new transportation funding package in 2027 ^[332] .	Veto new tax increases; protect the "kicker" refund ^[163] . Reform the corporate activity tax and the estate tax; reduce property taxes for seniors ^[334] .	Not stated in sources reviewed.
Metro SHS tax (Chapters 10–11)	No stated position found in sources reviewed.	No stated position found in sources reviewed.	No stated position found in sources reviewed.
Public safety and addiction	Points to HB 4002 (Table 19.3).	Emergency declaration on addiction and mental health (above). Wants law enforcement to work more closely with federal agencies ^[18] .	Not stated in sources reviewed.
Government efficiency and transparency	Replace the state's economic development agency with a Department of Commerce ^[332] . Supports campaign-finance transparency (commitments to the Working Families Party) ^[162] .	Create a state office to find budget savings. Issue a day-one executive order to identify practices that raise living costs. "Rightsize" large projects, including the I-5 bridge ^[334] .	Anti-corruption themes ^[323] .
Federal relations (Chapter 20)	Committed to the Working Families Party to "defend sanctuary laws" ^[162] . Opposes "aggressive federal immigration enforcement." Blames federal tariffs and Medicaid and ACA	Says sanctuary laws have "gone too far." Wants closer work with federal agencies ^[18] .	Not stated in sources reviewed.

Issue	Tina Kotek	Christine Drazan	Brett Smith
	changes for affordability problems ^[332] ^[329] .		
Economy	Business recruitment; investment in renewable energy and bioscience; more development-ready land; statewide universal preschool; a data-center moratorium ^[332] .	A \$200 million site-readiness infrastructure fund; repeal the Climate Protection Program; cut regulation ^[334] . Supports a data-center moratorium ^[329] .	Sustainability and younger voters' future ^[323] .

Sources are cited in each cell.

No candidate for governor has a stated position on the Metro SHS tax in the sources reviewed. The tax is a regional tax set by Metro voters, not by the governor. But it is Oregon's largest dedicated homelessness revenue source in the Portland region, it expires in 2030 unless voters renew it, and the state works alongside the counties that spend it (Chapter 10). A governor's view on renewal, reform or replacement is a reasonable question for every candidate.

Candidates' own numbers (claims, not verified by this study)

Each campaign cites numbers about its own record or its opponent's. They are listed here in parallel. This study did not fact-check them, except where noted.

Table 19.5 — Numbers the governor candidates cite (claimed)

Candidate	Claim	Reported by	Status in this study
Kotek	More than 6,250 shelter beds created or preserved; more than 5,500 people housed; about 26,000 households kept from homelessness	OPB, Jan 9, 2026 ^[235]	Claimed. The research notes that state figures reported by OPB are close to the campaign's figures; they were not independently audited.
Kotek	She "halted a military deployment to Portland"	Campaign site, Dec 4, 2025 ^[333]	Claimed. Chapter 20 gives the court record.
Drazan	Homelessness rose 35% under Kotek	KATU candidate profile ^[18]	Claimed. Not verified. The base years and data series were not stated in the source.
Drazan	Business taxes rose 77% since 2019	KATU candidate profile ^[18]	Claimed. Not verified.
Drazan	25,000 jobs lost, including 10,000 in manufacturing	KATU candidate	Claimed. Not verified.

Candidate	Claim	Reported by	Status in this study
		profile ^[18]	
Drazan	The Department of Corrections declined a U.S. Attorney request about dangerous offenders	KATU candidate profile ^[18]	Claimed. Not verified.
Smith	No numerical claims found in sources reviewed	—	—

Sources are cited in each row.

Criticisms reported and endorsements

Table 19.6 — Governor candidates: criticisms reported (attributed) and sample endorsements

Field	Tina Kotek	Christine Drazan	Brett Smith
Criticisms reported	Morning Consult has consistently ranked her among the least popular governors; some Democratic allies describe themselves as "underwhelmed"; her platform lacks funding details (all as reported by OPB) ^[332] . Housing permits remain far below target (Willamette Week) ^[330] . Drazan called her record a failure (OPB) ^[329] . Two prior endorsers declined to endorse in 2026 (KOIN, as listed on Wikipedia) ^[324] .	The Kotek campaign calls her "too extreme for our state" on abortion, vote-by-mail and health care, and a stand-in for President Trump ^[326] . The Oregon Capital Chronicle reported that several of her proposals lack specifics ^[334] . A Democratic Party of Oregon website ties her to the federal deployment; her spokesperson called it inaccurate ^[326] .	OPB and Hoodline reported he could draw votes from Kotek ^[162] ^[323] . No other criticism found.
Endorsements (sample)	Oregon AFL-CIO, SEIU 503, Oregon Nurses Association, building trades unions; Mayor Keith Wilson; Labor Commissioner Christina Stephenson; Attorney General Dan Rayfield ^[324] .	Oregon Farm Bureau; Oregon Right to Life (co-endorsed with Diehl in the primary); The Oregonian editorial board (primary) ^[324] .	Pacific Green Party.

Sources are cited in each cell. Endorsement lists are samples, not complete.

Same-yardstick note. A 2022 interview recorded some of Drazan's positions from that year's race. No comparable 2022 interview of Kotek was reviewed. To keep the comparison even, neither candidate's 2022 campaign positions are used here. Only 2026 stated positions and documented records appear.

19.3 City of Portland: the people now in power

Portland's new charter took effect January 1, 2025. It created a 12-member council elected from four districts, an executive mayor who does not sit on the council, and a City Administrator who runs

most bureaus day to day ^[114]. Chapter 6 describes the structure. This section covers five people: the mayor, the council president and vice president, the City Administrator and the City Auditor.

What is on the November 2026 city ballot

- **City Auditor:** Simone Rede, for a four-year term, unopposed ^{[123][335]}.
- **Council District 3:** three seats, ranked-choice voting, 21 candidates ^[123].
- **Council District 4:** three seats, 12 candidates, including Council Vice President Olivia Clark ^[123].
- **Mayor:** not on the 2026 ballot. Keith Wilson was elected in November 2024 and took office in January 2025 ^[142].

Platforms for the 33 District 3 and District 4 council candidates were not collected for this study. Rather than profile some and not others, this chapter profiles none of them. The full candidate list is on the City Auditor's elections page ^[123].

Parallel record: Portland officeholders

Table 19.7 — Portland's executive and council leadership: role, background and record

Field	Keith Wilson, Mayor	Jamie Dunphy, Council President (2026)	Olivia Clark, Council Vice President (2026)	Raymond C. Lee III, City Administrator
Role	First mayor under the new charter; executive over the city's bureaus; proposes the budget; breaks ties on non-emergency ordinances ^[114] . Took office January 2025.	Councilor, District 1 (East Portland). Elected president January 14, 2026, 9-3, after 13 rounds across three meetings; earlier rounds tied 6-6 ^[126] .	Councilor, District 4. Elected vice president 11-1 ^[126] . On the November 2026 ballot for District 4.	Hired by the mayor and confirmed by council; supervises bureau directors except the police chief and city attorney. Confirmed unanimously December 10, 2025; started December 29, 2025, at \$370,000 a year ^[121] .
Background	CEO of Titan Freight Systems at the time of the 2024 race. Beat sitting commissioners Rene Gonzalez, Mingus Mapps and Carmen Rubio under ranked-choice voting ^[119] .	Described in coverage as a compromise choice; said he will not seek a second year as president ^[117] . Further background not verified.	Described herself as a "reluctant recruit" ^[124] . Further background not verified.	Former city manager of Greeley, Colorado (1,600 employees, \$515 million budget). Succeeded Michael Jordan, the first City

Field	Keith Wilson, Mayor	Jamie Dunphy, Council President (2026)	Olivia Clark, Council Vice President (2026)	Raymond C. Lee III, City Administrator
				Administrator, who retired ^[121] .
Homelessness record	January 2025 plan to end unsheltered homelessness by December 2025: 1,500 overnight beds, a seasonal "flex" model, 90-day stay limits, a day center per district, and stricter enforcement on camping and RVs ^[133] . Paused camping-ban enforcement in February 2025 and resumed it November 1–2, 2025 ^[224] . Result: see Figure F19 below.	Has often criticized the mayor's homelessness plan and proposed alternatives ^[124] . Specific alternatives not found in sources reviewed.	Not found in sources reviewed.	Not applicable (appointed, not a policy-setting official). No homelessness-specific record found.
Budget record	FY2026-27 budget of \$8.5 billion adopted June 17, 2026, 9-2 with one abstention. It closed a general fund gap of about \$170–171 million using \$47 million of reserves, \$27 million of Clean Energy Fund interest, a new \$23 million transportation utility fee and a \$20 million street damage fee. About 140 positions were cut and about 100 people laid off. Shelter services were cut \$18 million (31%). The city ended its \$31 million transfer to the county for homeless services and will provide them directly ^{[137][141]} .	Presided over the June 2026 budget sessions, in which several amendments failed on 6-6 ties ^[127] . Individual budget votes not compiled.	Individual budget votes not compiled.	Delivered the June 15, 2026 police recruitment report: authorized strength 877 sworn; high-priority calls average about 20 minutes against a 7-minute goal ^[102] .
Public safety record	Kept sworn police positions in the FY2026-27 budget; \$21 million in non-sworn and other police cuts. Chief Bob Day estimated the cuts mean	Not found in sources reviewed.	Not found in sources reviewed.	See police report above.

Field	Keith Wilson, Mayor	Jamie Dunphy, Council President (2026)	Olivia Clark, Council Vice President (2026)	Raymond C. Lee III, City Administrator
	"about 20,000 hours less" of officer time on the street ^[141] .			
Government efficiency and transparency	Reports \$19.3 million cut through citywide streamlining ^[115] . Frames the executive-mayor system as voters' choice.	Led a push to cut the council's policy committees from eight to five; proposed a Committee of the Whole ^[132] . Favors spreading power across the council.	Stated aim: make the new form of government work ^[124] .	At his confirmation, councilors said trust between the administrative side and the council was lost in year one. Lee committed to monthly meetings with each councilor ^[130] .
Federal relations	Praised Portland police who testified in federal court about federal officers' conduct at the ICE facility ^[231] . See claims table below.	Not found in sources reviewed.	Not found in sources reviewed.	Not found in sources reviewed.
Documented ethics matters (see Chapter 18)	2026: City Auditor preliminary decision (July 9, 2026) on three 2024 campaign donations above the \$579 cap that were refunded late: fine of \$526 plus \$121 per donor, appealable until July 30; final status not verified. His office said he would comply ^[309] .	2025: one of six councilors named in about 13 state ethics complaints over group texts; dismissed on procedure as untimely, with no finding on the merits ^[128] . A separate complaint about an August 2025 retreat: the commission voted to investigate, staff recommended dismissal, and the final vote was not verified ^[311] .	2026: the Oregon Government Ethics Commission dismissed a complaint about a Moda Center event ticket; Clark said her office bought the ticket ^[313] .	None found in the sources reviewed.
Criticisms reported	Councilor Loretta Smith raised cost concerns; Councilor Angelita Morillo questioned 24-hour shelter costs of \$35–\$190 a day and	The deadlock over his election showed the charter lacks a tie-break for council	None found.	None found specific to Lee. The predecessor's tenure drew committee-communication

Field	Keith Wilson, Mayor	Jamie Dunphy, Council President (2026)	Olivia Clark, Council Vice President (2026)	Raymond C. Lee III, City Administrator
	the 90-day limits; reporting noted seasonal capacity gaps ^[133] . Progressive councilors have been more critical (OPB) ^[231] .	officer votes (Portland Mercury) ^[117] .		complaints from councilors (Portland Mercury) ^[131] .
Endorsements given	Endorsed Kotek for governor ^[324] .	None found.	None found.	Not applicable.

Sources are cited in each cell.

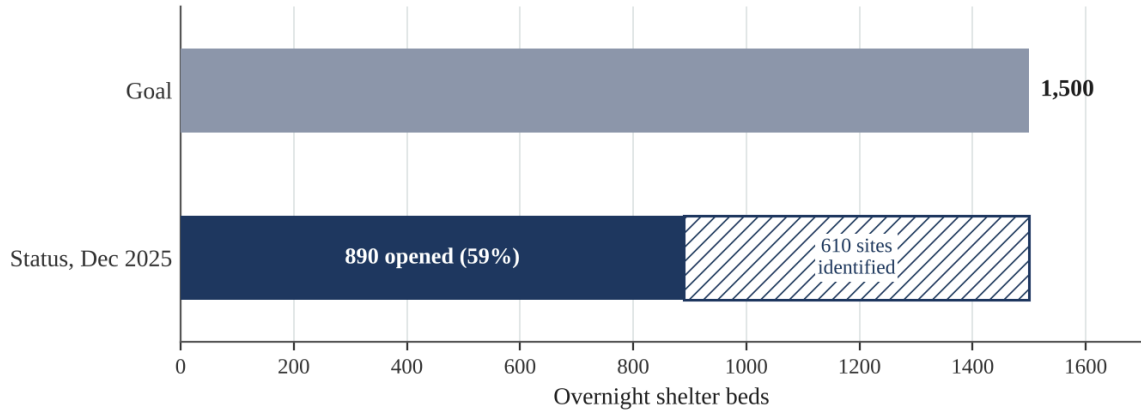
The mayor's shelter goal and the result

The mayor's best-known public goal was 1,500 new overnight city shelter beds by December 1, 2025, with 1,500 more through partners and the county, and an end to unsheltered homelessness ^[227]. The sources disagree about the outcome, and both accounts are given here.

- **Portland Mercury (December 31, 2025):** 890 of the 1,500 city beds had opened, and sites had been identified for 610 more. The Mercury reported the goal was not met, while noting Wilson claimed success ^[227].
- **FHS Post (December 17, 2025):** a student publication reported the 1,500-bed goal as met ^[230]. This study treats it as a less reliable source than the Mercury.
- **Mayor's claim (April 17, 2026 State of the City):** more than 1,500 overnight beds, more than 100,000 shelter nights, downtown tents down 75%, and 375 people reunited with family ^[115].
- **OPB, same speech:** county data show about 3,000 more people unsheltered than when he took office ^[231].
- **Bed totals (OPB, November 2025):** about 1,000 beds added since Wilson took office, bringing the county total to about 3,500, "less than half" of the estimated unsheltered population ^[224].

Mayor's goal of 1,500 new City shelter beds by Dec. 1, 2025

890 of the 1,500 City beds had opened by the deadline, with sites identified for 610 more (Portland Mercury). A student publication reported the goal as met; that report is treated as less reliable. A further 1,500 beds were to come through partners and the county.



Source: Portland Mercury, Dec 31, 2025; FHS Post, Dec 17, 2025 (conflicting report)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 27. Mayor's shelter-bed goal vs. beds opened by December 2025. The chart uses the Portland Mercury count; a student publication reported the goal as met. Source: Portland Mercury, Dec 31, 2025 ^[227]

The difference between counts may come partly from what is counted: new city beds, beds through partners, beds identified but not yet open, or seasonal beds. That is why Part VII recommends publishing a single public bed inventory with fixed definitions.

Officials' own numbers (claims, not verified by this study)

Table 19.8 — Numbers Portland officials cite (claimed)

Official	Claim	Reported by	Status in this study
Mayor Wilson	1,500+ overnight beds; 100,000+ shelter nights; downtown tents down 75%; 375 people reunited with family	City of Portland, Apr 17, 2026 ^[115]	Claimed. Bed count conflicts with Portland Mercury's December 2025 count (above).
Mayor Wilson	Downtown drug-trafficking arrests up 95%; stolen cars down 31%; burglary down 53%; 24 new investigators	City of Portland, Apr 17, 2026 ^[115]	Claimed. Not verified.
Mayor Wilson	The city "won in federal court" against the National Guard deployment	City of Portland, Apr 17, 2026 ^[115]	Claimed. Chapter 20 gives the court record.
Mayor Wilson	Pledge: cut the affordable-housing vacancy rate from 7.4% to 5.4% by the end of 2026	OPB, Apr 17, 2026 ^[231]	A goal, not yet measurable.

Official	Claim	Reported by	Status in this study
Council President Dunphy	No numerical claims found	—	—
Vice President Clark	No numerical claims found	—	—
City Administrator Lee	No numerical claims found	—	—

Sources are cited in each row.

City Auditor Simone Rede (on the ballot, unopposed)

The City Auditor is the one Portland office this study relies on most. Chapters 14 to 16 draw on the Auditor's audits, the Ombudsman's annual reports and the elections office. Because the Auditor is on the ballot unopposed, Table 19.9 uses the same fields as every other table, so that voters can weigh the record even without a contest.

Table 19.9 — City Auditor: role, background, record and stated priorities

Field	Simone Rede, City Auditor
Role	Elected in 2022; took office January 1, 2023. Re-elected in 2024 to a two-year term during the charter transition. On the November 2026 ballot for a four-year term, unopposed ^{[336][335]} . The office includes Audit Services, the Ombudsman and city elections.
Background	B.A., Vassar (Urban Studies); M.S., Carnegie Mellon. Certified Internal Auditor. Former Metro senior management auditor and state performance auditor. Member of the GAO Advisory Council and the Oregon Department of Corrections Audit Committee (voters' pamphlet statement) ^[337] .
Record: audit follow-through	The office's 2024 Audit Impact Report found 49% of 204 recommendations from 33 audits over five years were implemented, down from 51% in 2022. The peer average was 64% ^[152] . Implementation is the job of the bureaus, not the Auditor; the report is the Auditor's tool for tracking it (Chapter 14).
Record: Ombudsman	Jurisdictional complaints rose from 289 (2022) to 617 (2025), while the team named in the annual reports stayed at about four people. In 2025, 123 complaints were accepted for investigation and residents saved \$306,780 ^[256] (Chapter 15).
Record: elections oversight	Delegated election and campaign-finance oversight to her chief deputy while she was a candidate (November 2023) ^[338] .

Field	Simone Rede, City Auditor
Stated priorities	Oversight of the "effective use of tax dollars," the Arts Access Fund and climate commitments; auditor independence; flag maintenance backlogs in roads, parks and other assets; sustain improvements in 911 wait times (voters' pamphlet) ^[337] . Lists oversight of homeless services as an interest ^[336] .
Stated position on public-records fees	Not found in sources reviewed. (The Auditor's office has its own fee schedule: staff hourly pay plus 39% overhead, with a 50% deposit, effective July 1, 2025 — see Chapter 16.)
Own numbers (claimed)	None found beyond the office's published reports cited above.
Criticisms reported	None found.
Endorsements	AFSCME Oregon and Local 189, APANO Action Fund, Color PAC, Oregon Futures Lab, Building Power for Communities of Color, and former auditors Blackmer and Flynn, among others ^[337] ^[336] .

Sources are cited in each row.

19.4 Multnomah County Chair

Multnomah County receives the largest share of SHS money, 45.33% after collection costs ^[48]. Its chair leads the county board that oversees the Homeless Services Department. That makes this race central to the homelessness findings in Part IV.

Three candidates are verified as on the November 2026 ballot for Multnomah County Chair ^[335]:

Table 19.10 — Multnomah County Chair candidates, November 2026

Field	Shannon Singleton	Julia Brim-Edwards	Sharon Meieran
On the ballot	Verified	Verified	Verified
Background	Not verified in sources reviewed	Not verified in sources reviewed	Not verified in sources reviewed
Record on homelessness and SHS	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected
Stated positions (homelessness, housing, taxes, SHS, public safety, transparency, federal relations)	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected
Own numbers (claimed)	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected
Criticisms reported	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected

Source: Multnomah County Elections, ballot content, November 2026 ^[335].

This table is thin for all three candidates equally. The county's official pages and candidate profiles could not be reached during research, and nothing was filled in from memory. Voters should read each candidate's voters' pamphlet statement and the county elections page.

Verified facts about the office the winner will inherit:

- Multnomah County spent all of its FY2023-24 SHS receipts and began drawing down two prior years of carryover ^[196]. Its FY2025 report says the carryover will be fully spent by the end of FY2026 ^[186].
- Nathaniel VerGow was appointed director of the county's Homeless Services Department in April 2026 on a 3-2 board vote. He described a cut of about \$67 million, falling mostly on shelter ^[203].
- Portland's FY2026-27 budget ends the city's \$31 million transfer to the county for homeless services ^[137].
- The Multnomah County Auditor's 2025 follow-up found 1 of 8 recommendations to the homeless services office implemented, 5 in process and 2 not implemented ^[188].

The current chair's status was not verified for this study. A June 2024 report identifies Jessica Vega Pederson as chair at that time ^[222]. She is not among the three candidates on the November 2026 ballot ^[335].

19.5 Metro Council President

Metro sets and administers the SHS tax. Its council president is elected regionwide. In 2026 the office changed hands mid-term. Only facts confirmed in the research are given here.

Table 19.11 — Metro Council President: 2026 leadership change

Field	Lynn Peterson (former President)	Juan Carlos González (President)
Role	President from 2019. Announced her resignation March 10, 2026, effective March 13, 2026, to become Lake Oswego's interim city manager. Her second term would have ended December 31, 2026. Salary \$204,000 a year. Deputy President Duncan Hwang presided in the interim ^[61] .	Two-term District 4 councilor. Won the May 19, 2026 primary election for president with about 65% of early returns; would be the first Latino in the post ^[43] . Resigned his District 4 seat June 2, 2026, and was appointed president about seven months early to finish Peterson's term. His elected four-year term starts January 2027 ^[62] . Not on the November ballot.
SHS record	January 2025 proposal: extend the tax to 2050, cut the rate to 0.9% (2026) and 0.75% (2031), index the thresholds, create a new oversight body and allow housing construction ^[196] . The council paused the referral and later chose not to send a renewal to voters in 2025 ^[164] . The council voted	Metro has launched "Future 50," a regional planning process running to 2077; the last comparable regional plan dates from 1995 ^[41] . A specific SHS renewal position was not found in sources reviewed.

Field	Lynn Peterson (former President)	Juan Carlos González (President)
	unanimously in June 2025 to index the income thresholds to inflation from tax year 2026 ^[206] .	
Own numbers (claimed)	None compiled.	Metro reports SHS has housed more than 18,000 people since 2020 and helped 5,000 exit chronic homelessness (as stated on OPB) ^[41] . A program claim, not an audited figure.
Criticisms reported	An Oregonian analysis found she missed more than a third of council meetings after the start of 2025 (as reported by KOIN) ^[61] .	None specific to him found. Coverage of the May 2026 races noted criticism of slow SHS spending and limited visible impact ^[43] .

Sources are cited in each cell.

Other May 2026 Metro results: Miles Palacios won District 4, 51% to 48% over Alex Phan, with a term beginning January 4, 2027. Ashton Simpson (District 1) led Noah Ernst 58% to 40%. Christine Lewis (District 2) and Metro Auditor Brian Evans ran unopposed ^{[43][62]}.

The SHS clock. The SHS tax expires in 2030 unless voters renew it. As of October 2026, no referral, rate cut, sunset extension or housing-production expansion had been adopted, as far as this study could find; renewal before 2030 has been called a "near-term priority" ^[203]. The Metro president who takes office in January 2027 will lead that decision.

19.6 Labor Commissioner

The Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) enforces wage, civil-rights and apprenticeship law. Chapter 17 documents BOLI's staffing and backlogs. Christina Stephenson was elected in 2022 ^[286]. Whether she is on the November 2026 ballot could not be verified for this study. The table gives only verified facts.

Table 19.12 — Labor Commissioner: record and statements

Field	Christina Stephenson, Labor Commissioner
Role	Commissioner of Labor and Industries; elected 2022. 2026 ballot status not verified.
Background	Not verified in sources reviewed.
Record: backlog	When she was elected in late 2022, more than 5,000 wage claims awaited investigation and nearly 2,000 civil-rights cases were pending. By February 2024, those were about 3,000 and nearly 1,300 ^[286] . A November 2025 Secretary of State audit reported more than 4,500 wage claims backlogged at intake and 3,277 civil-rights questionnaires stalled at intake ^[287] .
Record: budget	The Legislature raised BOLI's 2025–27 budget by more than 50%, to nearly \$82 million, funding 46 new positions ^[287] . BOLI had requested 73 new positions ^[284] .

Field	Christina Stephenson, Labor Commissioner
Statements on staffing	February 2024: described a 3,000-case backlog as a difficult place to be ^[286] . November 18, 2025: told legislators 26 new positions had been filled and the wage-investigation backlog would not clear until mid-2029; agreed with the audit, saying its recommendations matched work under way for nearly three years ^[287] .
Own numbers (stated targets)	Clear the civil-rights intake backlog by mid-2026, wage intake by mid-2027, wage investigations by mid-2029; new case-management system by 2028 ^[285] .
Criticisms reported	The Secretary of State audit attributed BOLI's problems to years of poor management and inadequate resources (4 findings, 10 recommendations) ^[288] .
Endorsements given	Endorsed Kotek for governor ^[324] .

Sources are cited in each row. Any opponent on the 2026 ballot could not be identified; if one exists, the same fields would apply.

19.7 Questions every candidate should answer

The questions below come from the measured findings in Parts IV and V. They are the same for every candidate, of every party, for every office. A candidate who answers them in writing, with numbers and dates, gives voters a way to check the answers later.

Homelessness data and SHS outcomes

1. Multnomah County's 2025 count found 10,526 people homeless, up 67% from 2023 ^[174], and the counting method changed (Chapter 9). Will you commit to one public, monthly by-name count with fixed definitions, so residents can see the trend without method changes?
2. The Metro Auditor made 18 SHS recommendations in January 2024 and found inconsistent definitions that make progress hard to judge ^[48]. Which of them will you push to complete, and by when?
3. The SHS tax expires in 2030. Do you support renewing it, changing it, or letting it end? If you support renewal, what results should be required first?
4. Should the SHS tax give credit for income taxes paid to another state, as discussed in Chapter 11? Yes or no, and why?
5. Over one recent year, 14,000 people were sheltered but only 1,200 adults left shelter for permanent housing ^[229]. What exit-to-housing rate will you set as a goal, and will you publish it every quarter?
6. Different sources gave different counts for the mayor's shelter-bed goal. Will you support a single public bed inventory, updated weekly, with open, partial and planned beds listed separately?

Audit follow-through

7. Portland implemented 49% of its auditors' recommendations over five years, against a 64% peer average ^[152]. What rate will you commit to, and how will you report progress?
8. Some open recommendations date to 2018 (Chapter 14). Will you publish a dated plan to close or formally reject each one?

Ombudsman capacity

9. The Ombudsman's jurisdictional complaints more than doubled from 2022 to 2025, while the named team stayed at about four people ^[256]. What caseload per investigator is acceptable to you, and will you fund staffing to meet it?
10. In 2025, 40% of complaints were declined ^[256]. Should the office publish the reason for each declined complaint, in summary form?

Public-records fees

11. Portland collected about \$256,064 in records fees in FY2024-25 ^[262], while its 2021 staff cost for records was about \$2.85 million (Chapter 16). Do you support free records for non-commercial requesters? If not, what fee cap?
12. Will you support publishing commonly requested records proactively, so residents do not need to file a request at all?

State capacity and federal risk

13. BOLI expects its wage-investigation backlog to last until mid-2029 ^[287]. Is that acceptable? If not, what date and what funding would you set?
14. About 14% of the region's 2024 homeless-services spending came from federal sources ^[236] (Chapter 20). If federal funds fall, which programs would you protect first?
15. Will you publish your own numerical claims with a source link, so residents can check them?

19.8 What this chapter could not verify

The same rule applied to every person: if a fact was not confirmed in the research, it was left out. The gaps are listed here so readers can fill them from official sources.

- Brett Smith's issue positions beyond general themes, and his full background.
- Background and platforms for Multnomah County Chair candidates Shannon Singleton, Julia Brim-Edwards and Sharon Meieran.
- The current Multnomah County Chair's status in 2026 and SHS record.
- Juan Carlos González's stated position on SHS renewal.

- Labor Commissioner Christina Stephenson's 2026 ballot status, opponents (if any) and background.
- Backgrounds of Council President Dunphy and Vice President Clark from official biographies.
- Platforms of the 33 District 3 and District 4 council candidates.
- Any stated position by any candidate for governor on the Metro SHS tax.
- Candidates' own numerical claims (Tables 19.5 and 19.8) were not fact-checked.

What this means: The people on the 2026 ballot and in office will decide whether the measured problems in this study get fixed: the SHS tax before its 2030 sunset, audit recommendations left open since 2018, an Ombudsman office whose caseload has doubled, and records fees that stand between residents and their own government's files. The governor's race is close in public polls, and none of the three candidates has a stated position on the SHS tax in the sources reviewed. The county chair race, central to homelessness spending, has the least public information available. Voters can close those gaps by putting the same questions to every candidate and asking for answers in writing, with numbers and dates.

Federal Relations and Funding Risk

In brief: In September 2025, the U.S. Secretary of Defense federalized 200 Oregon National Guard members to protect federal property at the ICE facility in South Portland. The State of Oregon and the City of Portland sued. A federal district judge blocked the deployment and later entered a permanent injunction. The Ninth Circuit's rulings moved back and forth, and in January 2026 the federal government withdrew its request to pause the injunction and reported that the Guard members were going to Texas to demobilize. As of the court records reviewed, the appeal was still pending and no final appellate ruling on the merits was found. Separately, the leading candidates for governor disagree on Oregon's sanctuary laws. This study could not verify any federal funding cut or grant condition tied to Portland's or Oregon's sanctuary status. This chapter reports the court record and the stated positions only.

20.1 Why federal relations matter to this study

Federal money is part of how the region pays for homeless services. An ECONorthwest tally reported that more than \$724 million was spent on homeless services across the three Metro counties in 2024. By source, the SHS tax provided 43% and federal funds 14% ^[236]. The listed shares add to 87%; the article does not explain the remaining 13%.

Federal relations also affect public safety and city operations. Protests over the ICE facility have reached City Hall. At least 30 people were ejected from the June 2026 budget adoption meeting during ICE-facility protests ^[145], and protesters interrupted the June 17, 2026 council budget meeting ^[141].

This chapter does three things:

- It sets out the court record on the 2025 National Guard federalization, using only what the court documents state.
- It lists other federal lawsuits involving Oregon, Portland and Multnomah County that appear in court dockets, and says plainly where their subject could not be verified.
- It summarizes the sanctuary-law debate using each side's own stated positions, and states what could not be verified about federal funding.

What this chapter is not. It is not a legal analysis. It does not say who was right. Court orders are described as the orders themselves describe them. A stay or an administrative order is not a

ruling on the merits, and several of the orders below say so expressly. Readers who need the full record should pull the dockets from PACER or CourtListener^[339].

20.2 The National Guard federalization: court timeline

The main case is *State of Oregon and City of Portland v. Trump*, U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon, No. 3:25-cv-01756-IM, before Judge Karin Immergut. The State of California is now listed as a co-plaintiff. The appeals were heard in the Ninth Circuit as Nos. 25-6268 and 25-7194^[339].

Table 20.1 — National Guard federalization: events as stated in the court documents

Date	Court / docket	Event
Sept 28, 2025	—	Secretary of Defense Hegseth issued a memorandum federalizing 200 Oregon National Guard members for 60 days to protect federal personnel and property at the Lindquist Building (the ICE facility) in Portland, as recited in a Ninth Circuit order.
Sept 28, 2025	D. Or. 3:25-cv-01756-IM (Judge Immergut)	Oregon and Portland filed a complaint seeking declaratory and injunctive relief.
Oct 4, 2025	D. Or.	A first temporary restraining order (TRO) blocked the memorandum. A second TRO, on an amended complaint filed October 5, barred deploying federalized Guard members, including members from California, in Oregon. The federal government did not appeal the second TRO, according to the Ninth Circuit's October 8 order.
Oct 8, 2025	9th Cir. 25-6268 (Judges Graber, R. Nelson, Bade)	Ruled on an emergency motion for an administrative stay of the first TRO. The order states that the second TRO was not before the court.
Oct 20, 2025	9th Cir. 25-6268, published per curiam (R. Nelson concurring; Graber dissenting)	Granted a stay pending appeal of the October 4 TRO. The panel found the President "likely" acted lawfully under 10 U.S.C. § 12406(3).
Oct 28–30, 2025	9th Cir. 25-6268 (Chief Judge Murguia)	A majority of the court's non-recused active judges voted to rehear the case <i>en banc</i> (by a larger panel). The October 20 stay order, published at 157 F.4th 1013, was vacated. The October 8 administrative stay order remained in effect pending further order of the en banc court.
Nov 7, 2025	D. Or. 3:25-cv-01756-IM (Judge Immergut)	The district court entered a permanent injunction, as referenced in later Ninth Circuit orders.
Nov 14,	9th Cir. 25-7194	The federal government appealed the permanent injunction.

Date	Court / docket	Event
2025		
Nov 19, 2025	9th Cir. 25-6268 and 25-7194, consolidated (Chief Judge Murguia)	Partial administrative stay of the November 7 injunction, to the extent it blocked the federalization of the Oregon Guard. The order states it is not a decision on the merits. The court ordered weekly status reports on federalized troops and paused briefing until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the stay application in <i>Trump v. Illinois</i> , No. 25A443.
Dec 8, 2025	9th Cir. 25-6268	An amended en banc order attached statements by Judge Bybee (on the Constitution's Domestic Violence Clause, Article IV, Section 4, taking no position on the ultimate merits) and Judge Tung.
Dec 23, 2025	U.S. Supreme Court, <i>Trump v. Illinois</i> , No. 25A443	The Supreme Court denied the federal government's stay application, as recited in the Ninth Circuit's January 8, 2026 order.
Jan 7–8, 2026	9th Cir. 25-6268 and 25-7194	The federal government withdrew its request for a stay pending appeal and agreed to dissolve the administrative stay, without prejudice to future arguments. It reported that Oregon Guard members were in transit to Fort Bliss, Texas, to demobilize over about 7 to 14 days. The November 19 administrative stay was vacated. Result: the November 7 permanent injunction is in effect while the appeal is pending.

Source: CourtListener dockets and orders for D. Or. 3:25-cv-01756-IM and 9th Cir. Nos. 25-6268 and 25-7194 (CourtListener opinion IDs 11159391, 11173945, 11181635, 11205668, 11215987, 11237772) ^[339]. Events are listed in date order; the description of each follows the court documents.

What the record shows and does not show

- **Shows:** The district court blocked the deployment with two TROs and then a permanent injunction. The Ninth Circuit's three-judge stay was vacated when the full court agreed to rehear the case. After the Supreme Court denied a stay in a related Illinois case, the federal government withdrew its stay request and reported that the Oregon Guard members were demobilizing ^[339].
- **Does not show:** A final appellate ruling on the merits. The research did not find how the consolidated appeal was resolved after January 8, 2026, or whether the en banc court ruled on No. 25-6268 or dismissed it as moot. The full reasoning of the November 7, 2025 permanent injunction was not read.

Officials' statements about the outcome

Both the mayor and the governor's campaign describe the outcome as a win. Their statements are given here as claims, next to the court record.

Table 20.2 — Officials' statements about the Guard deployment (claimed) and the court record

Speaker	Statement	Source	How it compares with the court record reviewed
Mayor Keith Wilson	The city "won in federal court," stopping the deployment of National Guard troops	State of the City, Apr 17, 2026 ^[115]	Consistent with the district court's TROs and permanent injunction and the January 2026 demobilization. The appeal record reviewed shows no final appellate merits judgment.
Kotek campaign	She "halted a military deployment to Portland"	Campaign site, Dec 4, 2025 ^[333]	The State of Oregon was a plaintiff. The same court-record limits apply.
Democratic Party of Oregon	Ran a website on the military deployment in Portland that tied Drazen to it	Oregon Capital Chronicle, Aug 24, 2026 ^[326]	Not a court matter. A Drazen spokesperson called the site inaccurate.

Sources are cited in each row. The court-record comparison draws on the CourtListener dockets in Table 20.1.

Mayor Wilson also praised Portland police officers who testified in federal court about federal officers' conduct at the ICE facility ^[231]. The content of that testimony was not reviewed for this study.

20.3 Other federal cases on the docket

Court dockets show several other federal cases involving Oregon, Portland or Multnomah County in 2025 and 2026. For most, the research confirmed only the case name, number, judge and filing date. Their subjects are not described here because they were not verified.

Table 20.3 — Related federal cases (docket facts only)

Filed	Case	Court / judge	What was verified
Sept 16, 2025	<i>United States v. State of Oregon</i> , 6:25-cv-01666	D. Or., Judge Kasubhai	Federal suit against the State. A Ninth Circuit appeal (No. 26-1231) was docketed March 3, 2026. Subject not verified.
Oct 1, 2025	<i>United States v. Multnomah County Department of Community Justice</i> , 3:25-cv-01784	D. Or., Judge McShane	Federal suit against the county agency. Subject not verified.
Nov 21, 2025	<i>Dickinson v. Trump</i> , 3:25-cv-02170	D. Or., Judge Simon	Related private suit. A Ninth Circuit appeal (No. 26-1609) was docketed March 17, 2026.
Nov 24, 2025	<i>State of Oregon v. Noem</i> , 6:25-cv-02172	D. Or., Judge Aiken	State suit against the Department of Homeland Security. Subject not verified.

Source: CourtListener dockets ^[339].

Readers should not infer the subject of any of these cases from its name. The study lists them because they are public and pending or recently filed, and because any of them could affect state or county operations.

20.4 The sanctuary-law debate: each side's stated position

"Sanctuary" is the common term for state and local laws that limit how local agencies help with federal immigration enforcement. The text of Oregon's laws was not reviewed for this study, and this section does not describe what they require. It reports only what the candidates and officials have said.

Table 20.4 — Stated positions on sanctuary laws and federal immigration enforcement

Person	Stated position	Source
Tina Kotek (Governor; D, WFP)	Committed to the Working Families Party to "defend sanctuary laws." Her platform opposes "aggressive federal immigration enforcement."	OPB, Aug 21, 2026 ^[162] , OPB, Sept 17, 2026 ^[332]
Christine Drazan (R, Libertarian)	Says sanctuary laws have "gone too far." Wants state and local law enforcement to work more closely with federal agencies. Claims the Department of Corrections declined a U.S. Attorney request about dangerous offenders (claimed; not verified).	KATU candidate profile ^[18]
Brett Smith (Pacific Green)	Not stated in sources reviewed.	—
Keith Wilson (Mayor)	No stated position on sanctuary laws found. Praised police who testified about federal officers' conduct; states the city won in federal court on the Guard deployment (claimed).	OPB and City of Portland, Apr 17, 2026 ^[231] ^[115]

Sources are cited in each row.

The disagreement is plain. Kotek says she will defend the current laws. Drazan says they have gone too far and wants closer federal cooperation. Neither position, as reported, includes a specific proposed change to statute that this study could identify. A voter weighing the two might ask each candidate which provisions, if any, they would change, and what effect they expect on public safety and on federal funding.

20.5 Federal funding cuts tied to sanctuary status: could not be verified

This study could not verify any federal funding cut, withheld grant, or grant condition tied to Portland's, Multnomah County's or Oregon's sanctuary status in 2025 or 2026.
The research found no documented example in the sources reviewed. That does not mean none

exists. It means none was confirmed, and so none is reported here. Any claim, from any side, that specific federal dollars were cut or saved because of sanctuary status should be checked against the federal grant notice or court order it relies on.

What can be said with sources:

- Federal funds were about 14% of 2024 regional homeless-services spending in the ECONorthwest tally ^[236]. A change in federal funding would affect that share. The size and timing of any change could not be verified.
- Governor Kotek blames federal tariffs and changes to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act for affordability problems ^[329]. This is her stated view. The study did not measure those effects.
- Multnomah County's homeless-services budget already fell 25%, from \$420.6 million (FY2025 current service level) to \$316.2 million (FY2026 base) ^[215]. The reasons given in county documents were lower SHS revenue, general-fund cuts, the end of federal pandemic (ARPA) money and less city funding ^[226]. None of the reasons listed in those documents is tied to sanctuary status.

20.6 Managing federal risk: a neutral checklist

Whatever one thinks of the sanctuary debate, a city and county that depend partly on federal money can plan for change. The steps below do not take a side. They are about knowing the exposure.

Table 20.5 — Federal funding risk: what the public should be able to see

Step	What it means	Why it matters
1. Publish a federal-funds inventory	One public list of every federal grant the City and County receive, with amount, program, term and any conditions	Residents and councilors can see exactly which services rely on federal money.
2. Flag conditioned grants	Mark any grant whose terms include immigration-cooperation or similar conditions	Turns a vague debate into a list of specific dollars and terms.
3. Post court orders affecting operations	A plain-English page listing pending federal cases, their status and any orders in effect	Residents should not need PACER to know whether an injunction is in force.
4. Model a federal shortfall	Show what happens to homeless services and public safety if federal funds fall by 10%, 25% or 50%	The County's FY2026 budget already shows how fast cuts reach shelter beds.
5. Report the cost of federal-response operations	Publish city police and staff costs tied to protests and federal-facility operations	Lets the public weigh those costs against other needs.

What this means: The 2025 Guard deployment ended with Oregon Guard members demobilizing in January 2026, with a district court's permanent injunction in effect and an appeal still pending in the records reviewed. The mayor and the governor's campaign describe that as a win; the court record confirms the injunction but shows no final appellate merits ruling. The two leading candidates for governor take opposite positions on sanctuary laws. No federal funding cut tied to sanctuary status could be verified. For Portland residents, the practical point is exposure: about one dollar in seven of regional homeless-services spending came from federal sources in 2024, and no single public inventory shows which grants carry what conditions. Publishing that inventory would let residents judge the risk from facts rather than claims.

Part VII — The Fix: A 21st-Century Operating Plan

Parts I through VI described what the public record shows. Part VII is different. It is the author's operating plan. The recommendations are the author's own, but every fact and every benchmark behind them comes from a cited public source. Where this study puts a number on cost or time that no source provides, the number is labeled **SALAR estimate**, and its assumptions are shown in a table so any reader can change them.

The plan is written for the people who would have to carry it out: the Mayor, the City Administrator, bureau directors, the Council, the Auditor, and their partners at Multnomah County, Metro and the State. It is meant to be practical. Each chapter ends with steps a city manager could start on Monday morning.

How to read the labels in Part VII.

- **Cited fact:** a number or event from a public source, with a citation.
- **Derived:** simple arithmetic on cited numbers, shown so it can be checked.
- **SALAR estimate:** the author's own planning figure. Assumptions are listed in a table. These are not findings.
- **Recommendation:** the author's proposal. Readers may disagree; the evidence is laid out so they can.

Principles: How a Modern City Should Work

In brief: Before any new system or program, Portland needs a short set of operating rules that every bureau follows. This chapter proposes four: treat residents as customers; put data in public by default; move fast but keep a record of every decision; and measure results, not activity. Each principle is tied to a documented gap in the City's own audits and reports, and each has a simple test that the Council and the public can apply.

Why principles come first

Portland's government is new. Voters approved Measure 26-228 in November 2022 with 58.08% of the vote, replacing a commission system that had run the city since 1913 ^[68] ^[113]. The new council–mayor–administrator system took effect January 1, 2025 ^[114]. A City Administrator now supervises most bureau directors ^[114].

That structure creates, for the first time, one professional manager who can set common rules for all bureaus. The City's auditors have shown why common rules matter. The 2024 Audit Impact Report found that only 49% of 204 audit recommendations from the prior five years had been implemented, compared with a 64% average among peer audit offices ^[152]. The main obstacle the auditors named was prioritization, followed by coordination ^[152]. Those are mainly management problems. Principles are the cheapest fix for them.

Principle 1: Residents are customers

A customer gets a clear answer, a known wait time, and one place to go. Portland residents often get none of those. The City's 2022 collections audit found that each bureau collected debts on its own, with no Citywide standards. Only 8 of nearly 17,000 accounts sent to the collection agency paid within the 30-day no-fee window ^[156]. The audit's own title called it a "maze."

The resident survey points the same way. In 2024, about half of Portlanders said the City was moving in the right direction, and homelessness (85.4%) and cost of living (73.3%) were the top named challenges ^[72]. Awareness of the 311 service line rose from 47.8% in 2022 to 58.6% in 2024 ^[251]. That is progress, but it still means about four in ten residents do not know the City's front door exists.

What the principle requires in practice:

- Every service has a published promise: how long it should take, and who to call if it does not.
- Every resident contact gets a case number that follows the issue across bureaus (see Chapter 22).

- No resident is told "that's another bureau" without a warm hand-off and the case number carried over.
- Fees and penalties are explained in plain language before they are charged.

Principle 2: Data in public by default

"Public by default" means that if a record or dataset can legally be released, the City publishes it without waiting for someone to ask. Requests become the exception, not the main channel.

The case for this is in the City's own numbers. Portland received 54,477 records requests in FY2024-25, and 42,474 of them were for police records ^[262]. In 2021, the City testified that its staff cost for records work was about \$2.85 million (which it called an undercount), against about \$501,000 in fees collected ^[266]. Every record that is published once, instead of found and sent many times, lowers that cost.

Public by default also has a limit. Oregon has more than 550 records exemptions, according to the state's first Public Records Advocate ^[269]. Private information about victims, children, health and personnel must stay protected. The principle is "publish what the law allows," not "publish everything."

Principle 3: Speed with accountability

Portland's slowest processes are often its most expensive. The City Auditor's 2026 review of 911 dispatch found that only 2 of 39 trainees certified within the 18-month target, the average was more than 26 months, and about 46% of trainees left, at a cost of about \$3.4 million ^[135]. The same audit also showed what focus can do: average 911 wait time fell from 77 seconds in July 2022 to 18 seconds in January 2026 ^[135].

Speed without a record invites mistakes and distrust. The 2024 technology-purchasing audit found the City had no Citywide strategy for buying technology. It bought a \$300,000 device-management bundle and then a duplicative \$700,000 tool ^[151]. Fast decisions are good. Fast decisions that no one can trace are not.

What the principle requires: every significant decision (a contract, a denial, a policy change) is logged with who made it, when, and why. The log is reviewable by the Auditor and, where the law allows, by the public. Chapter 22 describes the audit log that makes this cheap.

Principle 4: Measure outcomes, not activity

Activity is easy to count: meetings held, tents distributed, beds funded. Outcomes are harder: people housed and still housed a year later, requests answered on time, recommendations actually fixed.

Portland's homelessness system has been criticized on exactly this point. A 2021 Multnomah County audit found the Joint Office tracked program entries rather than move-ins, as reported by OPB in 2023 ^[219]. Metro's own auditor found in 2024 that inconsistent definitions, reports and calculations made it hard to judge SHS progress ^[48].

Cities that measure outcomes can prove it to outsiders. The What Works Cities certification, run by Results for America with Bloomberg Philanthropies, rates cities on using data to set policy, fund programs and engage residents ^[340]. By February 2025, 104 cities were certified ^[341]. Portland joined the initiative in October 2016 ^[342], but this study found no record of Portland being certified. That status should be confirmed with Results for America; if it holds, certification is a clear, outside-verified goal.

Table 21.1 — Four principles, the documented gap behind each, and a simple public test

Principle	Documented gap	Public test (recommendation)
Residents as customers	No Citywide collection standards; 8 of ~17,000 accounts paid in no-fee window (2022)	Every service lists a time promise and a contact on its web page
Data in public by default	54,477 records requests in FY2024-25; 2021 staff cost ~\$2.85M vs ~\$501K fees	Share of new requests answered by a link to an already-published record
Speed with accountability	Duplicative \$700K tech purchase; 911 training averaged 26+ months	Every major decision has a logged reason the Auditor can review
Outcomes, not activity	49% of audit recommendations implemented vs 64% peer average	Monthly public report of outcomes (Chapter 27)

Sources: Portland Audit Services, collections audit ^[156]; FY2024-25 Records Report ^[262]; PRAC presentation ^[266]; OPB on technology audit ^[151]; 911 audit ^[135]; 2024 Audit Impact Report ^[152]. Public tests are the author's recommendations.

Start Monday

1. The City Administrator issues a one-page "Operating Principles" memo to all bureau directors, adopting the four principles above.
2. Each bureau names one person accountable for its service promises and its data publishing.
3. The Council adopts the principles by resolution, so they survive changes in leadership.
4. The City contacts Results for America to confirm its What Works Cities status and request an assessment.

What this means: Portland has a new government structure but not yet a common way of working. Four simple principles, adopted by memo and resolution, cost almost nothing and give the public a yardstick for everything that follows in this plan.

Architecture: A City "Data Spine"

In brief: Portland's bureaus keep records in separate systems that do not talk to each other, and the City has no Citywide strategy for buying technology. This chapter proposes a "Data Spine": one case number that follows a resident's issue across bureaus, one shared records store, an AI-assisted search and redaction layer that always has a human reviewer, an open public dashboard, and an audit log of every action. It is built in phases, mostly from tools the City may already license, and it avoids the "big-bang" IT projects that have cost Oregon agencies years and hundreds of millions of dollars.

The problem in plain words

Imagine a resident reports a broken streetlight, a blocked sidewalk and an unsafe vacant house on the same block. Today, that can mean three different bureaus, three different systems and three different reference numbers. If the resident later files a complaint with the Ombudsman or a records request, staff must search each system by hand.

The City Auditor found in 2024 that Portland had no Citywide strategy for buying technology, spent at least \$63 million on technology in FY2023-24, and saw some projects delayed by more than a year ^[151]. That audit is still listed among those with recommendations not fully implemented ^[152].

There is one encouraging precedent. The City replaced five separate public-records portals with a single portal on GovQA software ^[262]. The same logic, applied across the City, is the Data Spine.

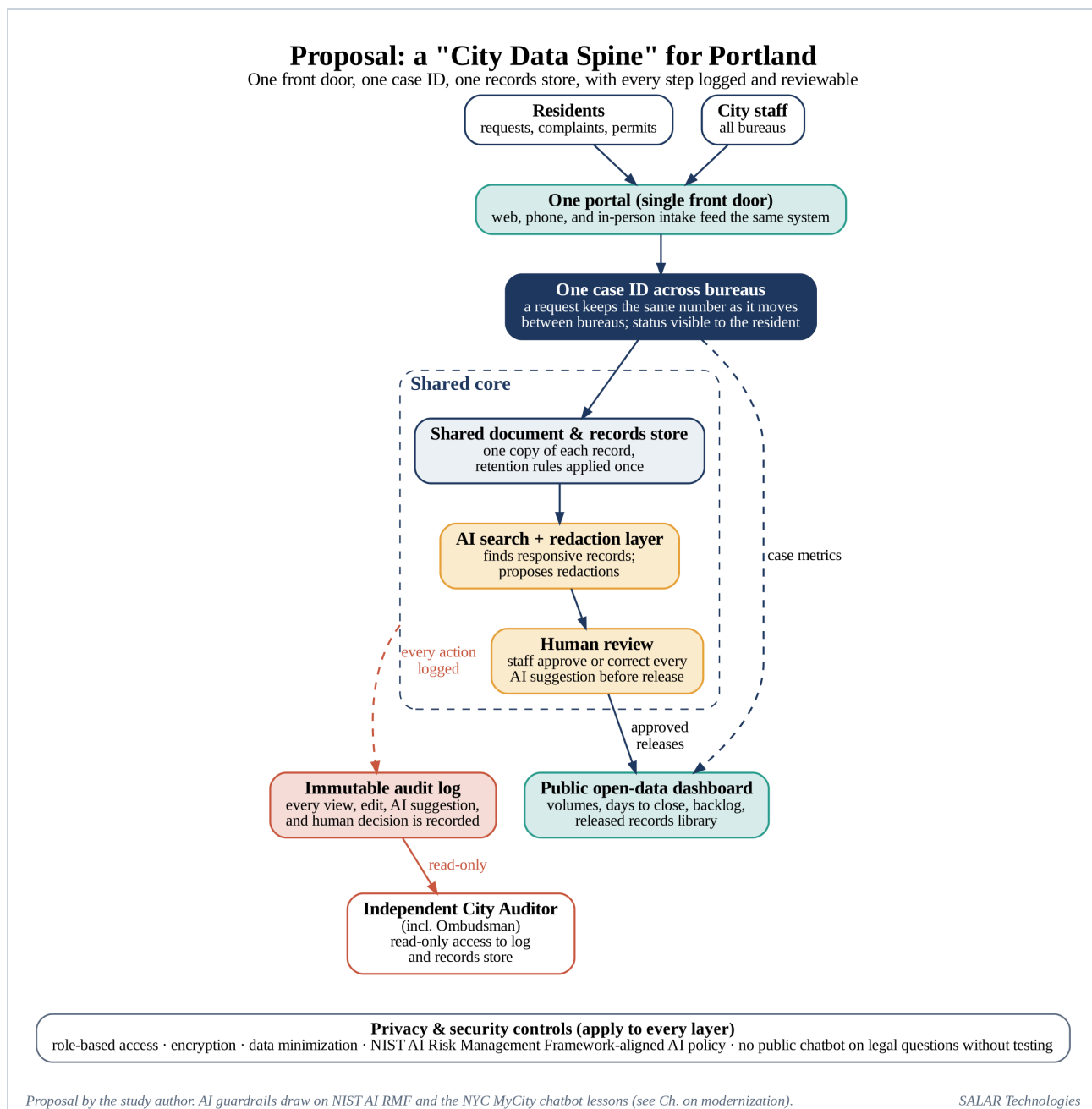


Figure 28. The proposed City "Data Spine." Source: SALAR Technologies design concept (author's recommendation; not an existing City system).

The five parts of the Data Spine

1. One case ID across bureaus

Every resident contact, whether through 311, a web form, a phone call or a counter visit, gets one case number. If the issue moves from Transportation to Permitting to the Ombudsman, the number

moves with it. Staff in any bureau can see the history. The resident can look up the status online with that number.

This is the simplest part and the most important. It answers the question residents ask most often: "Where is my issue?"

2. A shared records store

Documents, emails and data that bureaus already create are kept in one governed store with standard labels: which bureau, what type of record, how long it must be kept, and whether it is public, partly public or confidential. The store does not replace every bureau system on day one. It indexes them, so one search can reach them all.

3. AI-assisted search and redaction, with a human in charge

Software can find relevant records and suggest redactions (for example, a Social Security number or a victim's name). A trained staff member reviews every suggestion before anything is released. The software never releases a record by itself.

The best public example of this approach is the U.S. State Department. Its declassification pilot trained a model on past human decisions, reviewed 450,000 cables, and cut human review volume by 80%, while humans still did quality control and handled cases the model was unsure about ^[283]. Portland's records are simpler than classified cables, but the method is the same: let the machine sort, let people decide.

4. An open public dashboard

The dashboard shows, in near real time, how the City is doing on its service promises: records requests open and closed, Ombudsman cases, audit recommendations, shelter beds, permits, and 311 response times. Chapter 27 lists the proposed measures. The data behind each chart is downloadable.

5. An audit log of every action

Every search, edit, redaction, approval and release is recorded with a time stamp and a user name. The log cannot be changed by the people whose actions it records. The City Auditor and the Ombudsman get read access. This is what makes speed safe: decisions can be fast because they are always traceable.

Table 22.1 — Data Spine components: what each does and what it fixes

Component	Plain description	Documented gap it addresses
One case ID	One number per issue, across bureaus	Bureau-by-bureau collections with no Citywide standards (2022 audit)

Component	Plain description	Documented gap it addresses
Shared records store	One governed index of City records	Five separate records portals before consolidation
AI search/redaction + human review	Machine suggests, person decides	54,477 records requests in FY2024-25 handled by 8.4 FTE core team plus 113 staff
Open dashboard	Public service metrics, downloadable	No published median days-to-close for records
Audit log	Tamper-resistant record of actions	No Citywide technology purchasing strategy; duplicative purchases

Sources: collections audit ^[156]; FY2024-25 Records Report ^[262]; OPB on technology audit ^[151]. Component design is the author's recommendation.

Lessons from big IT projects: build in phases

Oregon has learned the hard way that large, all-at-once systems are risky. The Employment Department's Frances Online system cost \$106 million and launched in March 2024, about 15 years after federal funding first arrived in 2009 ^[291]. The state's ONE eligibility system for Medicaid and SNAP cost \$416 million to implement ^[292]. In 2026, an audit gave the OHP Bridge program an adverse opinion, with up to \$15 million in questioned costs, after the ONE system miscoded an income threshold; OHA disputes \$7 million of that total ^[293].

The lesson is not "avoid technology." The State audit of ONE found that most errors came from manual input, not automation ^[292]. The lesson is to build in small steps, test each one with real users, and keep a human check on anything that affects a person's rights or money.

Table 22.2 — Phased build of the Data Spine (author's recommendation)

Phase	Timing	Scope	Exit test before next phase
0 — Inventory	Days 1–30	List every system holding resident records; list existing software licenses	Inventory published to Council
1 — Case ID pilot	Days 31–180	One case number across 311, Transportation and the Ombudsman	Residents can look up status online; staff survey positive
2 — Records store and AI-assisted search	Months 4–12	Index records for the records team; AI suggests matches and redactions; human approves all	Error rate measured on a test set; no unreviewed release
3 — Public dashboard	Months 3–12 (in parallel)	First 10 metrics live (Chapter 27)	Data refreshes monthly without manual rebuilds
4 — Expand bureaus	Year 2+	Add Permitting, Parks, Water, Environmental Services	Auditor review of Phases 1–3

Buy, build, or use what the City already has

The Data Spine does not require a new custom system. Most large public employers already license an office productivity suite that includes document storage, workflow automation, business-intelligence dashboards and, increasingly, a built-in AI assistant. Microsoft 365 with Copilot, Power Automate and Power BI is one widely used example; other vendors offer similar bundles. This study did not verify which licenses the City of Portland holds. The first step is to find out (Phase 0).

Public results from these tools are promising but should be read carefully:

- **United Kingdom:** a government experiment gave 20,000 Microsoft 365 Copilot licences to 12 organizations in late 2024. Users self-reported saving an average of 26 minutes a day. The report itself warned that savings were self-reported and that complex or data-heavy work still needed human oversight ^[343].
- **Pennsylvania:** 175 state employees in 14 agencies piloted ChatGPT Enterprise from January 2024 and reported saving an average of 95 minutes a day. The state stressed that human oversight is essential and that AI is not right for every task ^[344].
- **New Jersey:** the state built its own AI assistant, used by about 15,000 workers in its first year, at about \$1 per user per month versus about \$20 for commercial licenses ^[345].

Table 22.3 — Buy vs build vs reuse: a decision guide (author's recommendation)

Component	Recommended path	Why
Case ID and workflow	Reuse existing licensed workflow tools first; buy only if gaps	Fastest; avoids duplicative purchases flagged by the Auditor
Shared records store	Reuse existing document platform; add records-retention labels	Records already live there
AI search and redaction	Buy or reuse; pilot two options side by side	Market is moving fast; test before committing
Public dashboard	Reuse licensed BI tool; publish data on open-data portal	Low cost; open formats
Audit log	Use built-in platform logging; give Auditor read access	Already exists in most enterprise platforms
Internal AI assistant	Compare a licensed assistant with a low-cost build (NJ model)	NJ reported ~\$1/user/month vs ~\$20 commercial

Sources: NJ cost comparison ^[345]; technology purchasing audit ^[151]. Paths are the author's recommendation.

Managing the risks

AI errors

The clearest warning comes from New York City. Its MyCity business chatbot, launched in October 2023, told users that landlords could refuse housing vouchers and employers could take workers' tips, both contrary to city law, and gave inconsistent answers to repeated questions ^[346]. It stayed online after the errors were documented ^[347].

Rule for Portland: no public-facing AI tool gives answers on legal rights, benefits, fines or regulations until it has passed a documented test set reviewed by the City Attorney. Internal tools that help staff draft and search come first.

Governance framework

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) published its AI Risk Management Framework in January 2023, built on four functions: Govern, Map, Measure and Manage. NIST added a Generative AI Profile in July 2024 ^[348]. Portland does not need to invent its own rules. It can adopt the NIST framework and use free templates from the GovAI Coalition, which San José started in 2023 and which grew to more than 3,000 members across more than 900 agencies ^[349]. Tempe, Arizona, offers a working model: an AI policy since 2023 and a committee that reviews every new AI tool ^[350].

Privacy

A shared store raises a fair concern: more data in one place means more harm if it leaks or is misused. The safeguards are standard: role-based access (staff see only what their job needs), encryption, the audit log, regular access reviews by the Auditor, and a published list of what data the Spine holds. The 2022 police surveillance audit, which found 37 types of surveillance technology with policies for only 16, shows why a published inventory matters ^[245].

Labor relations

Workers and their unions should help shape these tools, not learn about them after the fact. Washington State's Office of Financial Management issued a directive on introducing generative AI for represented employees ^[351]. Pennsylvania created a Labor-Management Collaboration Group as part of its AI oversight ^[344]. Portland should do the same before Phase 2. The stated goal should be to move staff from repetitive searching to higher-value review and resident service, not to cut jobs by surprise.

Table 22.4 — Risk register for the Data Spine (author's recommendation)

Risk	Example	Control	Owner
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Risk	Example	Control	Owner
AI gives wrong answer	NYC MyCity chatbot	No public legal/benefit answers without tested approval; human review on all releases	City Attorney + Chief Technology Officer
Privacy breach	Over-broad staff access	Role-based access; quarterly access review; audit log	Chief Information Security Officer
Over-collection of data	Surveillance tools without policies (2022 audit)	Published data inventory; Council approval for new data types	City Administrator
Cost overrun	Frances Online, ONE system	Phased build; exit test per phase; reuse licenses	City Administrator + Budget Office
Labor conflict	Tools imposed without consultation	Labor-management group before Phase 2	Human Resources
Vendor lock-in	Duplicative tools (2024 audit)	Open data formats; exit clauses in contracts	Procurement

Sources: The Markup ^[346]; surveillance audit ^[245]; Statesman Journal via Yahoo ^[291]. Owners and controls are the author's recommendations; actual City titles may differ.

Start Monday

1. The City Administrator orders a 30-day inventory of all systems holding resident records and all current software licenses, including any AI features already included.
2. The City adopts the NIST AI Risk Management Framework by administrative rule and joins the GovAI Coalition.
3. The City forms an AI review committee on the Tempe model, with the City Attorney, IT security, the Auditor (as observer) and a labor representative.
4. The City picks three bureaus for the Phase 1 case ID pilot: 311, Transportation (the bureau named most often in Ombudsman complaints) and the Ombudsman.

What this means: The Data Spine is not one giant purchase. It is a set of small, tested steps that give every resident one case number, give staff one place to search, and give the public one dashboard, with a person checking every AI suggestion and a log recording every action.

Public Records at Near-Zero Cost

In brief: Portland handles more than 54,000 records requests a year and already meets the state deadline on 97% of public requests. But fees still work as a wall for ordinary residents, the City does not publish a median response time, and fees recover only a small share of the real cost. This chapter proposes a four-part fix: publish common records before anyone asks; use AI to speed search and redaction with a human approving every release; stop charging individuals for non-commercial requests; and set and publish clear time targets. A simple cost model (SALAR estimate) suggests the change can be roughly cost-neutral for the City.

Where Portland stands

Portland's records system has improved. The share of public requests closed within 30 work days rose from 46% in FY2022-23 to 97% in FY2024-25 ^{[262][267]}. Open requests fell from 4,659 to 1,391 during FY2023-24 ^[268]. That is real progress, and the staff who achieved it deserve credit.

Three problems remain:

- **Fees.** Since July 1, 2025, the Auditor's fee schedule bills staff hourly pay plus a 39% overhead charge and requires a 50% deposit before work begins ^[264]. Citywide, requests are accepted only through the online portal or by mail, not by phone or email ^[263].
- **No median time.** The City's annual reports do not publish a median number of days to close a request. This study could not find one.
- **Cost far above fees.** In 2021, the City estimated its records staff cost at about \$2.85 million (an undercount, in its own words), against about \$501,000 in fees ^[266].

Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council found in 2022 that requesters described "arbitrary and sometimes extreme fees," and that fees rarely cover full costs anyway ^[270]. The state's first Public Records Advocate called fees perhaps the single most pressing records issue ^[273].

Table 23.1 — Portland public records: volume, timeliness and fees

Metric	FY2022-23	FY2023-24	FY2024-25
Total requests created	51,397 (table total)	53,263	54,477
Police records requests	40,622	42,404	42,474
Public requests meeting the 15-business-day deadline	93%	97%	97%

Metric	FY2022-23	FY2023-24	FY2024-25
Public requests closed within 30 work days	46%	94%	97%
Fees charged or pre-paid	\$849,251	~\$430,788	\$256,064
Fees waived	\$679,238 (all)	\$652,771 (all); \$222,626 (public)	~\$139,164 (35% of potential)

Sources: City of Portland Records Requests Annual Reports FY2022-23 ^[267], FY2023-24 ^[268] and FY2024-25 ^[262]. The FY2022-23 report gives inconsistent totals (51,397 in its table vs 68,094 created); all three reports contain minor internal inconsistencies.

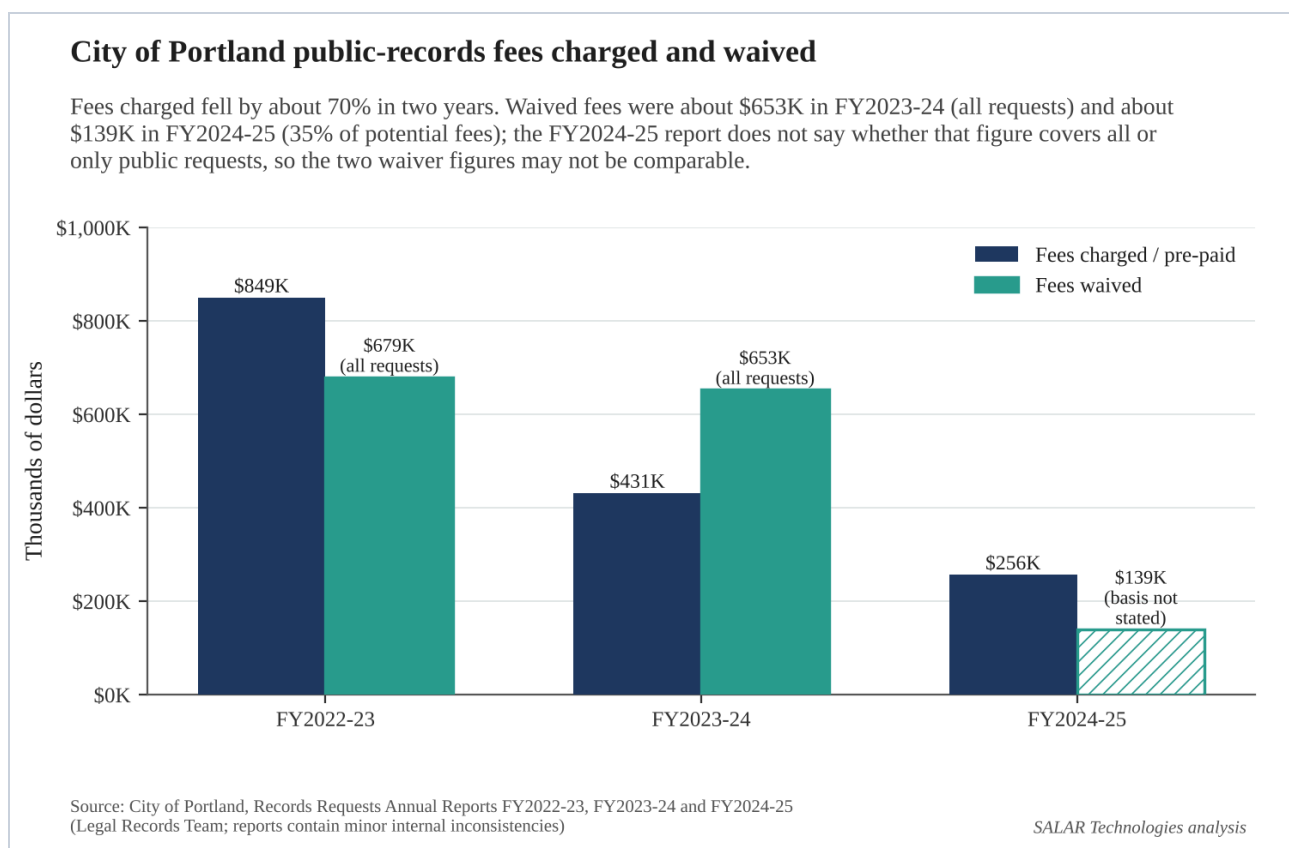


Figure 29. Public-records fees waived, FY2023-24 vs FY2024-25. Source: City of Portland Records Requests Annual Reports ^[262]

What other places show

Washington State collects the most complete cost data in the region. In 2022, 230 agencies reported 396,442 requests that cost more than \$103 million and 1.2 million staff hours. Only \$336,444 was recovered in fees ^[277]. Derived: that is a recovery rate of about 0.3%, and an average cost of about \$260 per request. In other words, Washington's fees pay for almost nothing. They mainly add paperwork.

Portland's own numbers point the same way. Derived from the 2021 testimony: about \$2.85 million in staff cost across 33,629 requests is roughly \$85 per request, and fees covered about 18% of the cost ^[266]. The average non-commercial fee was just \$11.96 per request ^[266]. Charging individuals small fees costs staff time to estimate, invoice and collect, and it discourages the very residents the law is meant to serve.

San Francisco charges 10 cents a page for copies and forbids departments from charging for locating, collecting or redacting records. "Immediate disclosure" requests must be answered within 24 hours; standard requests are due in 10 days ^[279].

New York City shows what happens without strong targets: a 94-day average to close a request (21-day median), and 62% of requests open at the end of 2024 were past due ^[280]. But its best agencies closed requests in 9 to 13 days, proving speed is possible inside the same government ^[280].

Federal agencies received a record 1.5 million FOIA requests in FY2024 ^[281]. The State Department's machine-learning pilot cut human review volume by 80% on 450,000 cables, with humans still checking quality and uncertain cases ^[283].

Table 23.2 — Records benchmarks

Jurisdiction	Volume	Speed	Cost and fees
Portland (FY2024-25)	54,477 requests	97% of public requests within 15 business days; no median published	\$256,064 fees charged; hourly rate + 39% overhead
Washington State (2022)	396,442 requests	47% estimated to take more than 5 days	>\$103M cost; \$336,444 recovered
San Francisco	—	24 hours (immediate); 10 days (standard)	10¢/page; no search or redaction fees
New York City (2024)	>85,000 via portal	94-day average, 21-day median; best agencies 9–13 days	—
State Department (ML pilot)	450,000 cables reviewed	80% less human review volume	—

Sources: Portland FY2024-25 report ^[262]; Association of Washington Cities ^[277]; SF.gov ^[279]; Reinvent Albany ^[280]; State Department ^[283].

The four-part fix

Part 1: A proactive publishing library

Most requests ask for the same kinds of records again and again. Police records were 42,474 of Portland's 54,477 requests in FY2024-25 ^[262]. In 2021, 15,712 police requests came from

commercial reporting companies ^[266]. The City should publish, on a regular schedule and in a searchable online library:

- Contracts and amendments over a set dollar amount, with vendor and value.
- Council and committee materials, calendars of senior officials, and lobbying contacts already required by law.
- Audit responses and status updates on every open recommendation.
- Standard datasets (permits, 311 requests, code enforcement, shelter capacity) on the open-data portal.
- Records released in response to any request, once released, so the next person does not have to ask (with privacy redactions kept).

Part 2: AI-assisted search and redaction, with human approval

The records workflow in Figure D04 shows how a request moves through the system. Software classifies the request, searches the shared records store (Chapter 22), and suggests responsive records and redactions. A trained staff member approves, edits or rejects every suggestion. Nothing is released without a person's sign-off, and every step is logged.

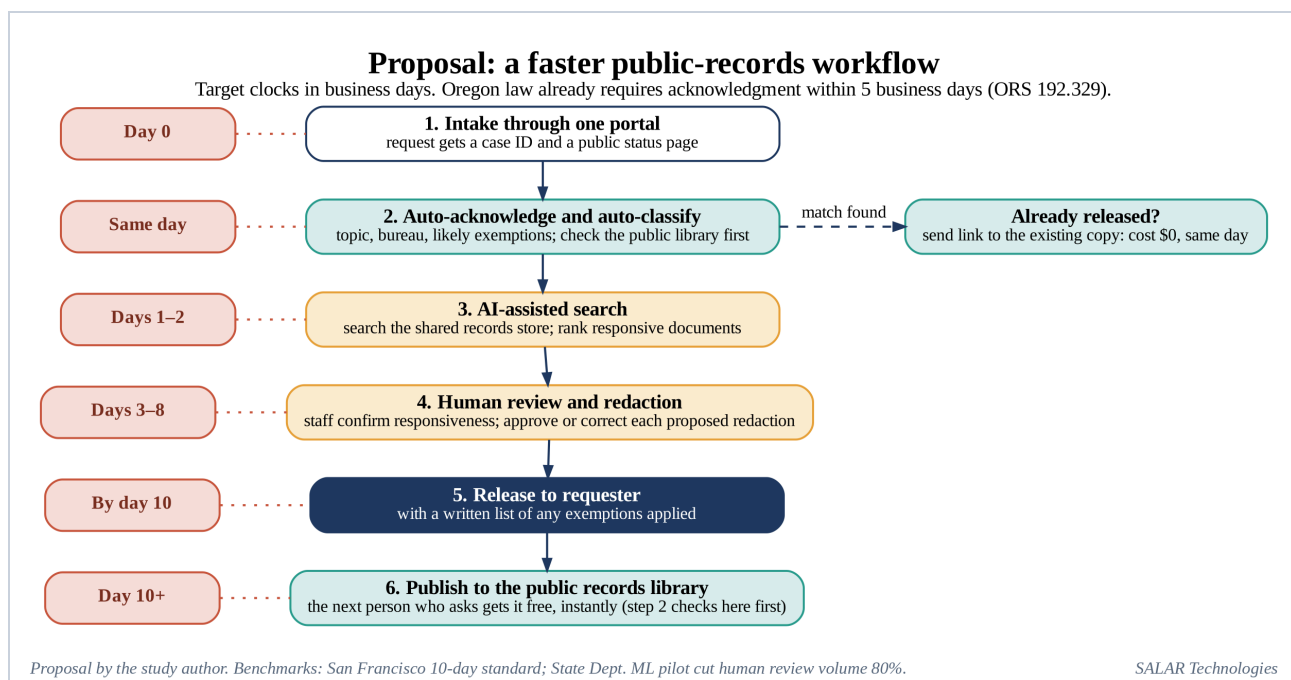


Figure 30. Proposed public-records workflow with time targets. Source: SALAR Technologies design concept (author's recommendation).

The 80% reduction reported by the State Department is a ceiling, not a promise. Its model was trained on years of consistent past decisions ^[283]. The cost model below assumes a much smaller gain.

Part 3: No fees for individuals; fair fees for commercial users

The recommended policy (the author's proposal) is:

- **Individuals, non-commercial:** no fee for search, review or redaction. Electronic copies are free. Paper copies at cost per page, on the San Francisco model.
- **News media and nonprofits:** treated as public interest by default, matching the reform concept the state Advisory Council endorsed in November 2022 ^[270]. (Portland already waived fees on 79% of closed media requests in FY2024-25 ^[262].)
- **Commercial requesters** (such as companies that resell police reports): a posted flat fee per record type, set to recover the actual cost of that record type.
- **Very large requests:** delivered in installments, with the requester able to narrow the scope. Portland has testified that where fees are lower, requesters tend to file broad requests delivered over years ^[266]. Installments manage that risk without a price wall.
- **Every fee denial or waiver denial** comes with a written reason, also in line with the 2022 state reform concept.

The City already uses discretionary waivers for public interest and hardship ^[263]. This study did not verify the full text of the fee statute (ORS 192.324), so the City Attorney should confirm whether state law permits this policy before adoption.

Part 4: Time targets, published monthly

Under state law as summarized by the City, agencies must acknowledge a request within 5 business days, and the City applies a 15-business-day deadline to complete the request or give an estimated date ^[263]. Portland already beats the legal floor. The targets below aim higher.

Table 23.3 — Proposed records time targets (author's recommendation)

Request type	Target	Benchmark
Acknowledgment	1 business day (automatic, with case ID)	State law: 5 business days
Already-published record	Same day (link sent)	SF immediate disclosure: 24 hours
Simple request (one bureau, few records)	Median 5 business days	SF standard: 10 days; NYC best agencies 9–13 days
Standard request	90% within 15 business days	Portland now: 97% of public requests meet deadline
Complex request	Written schedule within 10 business days; installments every 30 days	—
Public reporting	Monthly median and 90th-percentile days, by bureau	Washington State JLARC annual reporting

Sources: City of Portland ^[263]; SF.gov ^[279]; Reinvent Albany ^[280]; Granicus (vendor) on JLARC reporting ^[352]. Targets are the author's recommendations.

A simple cost model (SALAR estimate)

The question every budget officer will ask is: "What does this cost?" The table below gives a deliberately simple model. Every assumption is listed so the City Budget Office can replace it with real figures. The cited inputs are the FY2024-25 request volume and fee figures; everything else is a SALAR estimate.

Table 23.4 — Records modernization cost model: assumptions (SALAR estimate)

Input	Low case	High case	Basis
Annual requests	54,477	54,477	Cited: FY2024-25 report
Fees charged now	\$256,064	\$256,064	Cited: FY2024-25 report
Annual staff cost of records work, all bureaus	\$3.5M	\$4.5M	SALAR estimate: 2021 undercount of \$2.85M, adjusted for higher volume and wages
Share of staff time spent on search and review/redaction	50%	50%	SALAR estimate
Reduction in that time from AI assistance	30%	50%	SALAR estimate; well below State Dept's 80%
Fee revenue given up (non-commercial share)	\$110,000	\$110,000	SALAR estimate: 2021 non-commercial share (\$214K of \$501K, ~43%) applied to FY2024-25 fees
AI tools, licenses and training per year	\$400,000	\$200,000	SALAR estimate; lower if existing licenses cover it
Requests avoided by proactive publishing	0%	10%	SALAR estimate; low case assumes no effect

Cited inputs: FY2024-25 Records Report ^[262]; 2021 cost and fee split ^[266]. All other inputs are SALAR estimates.

Table 23.5 — Records modernization cost model: results (SALAR estimate)

Line	Low case	High case
Staff time freed by AI assistance (cost × 50% × reduction)	\$525,000	\$1,125,000
Staff time freed by fewer requests (remaining cost × avoided share)	\$0	~\$340,000
Minus: AI tools and training	−\$400,000	−\$200,000
Minus: fee revenue given up	−\$110,000	−\$110,000

Line	Low case	High case
Net annual effect	~\$15,000 (break-even)	~\$1.15M capacity freed

SALAR estimate using the assumptions in Table 23.4. "Capacity freed" means staff hours that can be redirected to faster service or reduced backlog; it is not necessarily a cash saving. The high-case request-avoidance line is 10% of the cost remaining after AI savings (\$4.5M – \$1.125M = \$3.375M).

The honest reading: in the cautious case, the City breaks about even. In the better case, it frees roughly the equivalent of a mid-size team's time. In both cases, individual residents stop paying. That is what "near-zero cost" means here: near-zero cost to the resident, and roughly neutral cost to the City.

Risks and how to manage them

- **Wrongful release of private data.** Control: human approval of every release; a second reviewer for records involving victims, juveniles or health; audit log.
- **AI misses a responsive record.** Control: staff can always search directly; test the tool on past requests with known answers before going live; publish the error rate.
- **Demand surge after fees drop.** Control: installments for large requests; the proactive library; monthly monitoring. Washington's experience shows that low fees and high volume can coexist with public reporting.
- **State law limits.** Control: City Attorney review of the fee policy; coordinate with the state Public Records Advocate, an independent office since SB 500 (2021) ^[270].

Start Monday

1. Publish the median and 90th-percentile days to close for FY2024-25, by bureau, from data the portal already holds.
2. Ask the City Attorney for a two-week legal review of a "no fee for individuals" policy.
3. Pick the 20 most-requested record types and set a publishing schedule for each.
4. Run a 90-day side-by-side test of AI-assisted search and redaction on closed past requests, measuring accuracy before any live use.
5. Accept requests by email, routed automatically into the portal with a case ID.

What this means: Portland's records team has already sped up. The next step is to remove the fee wall for residents, publish common records before anyone asks, and use AI under human

control to handle the volume. A cautious cost model suggests this can be done at roughly no net cost to the City.

A Real Ombudsman: Triage, Capacity and Published Outcomes

In brief: Complaints to Portland's Ombudsman more than doubled from 289 in 2022 to 617 in 2025, while the named team stayed at about four people. The office completed more investigations in 2025 (113) than in 2023 or 2024 and saved residents more than \$300,000, but it declined 40% of complaints and resident satisfaction fell. This chapter proposes a clear triage model, caseload targets tied to complaint growth (SALAR estimates), a written reason for every decline, published anonymized outcomes, and digital case tracking on the Data Spine.

What the Ombudsman does and what the numbers show

Portland's Ombudsman sits inside the elected City Auditor's office. Under City Code Chapter 3.77, the office may investigate any administrative act of a City agency, on complaint or on its own initiative, and may enter agency premises and request sworn testimony ^[252]. It cannot investigate elected officials, matters in litigation, or collective-bargaining grievances, and the code describes no explicit subpoena power ^[252].

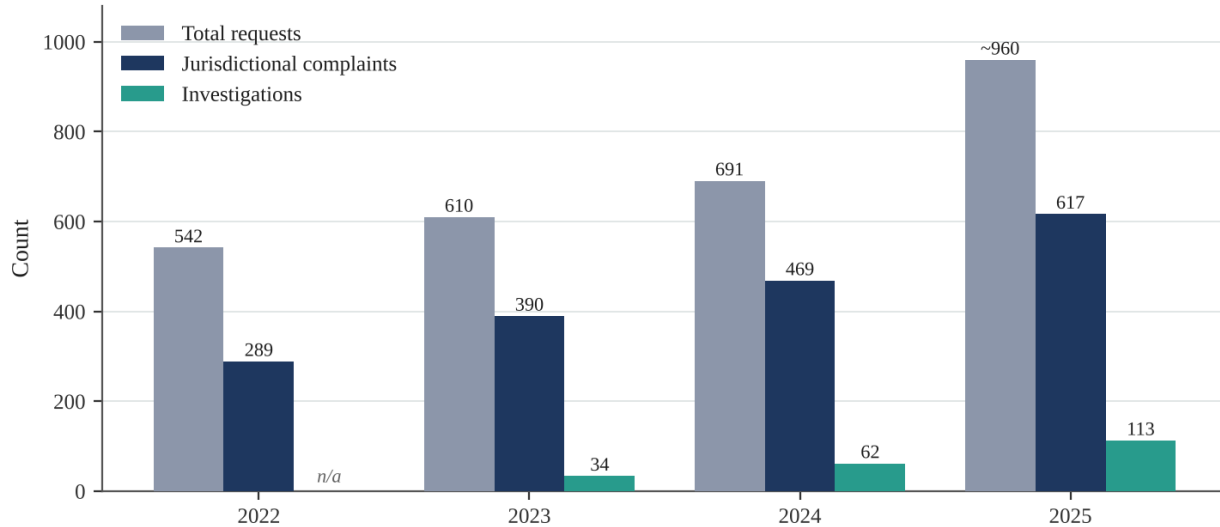
The office's results have grown. In 2025 it completed 113 investigations, substantiated 47 (42%), and recorded \$306,780 in savings for residents, up from \$140,335 in 2024 ^{[256][255]}. Most of the 2025 savings (\$248,192) came from lowered short-term rental fines ^[256].

But demand is outrunning capacity:

- In-jurisdiction complaints rose 32%, from 469 in 2024 to 617 in 2025 ^[256].
- 245 complaints (40%) were declined in 2025 ^[256].
- The share of survey respondents who would recommend the office fell from 76% to 64%, and the share who felt a sense of fairness fell from 51% to 42%. Response rates were low, about 10% and 7% ^[256].
- City acceptance of Ombudsman recommendations fell from 81% to 77% ^[256].
- 36% of complainants who answered were experiencing homelessness (about 15% in 2024), 60% were economically vulnerable, and 46% were living with a disability ^[256]. These are residents with the least ability to fight City errors on their own.

Portland Ombudsman: requests, complaints and investigations, 2022-2025

Complaints within the office's jurisdiction more than doubled from 2022 to 2025, while the staff named in its reports stayed at about four. 2025 total requests are "about 960"; 2025 investigations are those completed (123 accepted). 2022 investigation count not published ("about 15%" of eligible complaints).



Source: Portland City Auditor, Ombudsman Annual Reports for 2023 (Apr 4, 2024), 2024 (Apr 9, 2025) and 2025 (Apr 8, 2026); KGW (2022 figures)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 31. Ombudsman complaints and investigations, 2022–2025. Source: Portland City Auditor, Ombudsman annual reports ^{[256][254]}

Table 24.1 — Portland Ombudsman caseload, 2022–2025

Year	Total requests	Jurisdictional complaints	Investigations	Substantiated	Savings to residents
2022	542	289	~15% of eligible complaints	~one-third	n/a
2023	610	390	34	44%	~\$70,000
2024	691	469	62	23 (37%)	\$140,335
2025	~960	617	113 completed	47 (42%)	\$306,780

Sources: KGW on 2022 ^[253]; 2023 report ^[254]; 2024 report ^[255]; 2025 report ^[256].

How Portland compares

This study searched for a national caseload standard for ombudsman offices and did not find one. The U.S. Ombudsman Association sets out four core traits instead: independence, impartiality and fairness, a credible review process, and confidentiality ^[261]. The comparisons below use named or reported staff, so they are rough.

Table 24.2 — Ombudsman offices compared (caseload per staff is derived)

Office	Year	Intake	Staff (named or reported)	Derived load
Portland, OR	2025	617 jurisdictional complaints	~3 investigative (Ombudsman, 2 Deputies) + coordinator	~200 complaints per investigator
Iowa (state)	FY2025	6,266 cases opened	16 (2 administrative)	~450 cases per non-admin staffer
Anchorage, AK	2024	1,417 inquiries; 233 cases opened	3 named	~78 cases per staffer

Sources: Portland 2025 report ^[256]; Iowa Capital Dispatch ^[258]; Anchorage report ^[259]. Derived loads use named staff, not official FTE counts. Offices define "case" differently, so the comparison is approximate.

Two gaps stand out. Portland does not publish its average or median days to close a complaint, and it does not publish caseload per investigator. Anchorage does not publish either one ^[259]. Portland could lead by publishing both.

A triage model

Triage means sorting every complaint quickly into the right track, so that simple problems are fixed in days and serious ones get full investigation. The model below is the author's recommendation.

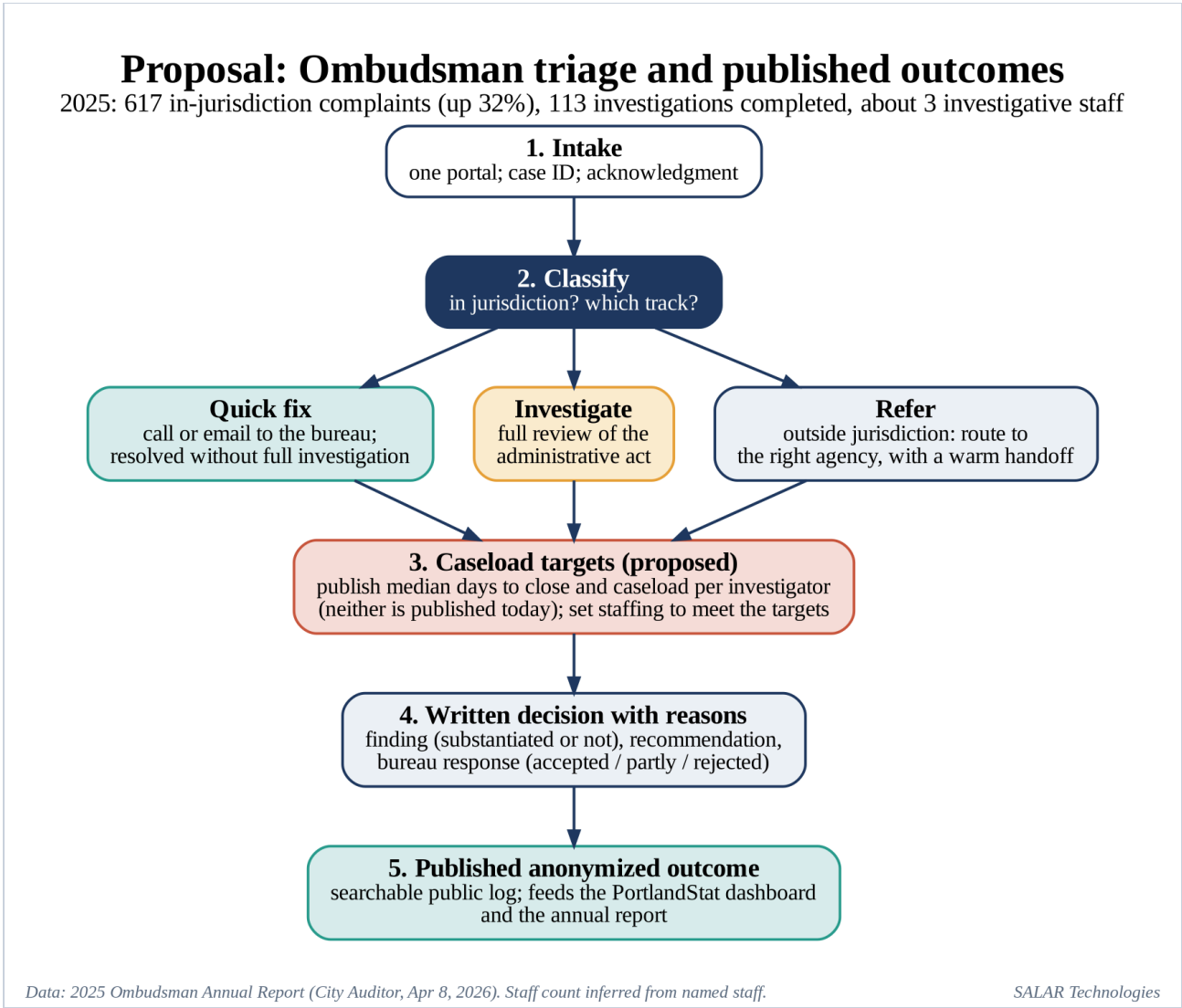


Figure 32. Proposed Ombudsman triage and published-outcome model. Source: SALAR Technologies design concept (author's recommendation).

Table 24.3 — Four-track triage (author's recommendation; time targets are SALAR estimates)

Track	Which complaints	What happens	Target time
A. Refer	Outside jurisdiction (e.g., county, state, litigation)	Warm hand-off to the right agency, with contact name; written reason	2 business days
B. Quick resolution	Clear, single-bureau problems (a missed reply, a billing error)	Call to bureau contact; fix confirmed with resident	15 business days
C. Investigation	Possible unfair, unlawful or unreasonable City action	Full investigation; findings and recommendations	Median 90 days
D. Systemic review	Pattern across many complaints (same bureau, same rule)	Own-initiative report, as allowed by PCC 3.77	6 months

Authority for own-initiative reviews: PCC 3.77 ^[252]. Tracks and times are the author's recommendations and SALAR estimates.

Track D matters most over time. In 2023, the office issued three systemic reports, including one on vessels unlawfully seized and destroyed at public docks ^[254]. One systemic fix can prevent hundreds of future complaints. The office's January 2025 follow-up found the City had still not fully implemented its 2021 recommendations on property maintenance enforcement ^[256], which shows why follow-up must be tracked in public.

A written reason for every decline

When 40% of complaints are declined, residents deserve to know why. The recommendation is simple: every decline gets a short written letter or email stating (1) the reason, using a standard list (outside jurisdiction, in litigation, already resolved, insufficient information, lower priority given capacity); (2) where else the resident can go; and (3) how to ask for reconsideration. The standard reasons are counted and published each quarter.

The state's Public Records Advisory Council endorsed the same idea for records-fee waiver denials in 2022: written reasons for every denial ^[270]. The principle applies equally here.

Capacity tied to complaint growth

The current approach, where staffing changes only through the annual budget fight, cannot keep pace with growth like 2025's 32%. The recommendation is a standing rule: Ombudsman investigative staffing is reviewed each year against a published caseload target, and the Auditor's budget request shows the math.

Table 24.4 — Caseload-based staffing model (SALAR estimate)

Input	Value	Basis
Jurisdictional complaints, 2025	617	Cited: 2025 annual report
Assumed growth, 2026	15%	SALAR estimate (half of 2025's 32% growth)
Projected complaints, 2026	~710	Derived
Target load per investigator	150 complaints/year	SALAR estimate (between Anchorage ~78 and Portland ~200)
Investigators needed	~4.7, round to 5	Derived
Current investigative staff (named)	~3	Cited (named staff, not FTE)
Gap	~2 investigators	Derived
Cost per added investigator (salary + benefits)	\$130,000–\$160,000	SALAR estimate; City should replace with actual classification cost

Input	Value	Basis
Added annual cost	\$260,000– \$320,000	Derived from SALAR estimate

Cited inputs: 2025 Ombudsman Annual Report ^[256]; Anchorage report ^[259]. The Ombudsman's budget could not be verified for this study. All targets and costs are SALAR estimates.

For comparison, the office reported \$306,780 in direct savings to residents in 2025 alone ^[256]. That figure is not a cash return to the City, but it shows that added capacity has measurable value for the residents it serves.

Publish anonymized outcomes

The office already publishes substantiation rates, recommendation acceptance and dollar savings, which is better than many peers. The next step is a searchable public log of closed cases, with names and identifying details removed, showing: bureau, issue type, track, days to close, outcome, and whether the bureau accepted the recommendation. Over time, this log becomes a map of where the City most often treats residents unfairly, and it can feed the PortlandStat reviews in Chapter 27.

Digital tracking

On the Data Spine (Chapter 22), an Ombudsman complaint can carry the same case ID as the original 311 report or permit file. That lets the office see the full history at once, and lets residents check status online. The audit log protects confidentiality, which the U.S. Ombudsman Association lists as a core trait ^[261]: Ombudsman case notes are visible only to Ombudsman staff, and every access is logged.

Independence

Under current code, the Ombudsman is an at-will employee who can be removed by the Auditor ^[252]. Because the Auditor is independently elected, this already gives the office distance from the Mayor and Council. As an option for Council and the Auditor to weigh, a fixed term or a written for-cause standard for removal would strengthen the independence that the U.S. Ombudsman Association treats as essential. The trade-off is less flexibility for the Auditor to manage the office.

Start Monday

1. The Ombudsman publishes median days to close for 2025, by track, from existing case records.
2. The office adopts a standard decline letter with reasons and referral contacts.

3. The Auditor's next budget request includes a caseload-based staffing table like Table 24.4, using actual costs.
4. The Ombudsman joins the Phase 1 case ID pilot (Chapter 22).
5. Each bureau names a single Ombudsman liaison with a 5-business-day response promise.

What this means: Portland's Ombudsman is doing more work than ever, but complaints are growing faster than staff. A clear triage system, a written reason for every decline, staffing tied to caseload, and a public outcomes log would turn the office into a real early-warning system for the whole City.

Homelessness: From Spending to Results

In brief: The tri-county region raised \$1.3 billion through the SHS tax by late 2025, and SHS has placed thousands of households in housing. Yet the January 2025 count found 12,034 people homeless across the three counties, partly because of a change in counting methods. Houston, by contrast, reports a reduction of more than 60% since 2011 after bringing dozens of agencies into one coordinated system. This chapter proposes five operating changes: a high-quality by-name list, a single command structure across City, County and Metro, outcome-based contracts, real-time bed availability, and a public decision on SHS reform before the tax sunsets in 2030. SHS reform is presented as options with trade-offs, not as a single answer.

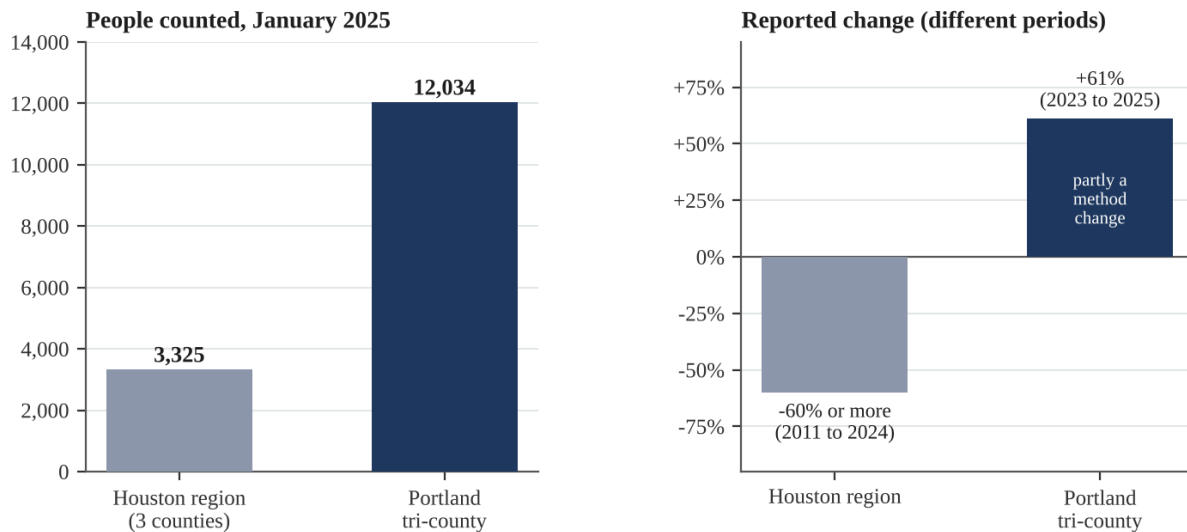
Where the region stands

- **The count.** The January 2025 Point-in-Time count found 12,034 people homeless in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, up 61% from 2023, with 38% sheltered. Portland State University says new administrative data sources added to the count, so part of the increase is a measurement change, not only growth ^[178].
- **The money.** The SHS measure raised \$1.3 billion since 2021, and Metro says more than 8,700 people were placed into housing by SHS, as reported by Willamette Week ^[202].
- **The flow.** In Year 3 of SHS, about 15 households entered the homeless system for every 10 that exited to housing ^[183].
- **What works.** 92% of Year 3 permanent supportive housing placements stayed housed at 12 months ^[183]. Multnomah County placed 2,599 people in permanent housing in FY2025, 2.4 times its goal ^[186].
- **The squeeze.** Multnomah's FY2025 report says its carryover will be fully spent by the end of FY2026 and that collections are well below expectations ^[186]. Its FY2027 work plan calls the year a "restricted funding year" and plans 575 placements, against 1,613 households placed in FY2025 ^[197].

In short: housing placements work and people mostly stay housed, but more people are entering homelessness than leaving it, and money is getting tighter. The region cannot spend its way out. It has to manage its way out.

Homelessness: Houston region vs. Portland tri-county

In January 2025 the Portland tri-county count was about 3.6 times Houston's (ratio derived). Houston reports a 60%+ decline since 2011; the Portland area reported +61% from 2023 to 2025, partly from a change in how Multnomah counts. Counting methods and regions differ; per-capita rates not calculated (no population figures in research).



Source: Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County (2024 and 2025 PIT results); CBS News, Apr 14, 2024; PSU HRAC 2025 Tri-County PIT (Nov 4, 2025)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 33. Homelessness change: Houston region vs Portland tri-county. Counting methods differ. Sources: Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County ^[237]; Portland State University ^[178]

Fix 1: A high-quality by-name list

A by-name list is a real-time list of every person experiencing homelessness in a community, by name, with their needs and housing status. It is the core tool of Built for Zero, a national effort run by Community Solutions. Rockford, Illinois, used by-name lists to become the first U.S. community to reach "functional zero" for both veteran (2015) and chronic (2017) homelessness ^[241]. Bergen County, New Jersey, was certified in 2017 as the first U.S. community to end chronic homelessness ^[242].

Multnomah County already keeps a by-name list. It had 14,361 people on it in January 2025, 6,275 of them unsheltered ^[182]. But in April 2022, the county scored only 16 of 28 points on the Built for Zero scorecard, with its chronic by-name list still in development ^[184]. This study found no later score.

Recommendation: make by-name list quality a public, measured goal.

- Publish the current Built for Zero scorecard result and set a date to reach a "quality" list.
- Extend the list across all three counties so a person who moves from Gresham to Beaverton stays on one list.

- Report monthly inflow (newly homeless), outflow (housed) and "inactive" exits separately, so the public can see whether the system is gaining or losing ground.

Fix 2: A single command structure

Today, responsibility is split. The City funds shelters and enforces camping rules. Multnomah County runs the Homeless Services Department. Metro collects and distributes SHS money. Washington and Clackamas counties run their own programs. The Metro Auditor's 2024 SHS audit title said it plainly: shared oversight reduces transparency and accountability ^[48]. A data-sharing agreement required by the 2020 intergovernmental agreement had not been finalized as of January 2025 ^[204].

Houston faced the same problem. Before The Way Home, there were more than 20 separate homelessness grants, and housing one person could involve 10 agencies and five grants ^[240]. The region brought "dozens" of agencies under one system ^[238], and reports a reduction of more than 60% since 2011, with more than 32,000 people housed since 2012 ^[237]. Houston's results are not flawless: its 2025 count showed unsheltered homelessness up 15.8% even as the sheltered count fell ^[239].

Recommendation (options for elected leaders to choose among):

Table 25.1 — Options for a single command structure

Option	How it works	Pros	Cons
A. Joint operations center	City, County, Metro staff co-located; one daily operating picture; one director with delegated authority	Fast to set up; no charter changes	Authority still split; relies on goodwill
B. Regional compact with one accountable executive	New IGA naming one lead executive and one budget for shared functions (shelter, outreach, by-name list)	Clear accountability; closest to Houston model	Requires all governments to cede some control; renegotiation takes time
C. Metro-led regional authority	Metro, as SHS funder, sets regional standards and runs shared data	Aligns money with standards	Counties may resist ceding control; Metro is not a service provider

Options are the author's analysis. Context: Metro Auditor ^[48]; Smart Cities Dive ^[240].

Whichever option is chosen, the first step is the same: finalize the data-sharing agreement so all partners see one set of numbers.

Fix 3: Outcome-based contracts

Multnomah's homeless services department coordinates more than 70 providers ^[188]. The County Auditor found in 2023 that some contractors worked without signed contracts and went unpaid for months ^[219]. The County reported that 80% of invoices were being paid on time after that audit ^[219].

Shelter outcomes vary widely by type. Since July 2024, 43% of exits from county alternative shelters and 42% from motel shelters went to housing, compared with 12% from congregate shelters and 16% overall; more than 35% returned to homelessness ^[166]. Costs vary too: about \$60 a bed per night for congregate shelter and \$141 for motel shelter ^[166].

Recommendation: pay providers partly for results, while protecting their stability.

- **Base payment** (for example, 85–90% of the contract) covers operations and is paid on time, every time, with a public on-time payment rate.
- **Outcome payment** (the remaining 10–15%) is tied to a few clear measures: exits to permanent housing, still housed at 6 and 12 months, and returns to homelessness.
- **Adjust for difficulty.** A provider serving people with severe disabilities should not be penalized for slower exits. Targets are set by population served.
- **Publish results by provider and shelter type**, so the public sees cost per successful exit, not just cost per bed.

The split percentages above are the author's planning suggestion, not a tested standard. Pilot with willing providers first.

Fix 4: Real-time bed availability

In February 2025, the county had about 2,500 shelter beds at 92% occupancy ^[166]. When nearly every bed is full, outreach workers and police need to know, in the moment, where the open beds are. This also matters legally: Portland's 2024 camping ordinance ties enforcement to whether shelter is available ^[221], and Oregon's HB 3115 (2021) requires camping rules to be "objectively reasonable" as to time, place and manner ^[217]. Reporting in November 2025 said "reasonable shelter" was left undefined and decided case by case ^[224].

Recommendation: every publicly funded shelter updates its open beds at least twice daily into one shared system on the Data Spine. Outreach teams see it on a phone. The public sees a daily total (not locations, for safety). Every camping enforcement contact records whether a bed was offered and whether it was accepted. In December 2025, about 3,000 sites were evaluated and 610 encampments removed, but the data did not show how many people were offered or moved into shelter ^[227]. That gap can be closed.

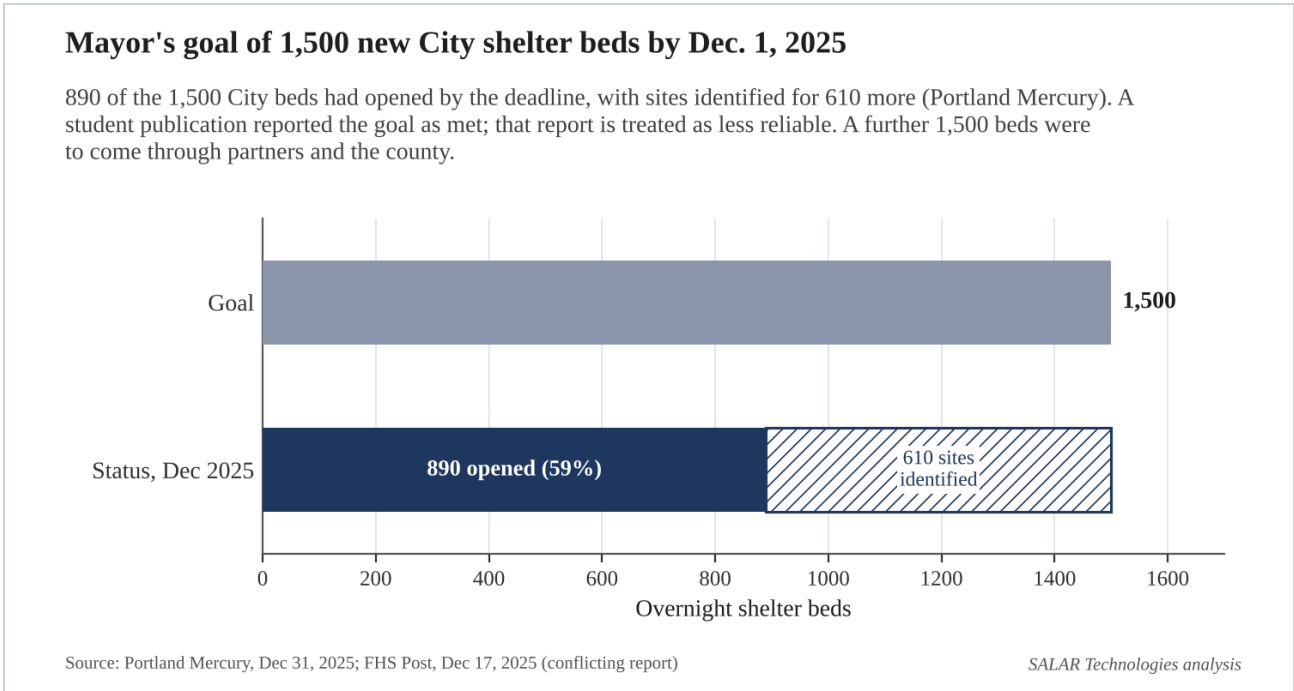


Figure 34. Mayor's shelter-bed goal vs beds opened by December 2025. Source: Portland Mercury ^[227]. A student publication reported the goal as met; this study relies on the Mercury figure.

Fix 5: Decide the future of the SHS tax in public

The SHS tax is a 1% tax on personal taxable income above \$125,000 (single) or \$200,000 (joint), plus 1% of profits for businesses with gross receipts above \$5 million. It expires in 2030 ^[58]. Starting in tax year 2026, the personal thresholds are indexed to Portland-area inflation ^[206]. In 2025, Metro councilors chose not to ask voters to renew the tax after polling showed tepid support ^[164]. As of August 2026, renewal before 2030 was described as a near-term priority ^[203].

This study does not take a position on whether the tax should be renewed, changed or ended. That is for voters. It lays out the main reform options that have been proposed or discussed, with their trade-offs, so the decision can be made on evidence.

Table 25.2 — SHS reform options and trade-offs (options only; no recommendation on a vote)

Option	What it would do	Possible benefits	Possible drawbacks	Where it came from
1. Sunset review with published scorecard	Independent review of outcomes, costs and data quality before any renewal vote	Voters decide on results; answers Metro Auditor's call to plan for the 2030 sunset	Takes time; review must be truly independent	Metro Auditor, Jan 2024
2. Let the tax expire in 2030	No renewal	Lowers combined tax burden on high earners and larger businesses	Loses a large share of regional homeless-services funding;	Discussed in public debate

Option	What it would do	Possible benefits	Possible drawbacks	Where it came from
			services built on SHS would need other funding or would close	
3. Extend with lower rate	Extend (e.g., to 2050) and cut personal rate to 0.9% then 0.75%	Stable long-term funding; lower rate	Locks in a tax for decades; less revenue than today	Business–provider agreement, Nov 2024; Metro President proposal, Jan 2025
4. Modest rate cut within Metro's own authority	Cut to 0.95%; cut Metro admin share from 5% to 2.5%	Quick; signals responsiveness	Small effect on taxpayers; less for services and oversight	Clackamas County proposal, Dec 2024
5. Allow housing construction	Let SHS fund "deeply affordable" housing, not only services	Adds housing supply, which services alone cannot create	Spreads money thinner; capital projects take years; changes what voters approved in 2020	Metro COO, Jul 2024; Nov 2024 agreement
6. Credit fairness for out-of-state taxpayers	Clarify or extend the credit for taxes paid to another state, and review how non-resident commuters are treated	Fairer treatment of people taxed by two jurisdictions; fewer disputes	Lowers revenue; design is complex; requires legal review	Revenue Division policy, Aug 2023 (see below)
7. Independent oversight body	Single oversight board with authority over data and reporting	Addresses "shared oversight" finding	Another layer unless it replaces existing committees	Metro COO, Jul 2024; Nov 2024 agreement

Sources: Metro Auditor ^[48]; Willamette Week on Nov 2024 agreement ^[211]; Willamette Week on Metro President proposal ^[196]; Clackamas proposal ^[199]; Portland Tribune on Metro COO ^[193]; Metro SHS Oversight Committee packet ^[195]; Revenue Division credit policy ^[154]. Pros and cons are the author's analysis.

A note on the out-of-state credit

The City Revenue Division's policy, adopted in August 2023, gives a credit for taxes paid to another state to Metro and Multnomah County *residents* whose income is also taxed by another state ^[154]. The tax also applies to non-residents on income earned inside the district ^[153]. As written, the policy covers residents, not non-resident commuters; this study could not verify whether commuters receive relief beyond apportioning their income. Option 6 asks Metro to publish a clear answer and, if it chooses, to review the design. Any change would reduce revenue and should be costed first.

Revenue risk any option must face

SHS revenue is volatile. FY2023-24 collections came in about 6% below forecast ^[161], and Metro warned in March 2025 that variance could approach \$50 million and recommended raising the stabilization reserve from 10% to 15% ^[47]. About 14% of FY2024 revenue was late payments for earlier tax years, and Metro said it could not tell whether that reflected timing or high earners moving away ^[161]. Whatever voters decide, the program should budget for ongoing services from a conservative revenue base and fund one-time items from surpluses.

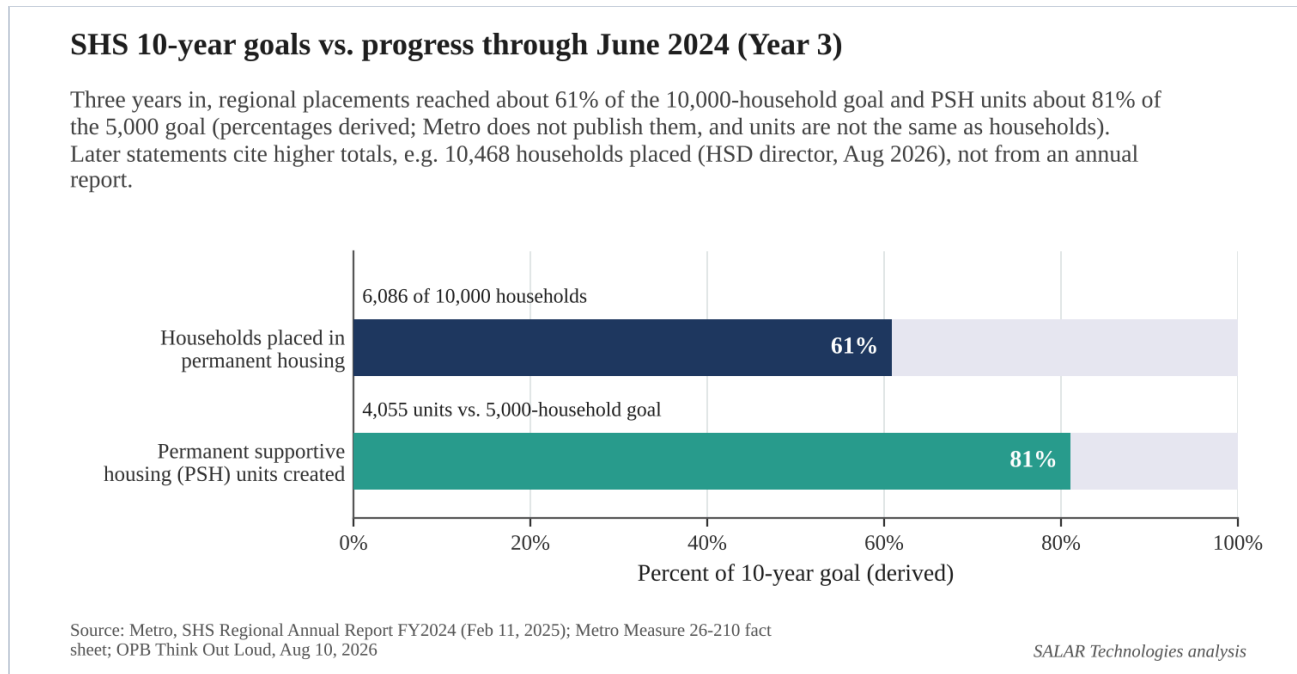


Figure 35. SHS 10-year goals vs progress through June 2024. Source: Metro SHS Regional Annual Report FY2024 ^[183]. Units are not households; percentages are derived.

Start Monday

1. City, County and Metro leaders sign a one-page commitment to finalize the SHS data-sharing agreement within 90 days.
2. The County publishes its current Built for Zero scorecard result.
3. Every City-funded shelter begins reporting open beds twice daily; every camping enforcement contact records whether a bed was offered.
4. The County and City publish exits to housing and returns to homelessness by shelter type and provider each quarter.
5. Metro commissions an independent pre-sunset review of SHS outcomes, to be published before any renewal referral.

What this means: The region has money and some proven tools, such as supportive housing with high retention. What it lacks is one list, one command, one set of numbers and contracts that pay for results. Those are management fixes that do not depend on how voters decide the future of the SHS tax.

Talent and Speed: People Who Can Build a Modern City

In brief: Every fix in this plan depends on people. Public employers take far longer to hire than private ones, and Portland's own audits show that slow training and high turnover are costly: about 46% of 911 trainees left, at a cost of about \$3.4 million. This chapter proposes hiring-time targets based on federal and county benchmarks, a small Portland Digital Service team, fellowships and apprenticeships that bring younger technologists into City service, and a program to capture the knowledge of long-serving staff before they retire.

Why hiring speed matters

A good candidate who waits four months for an offer usually takes another job. Benchmarks show how large the public–private gap can be:

- The federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sets an 80-day time-to-hire goal. In FY2024, mission-critical federal jobs took 72.1 to 94.6 days: contracting 72.1, human resources 75.5, and IT 94.6 ^[353].
- A vendor study by NEOGOV, a public-sector hiring software company, found an average public-sector time to hire of 119 days, versus about 36 days in the private sector (citing SHRM). Its sample covered 999 organizations ^[354]. This is vendor data from about 2018; no newer non-vendor benchmark was found.
- Fairfax County, Virginia, reported 68 days in 2017 and 78 days in 2022. It used video interviewing, electronic signatures, emailed timelines to candidates, and apprenticeships to improve ^[355].

This study did not find a published City of Portland time-to-hire figure. Publishing one is the first step.

Table 26.1 — Hiring speed benchmarks

Employer	Measure	Days	Year	Source type
Private sector (SHRM via NEOGOV)	Average time to hire	~36	~2018	Vendor
Public sector (NEOGOV sample)	Average time to hire	119	~2018	Vendor
Federal (OPM goal)	Target	80	Current	Government (GAO OIG)
Federal mission-critical jobs	Actual	72–95	FY2024	Government (GAO OIG)
Fairfax County, VA	Average	78	2022	Government

Employer	Measure	Days	Year	Source type
City of Portland	Average or median	Not found	—	—

Sources: GAO OIG ^[353]; NEOGOV (vendor) ^[354]; Fairfax County ^[355].

What slow pipelines cost Portland

Portland's own records show the cost of slow pipelines in two critical services:

- **911 dispatch.** Only 2 of 39 trainees (5%) certified within the 18-month target; the average was more than 26 months. An 18-month training cycle costs about \$137,000 in wages and benefits, and about 46% of trainees left, at a cost of about \$3.4 million ^[135]. The same audit credits the bureau with cutting vacancies from 33 to 6 ^[135], which shows the problem can be fixed.
- **Police.** In 2025 the Police Bureau received 1,801 applications, the most since 2020, hired 72 sworn members, and made a net gain of 27 ^[97]. A City Administrator report estimated the cost to hire and train one officer at about \$345,000, as reported by KATU ^[102]. Derived: 1,801 applications for 72 hires is roughly 25 applicants per hire, which suggests the bottleneck is in screening, testing and training, not in interest.

Recommendation 1: Hiring-time targets

Table 26.2 — Proposed City hiring targets (author's recommendation)

Step	Target	How
Publish current time to hire, by job family	Within 60 days	Report from existing HR system
Job posting to offer, general roles	Median 60 days in Year 1; 45 days in Year 2	Standard interview panels; pre-approved pay ranges; e-signatures
Job posting to offer, technology roles	Below the federal IT figure (94.6 days) in Year 1	Skills-based assessment instead of degree screens
Candidate communication	Status update every 10 business days	Automated emails (Fairfax model)
Critical public-safety roles	Published monthly pipeline: applied, tested, hired, in training, certified, left	PortlandStat review (Chapter 27)

Benchmarks: GAO OIG ^[353]; Fairfax County ^[355]. Targets are the author's recommendations.

Recommendation 2: A Portland Digital Service team

The Data Spine, the records workflow and PortlandStat all need a small, skilled team that works across bureaus. Two federal teams pointed the way. According to secondary summaries, which this

study could not independently verify against primary sources, the U.S. Digital Service was founded in 2014 after the HealthCare.gov launch failure, and the General Services Administration's 18F team, also founded in 2014, completed more than 450 projects before it was eliminated in March 2025 ^{[356][357]}. The lesson for Portland is twofold: a small expert team can deliver a great deal, and a team with no stable charter can be dissolved quickly.

Recommended design (author's proposal):

- **Size:** 8–12 people in Year 1: product managers, designers, engineers, a data analyst, a records and privacy specialist, and a procurement specialist.
- **Reports to:** the City Administrator, so it can work across all bureaus.
- **Charter:** adopted by Council ordinance, with a mission, a published project list, and an annual public report. This protects it from being dissolved on short notice.
- **Method:** small releases, tested with real residents and staff; reuse existing licenses before buying; open data formats.
- **First three projects:** the case ID pilot (Chapter 22), the records AI test (Chapter 23), and the PortlandStat dashboard (Chapter 27).

Recommendation 3: Fellowships and apprenticeships — bringing in young talent

Government needs a steady flow of early-career technologists who see public service as a good first job, not a last resort. Portland has strong local sources: Portland State University, Oregon's community colleges, and one of the country's major technology regions in the Silicon Forest ^[64]. The region has also seen large technology-sector layoffs in 2024 and 2025 ^{[104][105]}. Experienced technologists are available in the local labor market, and some may welcome public-service roles.

Table 26.3 — Talent pipeline programs (author's recommendation)

Program	Who	Length	What they do
Portland Civic Tech Fellowship	Recent graduates and early-career technologists	1–2 years, paid	Join the Digital Service team on live projects
Mid-career Tour of Service	Experienced private-sector engineers, data scientists, program managers	6–18 months	Lead specific builds (e.g., records AI, dashboard)
IT and data apprenticeships	Community college students; current City staff changing careers	12–24 months, paid	Earn while learning; path to permanent City roles (Fairfax used apprenticeships)
AI skills for all staff	Every City employee	Short online courses	Safe, effective use of AI tools under City policy

Program designs are the author's recommendations. Fairfax apprenticeship reference ^[355].

Training does not need to be expensive. InnovateUS, a free public-sector AI training program, is used by 25 states, according to the New Jersey governor's office ^[345]. San José's AI upskilling program became the basis for a GovAI Coalition training playbook ^[349]. In Pennsylvania's pilot, 48% of participants had never used ChatGPT before, yet more than 85% reported a positive experience ^[344]. Boston found 60% of its employees using AI at least weekly by spring 2025, and 78% wanting to learn more ^[350]. Current staff are willing to learn; they need training and clear rules.

Recommendation 4: Capture knowledge before it retires

Long-serving employees carry knowledge that is written down nowhere: why a rule exists, which system holds which records, who to call at the County. When they leave, that knowledge leaves too. The 911 audit showed how costly it is to rebuild skills once they are lost: an 18-month dispatcher training cycle costs about \$137,000 in wages and benefits per trainee ^[135]. This study did not find a Citywide figure for how many City employees are eligible to retire in the next five years. The City's human resources office should publish one.

Recommended steps:

- Each bureau lists its roles where one or two people hold critical, undocumented knowledge.
- Those employees, before retirement, spend paid time recording procedures, decision rules and contacts in the shared records store, with help from the Digital Service team.
- Pair each with a successor for at least three months where the budget allows.
- Use AI tools to turn recorded interviews and documents into searchable how-to guides, reviewed by the expert before publishing internally.
- Offer retirees short-term, part-time "emeritus" contracts to coach successors.

Working with unions and procurement rules

Hiring changes, fellowships and new job classifications touch union contracts and civil service rules. They should be negotiated, not imposed. Washington State's directive on generative AI for represented employees ^[351] and Pennsylvania's Labor-Management Collaboration Group ^[344] are models. Fellowship roles should be designed to add capacity, not to replace represented positions.

The City's own auditors found it falls short of its goal of directing 20% of technology contracts to historically disadvantaged businesses and does not track the data ^[151]. The Digital Service team can help here by breaking large technology purchases into smaller, well-defined contracts that local and smaller firms can realistically bid on, and by tracking who wins them.

Start Monday

1. Human Resources publishes current median time to hire, by job family, and the number of employees eligible to retire within five years.
2. The City Administrator drafts a Digital Service team charter for Council adoption.
3. The City enrolls staff in a free public-sector AI training course.
4. Human Resources and union leaders open talks on a fellowship and apprenticeship framework.
5. Each bureau director names its top five "single point of knowledge" roles.

What this means: Portland cannot modernize with slow hiring and knowledge that walks out the door. Published hiring targets, a small chartered digital team, a pipeline of young and mid-career technologists, and deliberate knowledge capture are low-cost steps that make every other fix possible.

Performance Management: PortlandStat

In brief: Baltimore's CitiStat showed two decades ago that a monthly, data-driven review of every major bureau can cut overtime, speed services and change habits, at modest cost. Portland joined the What Works Cities initiative in 2016 but this study found no record of certification. This chapter proposes "PortlandStat": a monthly public cycle where the City Administrator and bureau directors review a short list of outcome measures, agree on fixes, and report back the next month. It includes a candidate list of measures, with the current baseline where one could be found.

The model: CitiStat and its descendants

Baltimore expanded its CitiStat program to the largest city agencies in June 2000. Eighteen agencies met every two weeks with the mayor's team to review their data. The city reported \$20.9 million saved from reduced overtime, absenteeism cut by as much as half in many agencies, and graffiti removal quadrupled. The CitiStat room cost \$20,000 to equip, and the annual budget was \$400,000^[358]. Two cautions apply: those figures come from an undated case document from the early 2000s, and this study found no recent independent evaluation. CitiStat itself was modeled on the New York Police Department's CompStat^[358].

The approach has spread. By February 2025, 104 cities had earned What Works Cities certification for using data in decisions^[341]. Phoenix and Tempe were upgraded to the top Platinum level in January 2024^[359]. No Oregon city appeared in the February 2025 announcement^[341].

Table 27.1 — Performance management benchmarks

Model or city	Start	Result or certification
Baltimore CitiStat	2000	\$20.9M overtime savings reported; \$400K annual budget
New York City	—	What Works Cities Platinum (Jan 2024)
Phoenix; Tempe	—	Upgraded to Platinum (Jan 2024)
Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, Raleigh, Reno and others	—	Newly certified (Feb 2025)
Portland	Joined Oct 2016	No certification found

Sources: ICMA^[358]; What Works Cities, Jan 2024^[359] and Feb 2025^[341]; City of Portland^[360]. Portland's status should be confirmed with Results for America.

How PortlandStat would work

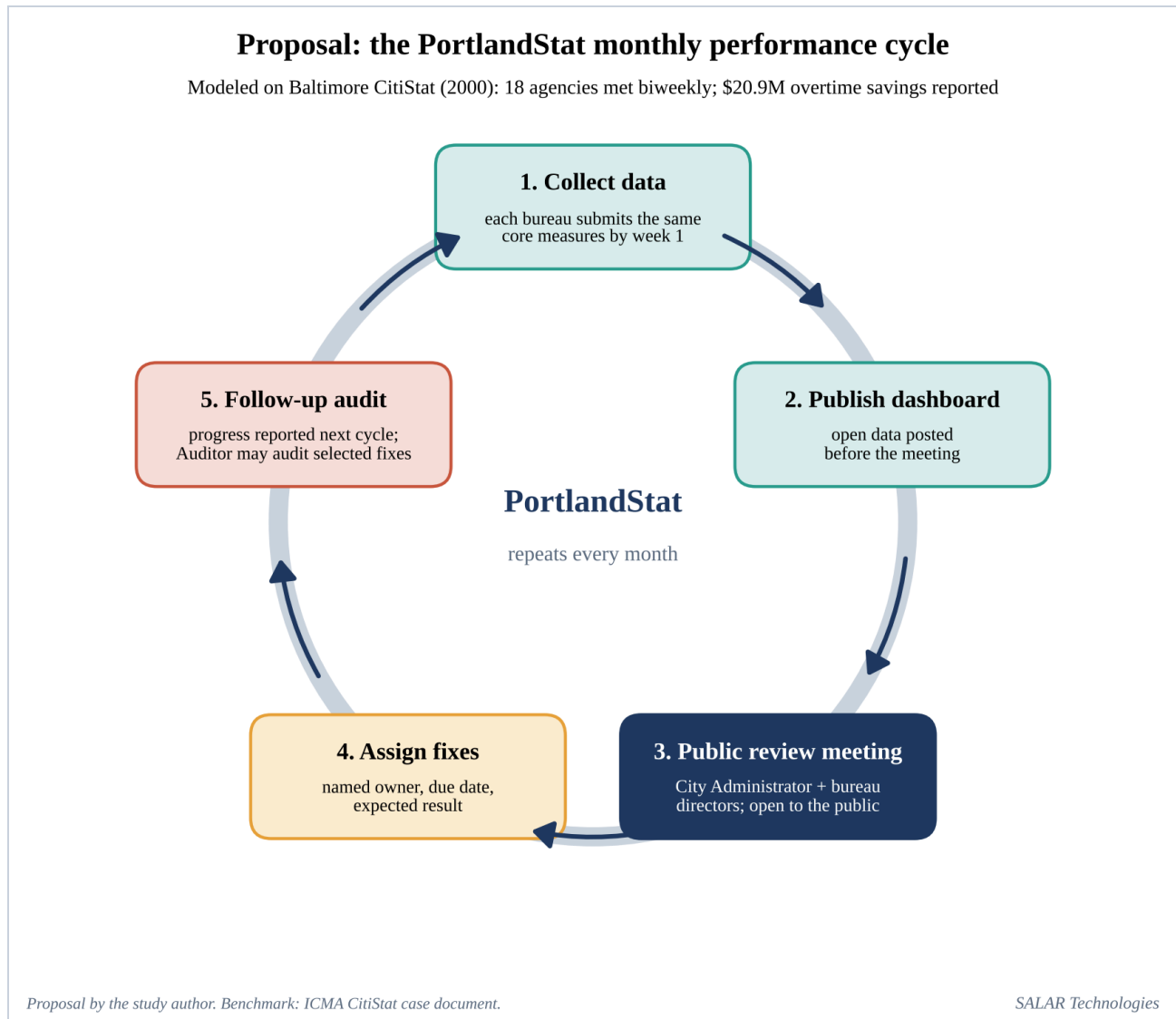


Figure 36. The proposed PortlandStat monthly performance cycle. Source: SALAR Technologies design concept (author's recommendation), adapted from the CitiStat model described by ICMA ^[358].

The monthly cycle has six steps:

- 1. Week 1 — Data refresh.** Measures update automatically on the Data Spine dashboard (Chapter 22).
- 2. Week 2 — Analysis.** A small PortlandStat team (two to three analysts in the City Administrator's office) flags measures that are off target and prepares questions.
- 3. Week 3 — Review meeting.** The City Administrator meets with two or three bureau directors. Each meeting is 60 to 90 minutes, focused on three or four measures. Meetings are recorded and posted.

4. **Week 3 — Agreed actions.** Each action has an owner and a due date, logged in the audit log.
5. **Week 4 — Public report.** A one-page summary per bureau is posted: measures, trend, actions taken.
6. **Next month — Follow-up.** Every review starts with last month's actions: done, late or dropped.

Two design choices matter. First, the reviews are about solving problems, not blaming people; directors should arrive with their own diagnosis. Second, the Council and Auditor get the same data at the same time as the executive, which respects the separation of powers in the new charter.

Candidate measures

The list below is deliberately short. Each measure is an outcome residents can feel. Where this study found a current baseline, it is shown with a source. Where it did not, the cell says "baseline not found," and setting that baseline is the first PortlandStat task.

Table 27.2 — Candidate PortlandStat measures (targets are the author's recommendations)

Area	Measure	Current baseline	Proposed target
Public records	% of public requests completed within 15 business days	97% (FY2024-25)	Keep ≥97%; add median days
Public records	Median days to close, by bureau	Baseline not found	Simple requests: 5 business days
Ombudsman	Median days to decision, by triage track	Baseline not found	See Table 24.3
Ombudsman	% of recommendations accepted by bureaus	77% (2025)	≥85%
Audit follow-through	% of audit recommendations implemented (5-year look-back)	49% (2024 report)	Reach peer average (64%) within 2 years
Homelessness	Unsheltered people (by-name list, monthly)	6,275 on BNL (Jan 2025)	Downward trend; set with County
Homelessness	Shelter beds online and occupancy	~2,500 county beds at 92% (Feb 2025)	Real-time daily reporting
Homelessness	Exits from shelter to permanent housing	16% overall (since Jul 2024)	Raise by shelter type; publish by provider
Emergency response	911 calls answered within 15 seconds	Below 90% national standard (Apr 2026)	≥90%
Emergency response	Police response to high-priority calls	~20 minutes vs 7-minute goal (2026)	Downward trend toward goal
311	Median time to resolve a 311 service request	Baseline not found	Set by request type

Area	Measure	Current baseline	Proposed target
311	Resident awareness of 311	58.6% (2024 survey)	≥70% by next survey
Permits	Median days from application to residential permit issue	Baseline not found	Set and publish by permit type
Talent	Median time to hire	Baseline not found	See Table 26.2
Vendors	% of invoices paid on time (homeless services)	80% (County-reported, 2023)	≥95%

Baseline sources: FY2024-25 Records Report ^[262]; 2025 Ombudsman report ^[256]; 2024 Audit Impact Report ^[152]; Clear Impact BNL ^[361]; OPB on shelter ^[166]; 911 audit ^[135]; KATU on police response ^[102]; 2024 Insights Survey ^[251]; OPB on JOHS audit ^[219].

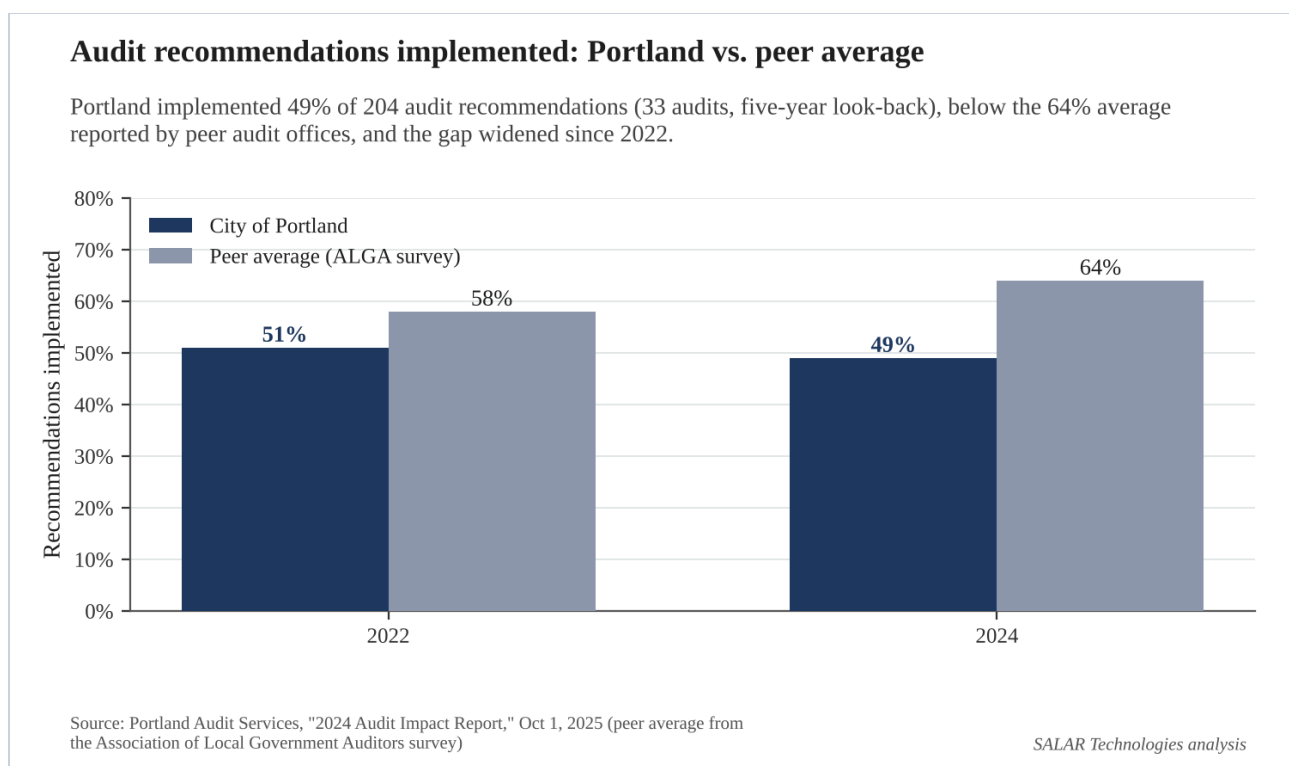


Figure 37. Audit recommendations implemented: Portland vs peer average. Source: Portland Audit Services, 2024 Audit Impact Report ^[152]

Audit follow-through as a standing PortlandStat item

Since January 2025, the City Administrator, not a Council member, has been responsible for responding to audit recommendations ^[118]. That makes PortlandStat the natural place to track them. The auditors listed audits with recommendations still not fully implemented, going back to 2018, including private stormwater, short-term rentals, building permit review, emergency management, collections and technology purchasing ^[152]. Each open recommendation should appear on the

dashboard with an owner, a planned date and its current status. Every month, one PortlandStat session should review the oldest open items.

Cost (SALAR estimate)

Table 27.3 — PortlandStat annual cost (SALAR estimate)

Item	Assumption	Annual cost
PortlandStat analysts	3 analysts at ~\$140,000 fully loaded each	~\$420,000
Dashboard and data tools	Reuse existing BI licenses; some data engineering from Digital Service team	~\$50,000
Meeting room and recording	Use existing City facilities	~\$0–\$20,000
Total		~\$470,000–\$490,000

SALAR estimate. For scale, Baltimore reported a \$400,000 annual CitiStat budget around 2000–2004 ^[358]. Analyst cost is an assumption; the City should substitute actual classification costs.

Risks

- **Gaming the numbers.** When a measure becomes a target, people may chase the number, not the result. Control: pair each measure with a quality check (for example, records closed fast *and* appeals rate), and let the Auditor spot-check data.
- **Meeting fatigue.** Control: short meetings, few measures, and a rotating schedule so each bureau appears about once a quarter unless a measure is in trouble.
- **Political misuse.** Control: publish everything; keep the format the same regardless of who is in office; give Council and the Auditor equal access.

Start Monday

1. The City Administrator announces PortlandStat and names a lead analyst.
2. Bureaus submit baselines for every "baseline not found" measure in Table 27.2 within 60 days.
3. The first PortlandStat session covers audit follow-through, the measure with the clearest public baseline.
4. The City requests a What Works Cities assessment and sets a target certification level.

What this means: A monthly public review of a few outcome measures, at roughly the cost of a small team, is one of the most proven tools in city management. Portland already has several

of the baselines it needs. It needs the habit.

Tax Fairness and Competitiveness: The Options

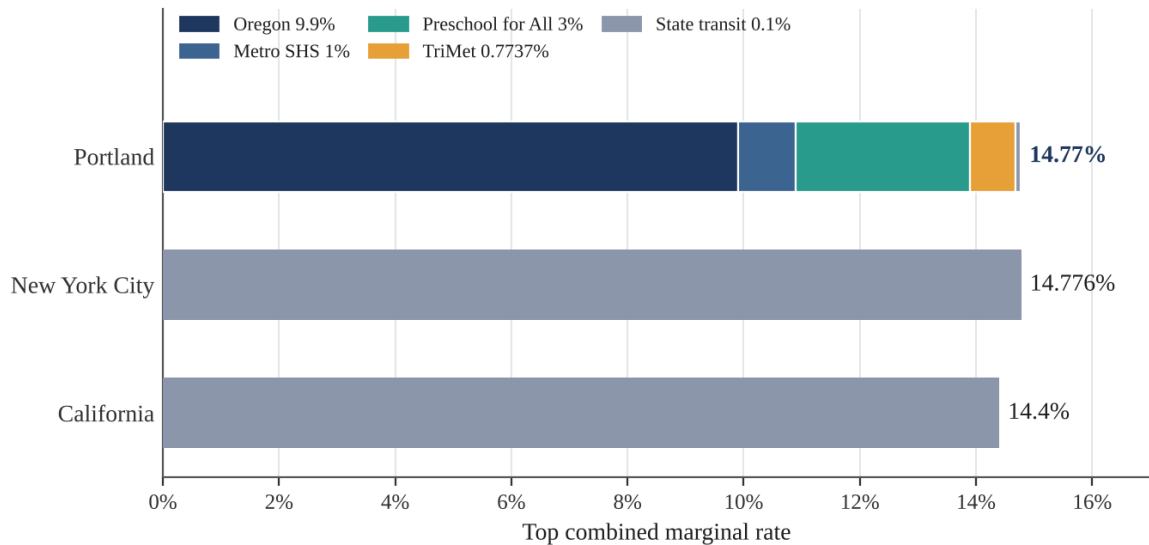
In brief: Portland's top combined income-tax rate on high earners is among the highest of any U.S. city, roughly equal to New York City's. Researchers disagree about how much this has pushed residents and income out of Multnomah County. This chapter does not argue for or against any tax or any ballot measure. It lays out practical options, from simpler administration to rate and design changes, with their pros and cons, so elected officials and voters can weigh them.

The facts

The Tax Foundation calculated in 2024 that Portland's combined top marginal rate on wages is 14.77%. That stacks Oregon's 9.9% top rate, the Metro SHS tax (1%), Multnomah County's Preschool for All tax (1.5% and 3% tiers), the TriMet payroll tax (0.7737%) and the state transit tax (0.1%). It compared this with 14.776% in New York City and 14.4% in California ^[34]. A Portland Central City Task Force advisory group reported in January 2025 that Portland has the second-highest top rate among U.S. cities, at 13.9% for single filers over \$250,000, versus New York City's 14.8% ^[35]. The two figures differ because they count different taxes and income levels.

Top combined marginal income-tax rate on wages

Portland's stacked top rate (14.77%) is effectively tied with New York City's and above California's. Tax Foundation, June 2024. A January 2025 city task force using a different method put Portland at 13.9% vs. NYC 14.8%. A scheduled 2026 Preschool for All increase was not verified.



Source: Tax Foundation, "Portland Taxes," Jun 25, 2024; KOIN, Jan 19, 2025 (Central City Task Force)

SALAR Technologies analysis

Figure 38. Top combined marginal income-tax rate: Portland vs NYC vs California. Source: Tax Foundation ^[34]

Residents notice. In the Portland Metro Chamber's December 2024 poll, 68% of tri-county voters said taxes were too high for the services they receive ^[108].

Does it drive people away? The evidence on both sides

Table 28.1 — Research on high-earner migration (presented without a verdict)

Study	Finding	Caveats stated
Conway, Iselin and Rork, "Mult-No-More?" (Apr 2026)	After Preschool for All took effect, net income in-migration to Multnomah fell about 3 percentage points; about \$1.4B in income left; Clark County, WA was the main destination	Authors call these upper-bound estimates; COVID, protests and other factors are confounders; effect may be fading by 2024
Common Sense Institute (Jul 2026), IRS 2022–23 data	Oregon net income loss of \$476M, with households earning \$200K+ accounting for \$403M	Arrivals and departures were nearly equal in number
Mary C. King, PSU (May 2026)	Multnomah households earning over \$500K grew from 2,541 (2019) to 7,695 (2024)	Survey microdata (ACS)
Erik Dean, for a City councilor (Jun	Preschool for All returns rose 16.5% (2021–2023) while county population fell 1.3%	Prepared for an elected official

Study	Finding	Caveats stated
2025)		

Sources: Conway, Iselin and Rork via OPB ^[36]; Common Sense Institute ^[37]; King, PSU ^[38]; Dean ^[39].

The honest summary is that the research is mixed. What is not in dispute is that SHS revenue is volatile and has run below forecast, and that Metro could not tell whether late payments reflected timing or high earners moving away ^[161]. Governor Kotek convened a Prosperity Council in January 2026 ^[30], which is a natural forum for these questions.

Options

The options fall into three groups. Group 1 changes how taxes are run, not how much is owed. Group 2 changes design details. Group 3 changes rates or duration. Each carries trade-offs.

Table 28.2 — Tax options with pros and cons (options only; no position on any vote)

Group	Option	Pros	Cons
1. Administration	One online filing portal and one account for all City, County and Metro income-based taxes	Less paperwork; fewer errors and penalties	IT cost; requires agreement among governments
1. Administration	Publish a combined-burden calculator so any resident or employer can see total local taxes	Transparency; informs public debate	Small staff cost
1. Administration	Publish collection cost per dollar collected, for each tax, every year	Accountability for City Revenue Division costs (~\$9–10M/yr for SHS)	None significant
1. Administration	Apply Citywide collection standards recommended by the Auditor in 2022	Fairer treatment of people who owe; recommendation still open	Requires coordination across bureaus
2. Design	Clarify and, if chosen, extend credit for taxes paid to another state (SHS and PFA)	Reduces double taxation; fewer disputes	Less revenue; design complexity; legal review needed
2. Design	Index all local thresholds to inflation (SHS personal thresholds already indexed from 2026)	Prevents "bracket creep" pulling in middle-income households over time	Slightly lower revenue growth (Metro estimated about 1.2% for SHS in FY2026-27)
2. Design	Mandatory sunset reviews with published outcome scorecards before any local tax renewal	Ties continuation to results	Review cost; risk of politicized reviews

Group	Option	Pros	Cons
3. Rate or term	Reduce one or more local rates (e.g., SHS proposals of 0.9%–0.75%)	Improves competitiveness; responds to poll results	Less funding for services; may require cuts elsewhere
3. Rate or term	Let a tax expire at its sunset	Lowers burden	Loss of funding for programs built on it
3. Rate or term	Renew or extend a tax unchanged	Funding stability for providers	Keeps Portland's top rate among the highest in the U.S.

Sources: Tax Foundation ^[34]; SHS collection costs ^[158]; collections audit ^[156]; credit policy ^[154]; indexing ^[206]; rate proposals ^[211]. Pros and cons are the author's analysis.

Group 1 options do not change anyone's tax bill and could be adopted regardless of one's view on tax levels. The Auditor found in 2022 that Business License Tax penalties escalate from 5% to 20% plus 10% annual interest, and that the City sometimes referred people who did not owe the Arts Tax to collections ^[156]. In 2023, the Auditor reported no progress on Citywide collection standards ^[157]. Fixing that is a matter of fairness, not tax policy.

Start Monday

1. The Revenue Division publishes collection cost per dollar for each tax it administers.
2. City, County and Metro finance staff publish a joint combined-burden calculator.
3. Metro publishes a plain-language explanation of how non-resident commuters are treated under the SHS tax and the other-state credit.
4. The City Administrator sets a date to implement the Auditor's 2022 collections recommendations.

What this means: Reasonable people disagree about how high local taxes should be. Fewer will disagree that taxes should be easy to understand, cheap to collect, fair to people taxed twice, and reviewed against results before they are renewed.

The Roadmap: 30, 90, 180 and 365 Days

In brief: This chapter turns Chapters 21 to 28 into one schedule. It assigns each step an owner, a deliverable and a success measure, in four stages: 30 days, 90 days, 180 days and one year. It closes with a cost-benefit table. All costs are SALAR estimates, sized to a City that adopted its FY2026-27 budget facing a General Fund gap of about \$170 million, so the plan leans on reusing existing tools, small teams and pilots.

The budget reality

Any plan must fit the money. Portland adopted an \$8.5 billion budget for FY2026-27 and described a General Fund gap of about \$170 million, roughly 19%. About 140 positions were discontinued and about 100 employees laid off ^[137]. The proposed budget showed General Fund expenses of \$906 million against revenues of \$743 million ^[142].

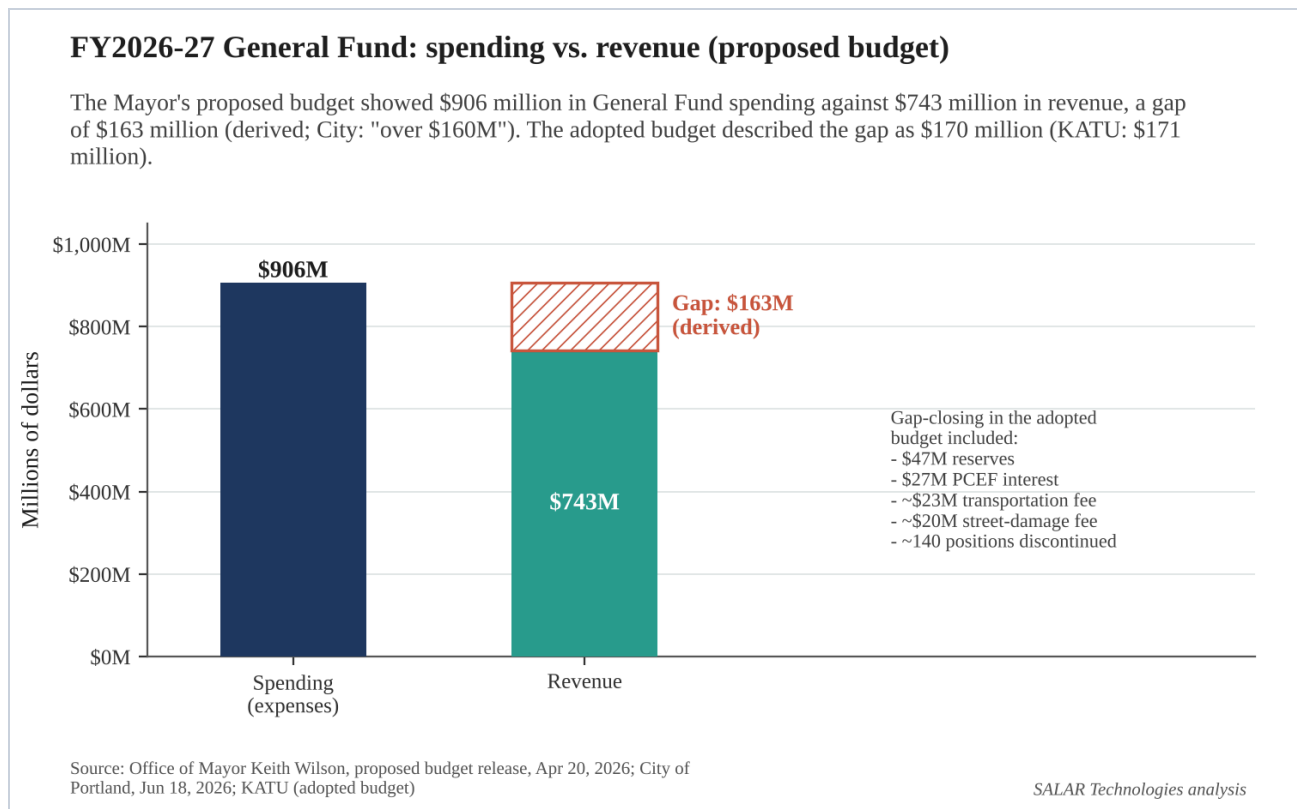


Figure 39. FY2026-27 General Fund: spending vs revenue (proposed). Source: Office of Mayor Wilson ^[142]

That is why the roadmap starts with steps that cost little or nothing: publishing data the City already has, adopting free frameworks, and checking existing software licenses before buying anything.

Larger items are pilots first, scaled only when results are proven.

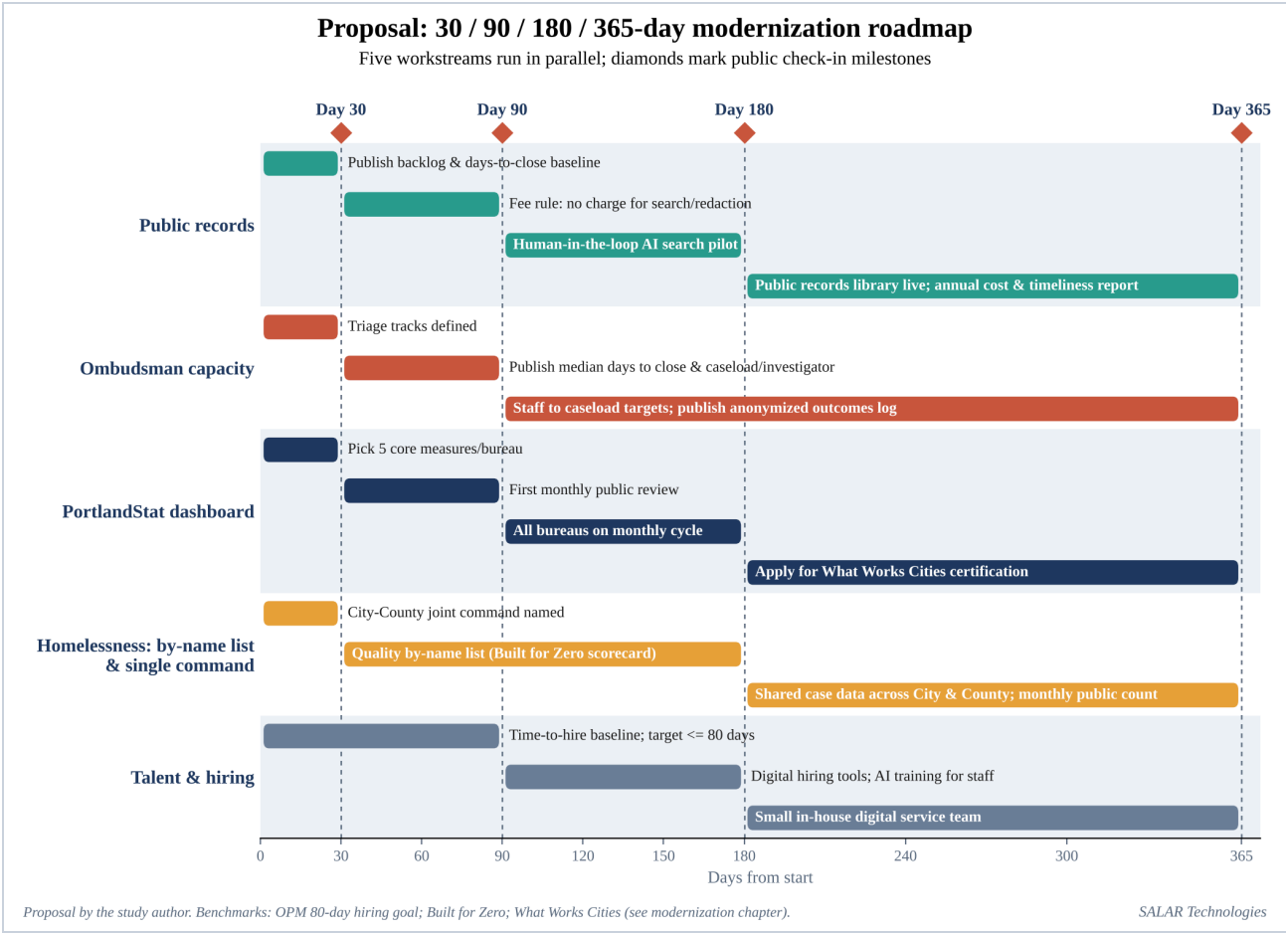


Figure 40. The 30/90/180/365-day modernization roadmap. Source: SALAR Technologies (author's recommendation).

The plan

Table 29.1 — First 30 days: decide and publish

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
Adopt four operating principles	City Administrator	Memo to all bureaus	Issued; posted publicly
Systems and license inventory	Chief Technology Officer	List of systems holding resident records and all licenses	Report delivered to Council
Adopt NIST AI RMF; form AI review committee	City Administrator; City Attorney	Administrative rule; committee charter	First meeting held
Publish records median days to close	City Attorney's records team	FY2024-25 median and 90th percentile by bureau	Posted online

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
Publish Ombudsman median days to close	Ombudsman	2025 medians by complaint type	Posted online
Publish time to hire and retirement eligibility	Human Resources	Median days by job family; 5-year retirement count	Posted online
Legal review of no-fee records policy	City Attorney	Written opinion	Delivered
Name PortlandStat lead	City Administrator	Appointment	Named

Table 29.2 — By 90 days: pilots start

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
Case ID pilot launched (311, Transportation, Ombudsman)	Digital Service team (interim lead: CTO)	One case number shared across three units	Residents can check status online
Records AI test on closed past requests	Records team + CTO	Accuracy report	Error rates measured and published
Proactive publishing schedule for top 20 record types	Records team + bureaus	Published schedule; first 5 types live	Links live on City site
No-fee policy for individuals drafted	City Attorney; Auditor	Draft ordinance or rule	Introduced to Council
Ombudsman standard decline letter and triage tracks	Ombudsman	Letter template; track definitions	In use for all new complaints
SHS data-sharing agreement	City, County, Metro executives	Signed agreement	Signed
Shelter beds reported twice daily	County HSD; City shelter program	Live shared count	All funded shelters reporting
Digital Service team charter	City Administrator; Council	Ordinance	Adopted
First PortlandStat session (audit follow-through)	PortlandStat lead	Recorded meeting; one-page report	Posted within 7 days
Labor-management AI group	Human Resources; unions	Charter	First meeting held

Table 29.3 — By 180 days: first results

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
Public dashboard with first 10 measures	Digital Service team; PortlandStat	Live dashboard with downloadable data	Updates monthly without manual rebuild
Records AI-assisted search live (human approval on all releases)	Records team	Live workflow	Median days down; zero unreviewed releases

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
No-fee policy for individuals in effect	Council; records team	Adopted policy	Fee complaints down; monthly volume reported
Ombudsman public outcomes log	Ombudsman	Searchable anonymized log	Live; updated monthly
Outcome-based contract pilot	County HSD with willing providers	3–5 pilot contracts	Signed; baseline measures set
By-name list quality plan	County HSD; Washington and Clackamas counties	Published scorecard and target date	Scorecard posted
First civic tech fellows and apprentices start	Human Resources; Digital Service team	First cohort	Cohort on staff
Hiring target: median 60 days	Human Resources	Monthly hiring report	Trend toward target

Table 29.4 — By 365 days: scale what worked

Action	Owner	Deliverable	Success measure
Case ID expanded to Permitting, Parks, Water, Environmental Services	Digital Service team	Expanded system	Auditor review of Phases 1–3 complete
All PortlandStat measures with baselines and targets	PortlandStat lead	Full measure set (Table 27.2)	No "baseline not found" cells remain
Audit recommendation implementation rate improved	City Administrator	Next Audit Impact Report	Rate above 49%, on path to 64%
Ombudsman staffing tied to caseload	Auditor; Council	Budget request with caseload table	Considered in budget
Independent pre-sunset review of SHS	Metro	Published review	Released before any renewal referral
Single command structure decision	City, County, Metro elected leaders	Choice among options in Table 25.1	Decision adopted
What Works Cities assessment	City Administrator	Application submitted	Submitted
Annual public report on this plan	City Administrator	Report to Council and residents	Published

Tables 29.1–29.4 are the author's recommendations. Owner titles are descriptive; actual City titles may differ.

Cost-benefit summary (SALAR estimates)

The table below collects the cost and benefit estimates from earlier chapters, plus estimates for items not yet costed. Every dollar figure is a SALAR estimate unless it carries a citation. Benefits are

listed as measurable results, not as claimed savings, except where a cited benchmark supports a range.

Table 29.5 — Cost-benefit summary, first year (SALAR estimates)

Item	Year-1 cost (SALAR estimate)	Key assumptions	Expected benefit
Operating principles, publishing existing data	~\$0 (staff time)	Done within existing roles	Public baselines for all measures
Digital Service team (8–12 people)	\$1.2M–\$1.8M	~\$150,000 fully loaded per person; some roles filled by reassignment	Delivers case ID, records AI and dashboard without large vendor contracts
Data Spine Phases 0–3	\$300,000–\$800,000	Reuse existing licenses; low end if AI features are already licensed	One case ID; one search; one dashboard
Records modernization (net)	~\$0 to ~\$1.15M (net freed capacity)	Table 23.4 assumptions	No fees for individuals; faster median times
Ombudsman capacity (+2 investigators)	\$260,000–\$320,000	Table 24.4 assumptions	Fewer declines; faster decisions; 2025 savings to residents were \$306,780 (cited)
PortlandStat team	\$470,000–\$490,000	Table 27.3 assumptions	Monthly accountability; Baltimore reported \$20.9M overtime savings (cited, early 2000s)
Fellowships and apprenticeships (first cohort of 6–10)	\$400,000–\$900,000	Paid at entry-level rates; some grant or partner funding possible	Talent pipeline; lower vacancy
Staff AI training	~\$0–\$50,000	Free public-sector courses; staff time	Safe AI use under policy
Homelessness operations (BNL quality, bed reporting, outcome contracts)	Mostly within existing County and SHS budgets	Reallocation, not new spending	Measured exits to housing; real-time beds
Total new City cost, year 1	~\$2.6M–\$4.4M before records savings; ~\$1.5M–\$4.4M after	Sum of rows above	About 1.5%–2.6% of the ~\$170M General Fund gap, before savings (derived)

All costs are SALAR estimates. Cited benefit figures: 2025 Ombudsman report ^[256]; ICMA on Baltimore CitiStat ^[358]. Gap figure: City of Portland ^[137]. Comparison with the General Fund gap is for scale only; the costs would add to, not reduce, that gap unless offset by savings or reallocation.

How to pay for it

The author's suggestions, in order of preference:

1. **Reallocate before adding.** Several Digital Service roles can be filled by moving existing technology staff whose projects are paused.
2. **Use savings from avoided duplicate purchases.** The 2024 technology audit identified a duplicative \$700,000 tool ^[151]. A Citywide technology purchasing review, overseen by the Digital Service team, can prevent repeats.
3. **Seek partner funding** for fellowships and training from philanthropy, universities and federal workforce programs.
4. **Phase spending** so that each stage is funded only if the previous one met its success measure.

Governance of the plan itself

- The City Administrator owns delivery and reports progress monthly through PortlandStat.
- The Council receives a quarterly briefing and adopts the annual report.
- The City Auditor reviews the plan's results independently after year one.
- Residents see every deliverable and measure on the public dashboard.

What this means: The roadmap is designed for a city with no spare money. It starts with free steps, tests before it scales, and puts every deliverable on a public dashboard. A first-year cost of a few million dollars (SALAR estimate) is small next to an \$8.5 billion budget, but it should still be earned step by step.

How Residents Can Hold the System to Account

In brief: A plan only works if people check that it is carried out. Portland residents already have strong tools: independent audit reports, open public meetings, public records requests, the Ombudsman, public testimony, and resident surveys. This chapter is a practical guide to using each one well. It closes with a message about why a city that works matters to all of Oregon, not just to Portland.

Six tools every resident already has

1. Read the audit reports, and ask what happened next

The elected City Auditor publishes performance audits and an annual Audit Impact Report that tracks whether the City fixed what the auditors found ^[246]. The 2024 report showed 49% of recommendations implemented ^[152]. Metro and Multnomah County have their own elected auditors, and the Oregon Secretary of State audits state agencies.

How to use it:

- Pick one audit that affects your neighborhood (streets, parks, housing, 911).
- Find its recommendations and the bureau's response.
- Ask your councilors, in writing, for the current status of each open recommendation and the planned completion date.

2. Attend or watch public meetings

Under the new charter, Portland has 12 councilors, three from each of four districts ^[114]. That means every resident has three councilors who represent their district directly. Council and committee meetings are public. Metro's SHS oversight committees and county boards also meet in public.

How to use it: learn who your three district councilors are; sign up for agendas on topics you care about; watch the budget sessions each spring, when the most important choices are made.

3. File public records requests, and share what you get

Any person may request City records. Requests go through the City's online portal or by mail ^[263]. Under state law as summarized by the City, the City must acknowledge a request within 5 business days ^[263]. The City offers discretionary fee waivers for requests in the public interest and for financial hardship ^[263].

How to use it:

- Be specific: name the record type, the bureau and the date range.
- If a fee seems too high, ask for a public-interest waiver in writing and explain why.
- If you hit a dispute you cannot resolve, the state's independent Public Records Advocate offers dispute help; the office handled more than 850 such requests between 2018 and 2022 ^[270].
- Share what you receive, so the next person does not have to ask.

4. Use the Ombudsman

If a City bureau has treated you unfairly, the Ombudsman can investigate, and the office secured \$306,780 in savings for residents in 2025 ^[256]. City code prohibits reprisals against people who complain ^[252].

How to use it: first give the bureau a chance to fix the problem and keep a record of your contacts. Then file with the Ombudsman, attaching dates, names and documents. Remember the limits: the office does not handle elected officials, matters in litigation, or union grievances ^[252].

5. Testify, briefly and with evidence

Public testimony at Council, County and Metro meetings is most effective when it is short, specific and backed by a source. Good testimony names one problem, cites one fact (an audit finding, a dashboard number), and asks for one action with a date.

A two-minute testimony template

1. "My name is ___ and I live in District ___."
2. "The [audit / report] dated ___ found ___." (one fact, with source)
3. "This affects my neighborhood because ___."
4. "I ask the Council to ___ by ___ [date], and to report back publicly."

6. Watch the data, and answer the surveys

The City's Portland Insights Survey, run by the City Budget Office with Portland State University, asks residents about services and priorities. The 2026 survey was fielded June to August 2026, with results expected in early 2027 ^[249]. Multnomah County publishes homelessness data on public scorecards ^[182]. If PortlandStat (Chapter 27) is adopted, the dashboard becomes the single place to check whether the City is keeping its promises.

How to use it: if you receive a survey invitation, answer it; each response adds to the picture. Bookmark the dashboards and ask about any measure that stops updating.

Table 30.1 — Resident accountability toolkit

Tool	Best for	First step
Audit reports	Systemic problems in a bureau	Ask councilors for the status of open recommendations
Public meetings	Budget and policy choices	Learn your three district councilors; sign up for agendas
Records requests	Facts the City has not published	Specific request through the online portal
Ombudsman	Unfair treatment of you by a bureau	Document contacts; file with dates and names
Testimony	Pressing for a specific action	One problem, one fact, one ask, one date
Surveys and dashboards	Tracking results over time	Answer the survey; check the dashboard monthly

Sources: Portland Audit Services ^[246]; City of Portland records overview ^[263]; PCC 3.77 ^[252]; City Budget Office ^[249].

Holding the system to account, without tearing it down

Accountability works best when it is steady, specific and fair. The same yardstick should apply to every official and every party. The record in this study includes real progress alongside real problems: 911 wait times cut from 77 seconds to 18 ^[135]; shootings down 29% in 2025 ^[97]; records deadlines met for 97% of public requests ^[262]; and 92% of new supportive-housing tenants still housed after a year ^[183]. Residents who credit what works earn a stronger hearing when they press on what does not.

Closing: a city that works for everyone

Portland is not all of Oregon. The state has 36 counties and 241 incorporated cities ^[3], and Portland's roughly 640,600 residents are about 15% of the state's people ^[3]. But Portland sits at the center of the three Metro-area counties, which together hold about 42.9% of Oregon's people ^[2]. When Portland's systems fail, the cost does not stay inside city limits. It shows up in state budgets, in regional taxes, and in the attention that the Governor and Legislature cannot give to wildfire, rural health care, schools and the other needs of the other 35 counties.

The opposite is also true. A Portland that answers its residents quickly, publishes its data, fixes what its auditors find and moves people from the street into homes would be a model for every city in Oregon. Most of the tools in this plan are not expensive and not partisan: one case number, a public dashboard, a written reason for every decision, a monthly review of results, and a person checking every machine's work.

The goal is not a perfect city. It is a stable one, where people can trust that government will do what it says, where disagreements are settled with evidence and in public, and where a resident in Burns, Coos Bay or Pendleton can look at Portland and see a city working for the whole state. That kind of steady, peaceful, competent government is within reach. It starts on a Monday.

What this means: Residents already hold the tools to keep this plan honest: audits, meetings, records, the Ombudsman, testimony and data. Used steadily and fairly, they can help Portland become a city that works for everyone who lives there, and for the Oregonians in all 36 counties who depend on it.

Appendix — Glossary

Term	Meaning
Metro	The elected regional government for the Portland area, covering urban parts of Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties.
SHS	Supportive Housing Services: the regional tax approved by voters in May 2020 (Measure 26-210) to fund homeless services.
PIT count	Point-in-Time count: a one-night count of people experiencing homelessness, required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
By-name list	A continuously updated list of each person experiencing homelessness, used to track individual outcomes.
Ombudsman	An independent office that investigates residents' complaints about city government. In Portland it sits inside the elected City Auditor's office.
BOLI	Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, which enforces wage and civil rights laws.
General Fund	The part of the City budget paid from general taxes, which pays for police, fire, parks and most core services.
Ranked-choice voting	Voters rank candidates in order of preference; Portland began using it for city offices in 2024.
Kicker	Oregon's rule that returns surplus state revenue to taxpayers when collections exceed the forecast by 2% or more.
PortlandStat	The performance-management cycle this study proposes: monthly public metrics with follow-up.

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