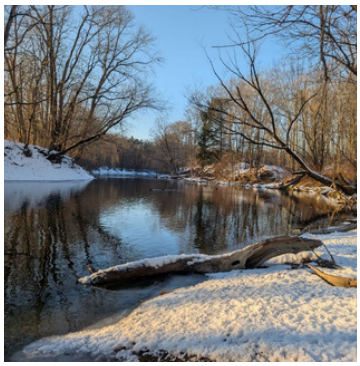
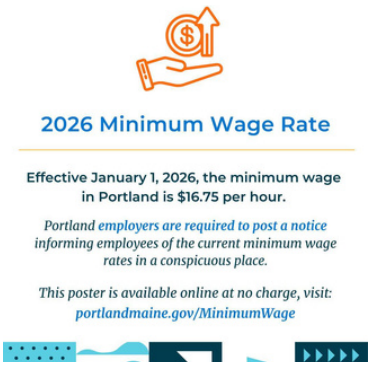
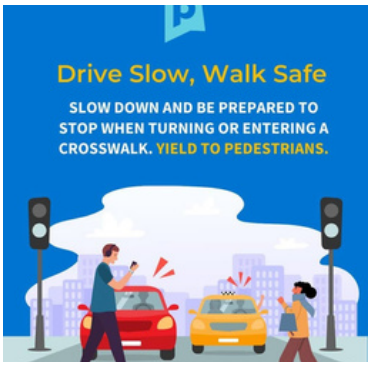
2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Delivering for District 5







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A NOTE FROM YOUR COUNCILOR

Dear Neighbors,

Serving District 5 on the City Council has been one of the great honors of my life. Over the past year we've worked together to tackle major challenges facing Portland, from housing and street safety to strengthening our local economy and public institutions.

When you elected me, I promised to fight for housing that Portlanders can afford, public safety rooted in care, living wages, and a local government accountable to the people it serves. With your help, we made meaningful progress on many of these goals.

Residents like you organized, canvassed, spoke out, and stepped up to serve on boards and commissions, helping move important policy changes forward. Together we delivered real wins for working families while also laying the groundwork for long-term solutions to our most challenging issues.

Housing was, and is still, my top policy priority. The Social Housing Task Force, now halfway through its work, is developing a plan to create permanently affordable, publicly owned housing in Portland, a step that could reshape our housing system for generations.

As we move into the next election cycle, I want you to know that I will not be seeking re-election when my current term concludes. I'm proud of what we've accomplished together and confident about the direction we've set.

I still have eight months left in this term, and important work ahead. Portland, like many cities, is facing growing fiscal pressure as federal support shrinks. Our job now is to protect the progress we've made and continue pushing for the resources our communities need.

Thank you for the trust you placed in me.

Kate Sykes

KATE SYKES

CITY COUNCILOR, DISTRICT 5

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Housing & Affordability

Housing sits at the center of nearly every challenge Portland faces, from workforce stability to public health to the long-term resilience of our neighborhoods.

Social Housing

We took a major step toward addressing the housing crisis by seating a 13-member Social Housing Task Force charged with designing a plan for permanently affordable housing in Portland.

Social housing represents a different model from what we do today. It is publicly owned, mixed-income housing designed to create stable neighborhoods that reflect the real makeup of our city.

It is also a smarter use of public dollars. Today millions in tax breaks and subsidies support private development, yet the public does not retain ownership of what gets built. Social housing creates public assets that remain affordable over time and generate value for future generations.

The Task Force is actively developing recommendations now. Our meetings are open to the public. Follow the work and add your voice:

https://www.portlandmaine.gov/1704/Social-Housing-Task-Force

Rebuilding Public Housing

If you've driven out of town on Route 302 recently, you've likely seen construction underway at Riverton Park, one of Portland's long-standing public housing communities. The Portland Housing Authority (PHA) began redevelopment work after the City approved infrastructure easements, updates to the Riverton Park TIF district, and an amended credit enhancement agreement that allowed the project to move forward.

But this redevelopment reflects a much larger national story.

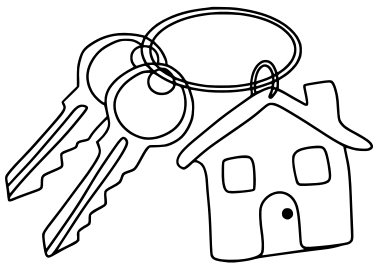
For decades, the federal government steadily reduced investment in public housing. Across the country, housing authorities were left trying to maintain aging buildings with limited resources. Basic repairs, accessibility upgrades, and energy improvements were deferred year after year as funding failed to keep pace with real needs.

The Riverton redevelopment represents an important reinvestment in building quality, safety, accessibility, and long-term livability for residents who have too often been underserved by past capital planning.

At the same time, the project has highlighted the need for stronger coordination between the City and the PHA. Portland incorporated the Housing Authority in the 1940s, but over time the two institutions drifted apart and were not consistently working together as partners in shaping the city's housing strategy.

That is beginning to change. This year the City Council and the Portland Housing Authority met jointly for the first time in decades to discuss our shared goals for housing.

Strengthening that partnership will be essential as Portland works to rebuild and expand public housing infrastructure and develop new tools like social housing that can keep homes affordable for generations.



Rent Control Enforcement

We strengthened rental housing protections after tenants and advocates reported illegal rent increases, missing lease filings, and enforcement gaps. Without meaningful oversight, the ordinance could not reliably protect renters.

We approved funding for an additional compliance staff position in Permitting and Inspections dedicated to rent control enforcement. This improves lease tracking, complaint follow-up, and the City's ability to hold landlords accountable.

Stronger enforcement protects tenants while creating clearer expectations for property owners.

Hotels Help Fund Housing

Tourism is central to Portland's economy. New hotels bring jobs and economic activity, but many hospitality workers earn wages that make market rents difficult to afford.

When wages fall short of housing costs, taxpayers often subsidize affordable housing programs to close the gap.

We placed a six-month pause on hotel development while recalibrating how much hotels contribute to the City's Housing Trust Fund.

Hotel contributions now better reflect the true cost of building new units and will rise with housing costs, helping ensure that growth contributes to housing the workforce our tourism economy depends on.

Neighborhood Housing

Projects such as Lambert Woods, Deering Village, and Belfort Landing reflect Portland's shift toward neighborhood-scale housing growth after ReCode.

These projects are not without tension. They change traffic patterns, density, and familiar rhythms. But they also support walkability, local businesses, transit viability, and housing supply without contributing to sprawl.

Our role is to guide this growth so it strengthens neighborhoods while preserving the qualities that make them livable.

Public Health & Safety

Building a healthy city requires more than housing alone. Our streets, safety systems, and public services must also protect residents and support community well-being.

A Vision for Safer Streets

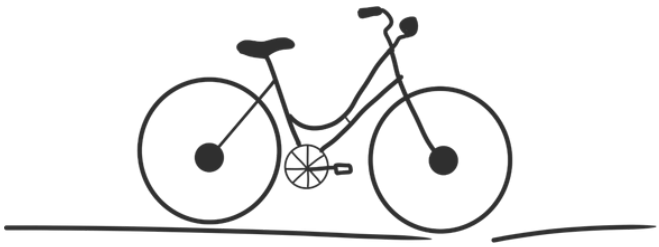
Far too many people have been killed or seriously injured on Portland's streets in recent years. Here in District 5, a hit-and-run crash outside the Homeless Services Center injured someone already living in extremely vulnerable conditions.

In response, we adopted Vision Zero, committing Portland to eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries.

Vision Zero recognizes that people make mistakes, but streets should be designed so those mistakes do not cost someone their life.

The City now publishes regular crash reports, allowing us to identify dangerous patterns and prioritize safety improvements. Coordination across Public Works, Planning, Police, and other departments has strengthened efforts to slow traffic, improve lighting, and make crossings safer.

Portland now joins a growing number of cities that refuse to accept traffic deaths as inevitable.



Emergency Winter Warming Shelter

We voted unanimously to operate an emergency winter warming shelter at 166 Riverside Industrial Parkway for the 2025–2026 season.

This marked an important shift: the City took direct responsibility for operating a warming shelter rather than relying on a patchwork of nonprofit providers.

Bringing this service in-house improves reliability, safety, and accountability for a program that protects some of Portland's most vulnerable residents during extreme winter weather.

The off-peninsula location is not ideal, but it allowed the City to act quickly while longer-term solutions continue to be developed.

Public Spaces

Portland reached an important milestone last year: a park within half a mile of every resident.

In District 5 we improved North Deering Park and opened the Riverton Bike Skills Park, creating new recreational space for kids, teens, and families.

We also expanded evidence-based harm reduction programs, including a syringe buy-back initiative that safely removes thousands of needles from public spaces while distributing sterile supplies and Narcan.

These programs protect public health, keep neighborhoods cleaner, and prevent far more costly emergencies down the road.

Workers & Economic Vitality

Strong neighborhoods depend on a strong local economy, one where workers are paid fairly and commercial districts remain active and vibrant.

Raising Wages

Portland voters approved a Council sponsored referendum to raise the minimum wage, raising pay for workers across the city and helping families keep up with the rising cost of living.

Reviving Empty Storefronts

We advanced a Vacant Commercial Properties Ordinance to address long-term storefront vacancy and bring new life to underused commercial spaces.

Empty storefronts reduce foot traffic, weaken nearby businesses, and diminish the energy of our downtown and neighborhood commercial districts.

The ordinance encourages property owners to activate vacant storefront windows with temporary public art installations, creating a visible partnership between the City and local artists while making empty spaces more welcoming.

Just as importantly, the policy allows the City to build an inventory of vacant commercial spaces, helping us better connect property owners with entrepreneurs and small businesses looking for space.
By combining creative activation with better information, the goal is to reduce long-term vacancy, support artists, and strengthen Portland's local economy.

Portland Opportunity Crew

The Portland Opportunity Crew returned in 2025.

This workforce program provides paid work opportunities for clients of the Homeless Services Center while improving public spaces across the city.

Between June and October:

- 28 participants worked over 1,000 hours
- nearly 500 bags of trash were removed
- more than 500 syringes were safely collected

Nearly half of participants increased their income, and some secured housing.

The program shows how investing in work, dignity, and reintegration can address public concerns while strengthening our community.

Environment & Sustainability

Capisic Brook and UNE Campus Growth

We adopted zoning changes creating an Institutional Overlay Zone for the University of New England's Portland campus.

The overlay establishes a planning framework that allows campus growth while protecting environmental resources and open space.

Early proposals raised concerns about development pressure on Capisic Brook, an ecologically sensitive waterway in District 5.

The final ordinance strengthened protections for the brook while allowing responsible institutional growth.

Governance & Accountability

This year we strengthened several key governance structures:

- Ethics Commission seated, fulfilling long-standing charter requirements
- Proportional Ranked Choice Voting reforms adopted
- Cumberland County Finance Committee representation restored
- P-STEP funding expanded, increasing property tax relief for seniors

These reforms improve transparency and ensure residents have a stronger voice in how government operates.

Looking Ahead

The work described in this report is not finished. As we move into 2026, my focus remains on turning policy into lasting results by advancing social housing, improving public safety, and ensuring Portland remains a city where working people can build stable lives.

Thank you for your partnership and trust.

Contact

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