

Portland, Oregon: Four Undisputable Proof Points for What Is Not Working

A research summary for community education and civic engagement by Michelle Milla, Stadiumhood Neighbors, March 2026



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1. System Failure at the street level

Portland's most visible conditions—homelessness, open drug use, and untreated mental illness—have worsened despite sustained and increasing public spending, signaling a breakdown between investment and outcomes.

Homelessness

Homelessness in Multnomah County has increased 66% since 2015, rising from 3,800 to 6,297 people by 2023 per the federally required Point-in-Time Count. The county's new by-name dashboard, released in early 2025, now shows nearly 15,000 people experiencing homelessness in some form.

Homelessness spending outcomes

Multnomah County has spent over \$500 million annually on homeless services, at a cost exceeding \$53,000 per homeless person per year — and the homeless population has continued to grow. The street-level crisis and the spending failure are inseparable: the county that cannot get people off the street is the same county that spent just 22% of its homeless services budget in the first half of fiscal year 2023-24, violated its own budget rules by funding ongoing programs with one-time money, and is now facing a \$104 million budget crisis.

Scale of spending: The Portland metro area spent over \$724 million on homeless services in 2024, with the majority — \$501 million — directed to services in Multnomah County alone. The Joint Office of Homeless Services had an adopted budget of approximately \$279 million for fiscal year 2024.

Cost per person: Multnomah County spends over \$53,000 per homeless person annually, yet unsheltered homelessness has continued to rise. The average cost of a shelter bed across all 24/7 shelter types in 2025 was \$47,000 per year — and of the 6,700-plus individuals who stayed in shelters over the course of the year, only 841 moved into permanent housing.

Chronic underspending despite the crisis: Multnomah County has never come close to spending its full homeless services budget since voters approved the Metro tax in 2020. Through the first six months of the 2023-24 fiscal year, the county had spent just 22% of its annual budget allocation.

Structural mismanagement: In 2024, 44% of the Homeless Services Department's spending came from one-time funding sources — violating the county's own budget rules, which discourage using one-time money for ongoing programs. Multnomah County's homeless services are now facing a \$104 million shortfall — a 25% reduction — largely because the department spent down reserves and relied on one-time funds that are no longer available.

Drug dealing, open use, and overdose deaths

Oregon recorded 1,833 overdose deaths in 2023 — more than double the 2020 figure — with Multnomah County alone seeing over 350 opioid overdose deaths in a single year, nearly triple the number from just three years earlier. Despite recriminalizing drug possession in September 2024, open-air drug markets continued to appear in downtown Portland as recently as November 2024, with businesses reporting daily drug paraphernalia cleanup and significant customer loss. Oregon ranks near the bottom nationally for addiction treatment access, with less than 10% of those with substance use disorder receiving treatment annually.

The Oregonian broke the story that Oregon had the highest rate of increase in fentanyl overdose deaths in the nation — a 41% surge between September 2022 and September 2023, rising from 77 deaths in 2019 to an estimated 1,268 by late 2023. Oregon recorded 1,833 total drug overdose deaths in 2023 — an increase of 450 people from the previous year, a nearly 33% surge — fueled by fentanyl and methamphetamine. From 2020 to late 2023, the number of people who died from an overdose in Oregon more than doubled. Oregon saw 1,480 overdose deaths in 2024, a 22% decline from 2023 — but still far above pre-pandemic levels.

Multnomah County specifically: The Multnomah County Medical Examiner recorded more than 350 overdose deaths involving opioids in one recent year — nearly triple the number from just three years earlier — driven by fentanyl. Overdose and poisoning calls made up 6.1% of all medical calls in the first half of 2023, up from 3.9% in late 2021.

Oregon's treatment access gap: Oregon ranks near the bottom nationally for access to addiction treatment. Less than 10% of Oregonians struggling with substance use disorder receive treatment each year, according to SAMHSA estimates.

Open-air drug markets — direct evidence: In August 2024, Portland Police Bureau acknowledged a surge in open-air drug use in downtown Portland, with crowds of drug users being displaced from location to location, from the Safeway bottle drop to the Central Library to Washington Center to SW 12th Street. In November 2024, new open-air drug markets continued to appear in downtown Portland, with one business owner reporting he had lost 60% of his clientele due to drug activity.

Multnomah County mental health services

In January 2024, seven-year veteran of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and ER physician Sharon Meieran called on Governor Kotek to intervene, declaring the county "does not have a functional continuum of behavioral health care" and had violated its legal obligations as the Local Mental Health Authority. She cited five behavioral health directors in six years, an unprecedented number of jail deaths, and the county's failure to maintain a legally required mental health plan.

Behind the failure: Oregon needs nearly 8,000 behavioral health beds — nearly double current capacity — with residents facing waits of up to six months and routinely turned away until their conditions reach crisis level.

2. Core Public Services are inconsistent and unreliable

Basic city services such as police response, fire coverage, infrastructure maintenance, and permitting are failing to meet expected standards, leaving residents with slower response times and declining reliability.

Police response times

Portland's average high-priority police response time of 19 minutes 9 seconds in 2024 is nearly double the national average of approximately 10 minutes for Priority 1 calls. By comparison, both Denver and Seattle average just over 11 minutes for Priority 1 calls. Portland's response times have nearly doubled since 2019, when they averaged 8.3 minutes.

Portland has approximately 1.28 sworn officers per 1,000 residents — less than half the national average of 2.4 and the lowest ratio among comparable western cities including Seattle (1.41), Sacramento, and Denver (2.10), according to Police Chief Day's October 2024 staffing analysis.

To reach the national average, Portland would need approximately 721 additional officers. As of March 4, 2026, Portland operates with 815 all rank sworn members and 560 officers.

Portland's current numbers:

- Average high-priority police response: 19 minutes 9 seconds citywide in 2024, with some areas averaging nearly 27 minutes;
- As of June 2023, Portland police averaged 21 minutes to reach the scene of a high-priority crime — more than five minutes slower than the same period in 2022;
- National guidelines recommend that 90% of 911 calls be answered within 15 seconds; Portland's 2024 data showed only about 38% met this target

Four comparable cities — population 500,000 to 800,000:

- Denver, Colorado Population: approximately 715,000; police response time: 11.6 minutes;
- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Population: approximately 700,000; police response time: 9 minutes 30 seconds;
- Seattle, Washington Population: approximately 749,000; police response time: average of 11.4 minutes
- Detroit, Michigan Population: approx 645,000; police response time average: 14 minutes

Portland's trend over time: According to crime analyst Jeff Asher's multi-city analysis, Portland's high-priority police response times nearly doubled from 8.3 minutes in 2019 to 16.4 minutes in 2022 and have continued climbing since.

Fire & rescue response times

Portland Fire & Rescue has adopted the NFPA Standard 1710 goal of responding to high-priority emergencies within 5 minutes and 20 seconds, 90% of the time. According to

PF&R's own FY2024-25 Annual Performance Report, the bureau met that standard just 42% of the time — less than half. The 90th percentile response time has worsened every year, reaching 8 minutes and 27 seconds in FY2024-25.

The city's own report acknowledges that growing call volume "is not sustainable," driven by the dual crises of homelessness and drug use overwhelming the system. PF&R has 1.16 members per 1,000 residents; the national average is 1.22. Portland Fire & Rescue operates with roughly 699 sworn personnel.

Street maintenance and repair

Portland's streets are in measurable and documented decline. Decades of chronic underfunding have pushed the city's road quality from acceptable to the cusp of poor, producing a transportation maintenance backlog that is the largest of any city bureau, with no reserves for emergencies and no ongoing funding for bridge repair.

The bureau has faced repeated budget crises, with cuts falling on routine maintenance, street sweeping, and traffic signal repairs. Meanwhile, city cleanup crews remove millions of pounds of trash from encampments each year, and unsanctioned camp reports have risen sharply — compounding the burden on a transportation system that is already failing to keep up.

Road condition as core numbers: When Portland began tracking pavement condition in 2008, the citywide Pavement Condition Index was 76 out of 100 — a rating requiring about \$100 million annually to maintain. In reality, funding for paving maintenance has hovered around \$25 million a year since 2008, and today Portland's network PCI has fallen to 53, meaning most repairs now require expensive base repair and road reconstruction rather than routine maintenance. Portland's unmet road maintenance needs include \$1.5 billion for busy streets and \$1.8 billion for residential streets in various states of disrepair. A 2019 Citywide Assets Report deemed the majority of Portland's arterials and local streets in "poor" or "very poor" condition.

The maintenance backlog: Portland's transportation maintenance backlog has grown to roughly \$6 billion — the highest of any city bureau — with no financial reserves for winter weather, unplanned asset failure, or other emergencies, and no ongoing funding for bridge repair or rehabilitation.

Budget crisis and chronic underfunding: In 2023, the Portland Bureau of Transportation faced a \$32 million structural budget shortfall, with proposed cuts including routine road, bridge, and sidewalk maintenance, traffic light repairs, street sweeping, and graffiti removal. PBOT's director warned that "Portland's ability to deliver even the most basic transportation services is at risk." The residential street sweeping program has historically cost just \$500,000 annually — and even that has been at risk due to scarce discretionary dollars.

Street cleanliness: Portland's Impact Reduction Program collected an average of 1,030,000 pounds of trash near campsites each month in fiscal year 2024-25 which totals more than 12 million pounds of debris per year from encampments alone. Unsanctioned camp reports

increased 23% between fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25, signaling both a growing number of encampments and rising public concern about street conditions.

3. Business is leaving, jobs are disappearing, and affordability is a memory

Portland's economic base is weakening as businesses close, high-wage jobs decline, and higher-income households leave, reducing both opportunity and the tax base that supports the city.

Tax burden

Portland carries the second-highest top marginal income tax rate in the United States at 13.9% for high earners, surpassed only by New York City. Layered on top of Oregon's 9.9% state income tax rate, Portland also carries the highest combined local income tax rate in the nation at 4% — a burden the Tax Foundation describes as falling on "just about every class of income."

Since 2009, local leaders and voters have approved at least 20 major tax measures, driving Portland's total business tax burden up 82% – from \$781 million in 2019 to \$1.4 billion in 2023.

Building permits

Portland's building permit system has been a documented failure for over two decades. The city's own auditor found it had never once met its timeliness goals, with responsibility so fragmented across multiple bureaus that no single entity was accountable for the outcome. By the time the crisis was widely acknowledged, wait times had nearly tripled the city's own targets, and the economic consequences followed: permit volume collapsed, project investment declined, and builders went elsewhere.

Permit timeliness failures: A March 2021 City Auditor's report found that Portland had not reached its timeliness goals for initial permit review even once in the prior five years. In 2019, the city provided on-time review for just 27% of new commercial construction projects and only 7% of new residential projects. The City Auditor concluded that "getting a building permit in Portland can be a frustratingly slow process," noting that "delays can affect the economy and motivate property owners to skirt the permitting system altogether."

Wait times: In 2021, Portland's Bureau of Development Services set a goal to reduce what was then a nearly 100-day wait time for new residential and commercial permits. By mid-2022, wait times had nearly doubled to almost 200 days. As reported by The Oregonian in July 2022, Portland was taking nearly twice as long as its own targets — approaching 200 days for new commercial construction against a goal of 71 days, and more than 50 days for routine home alterations that should have been approved in 27.

Seven bureaus, no accountability: Portland's City Auditor found that the city's fragmented governance — with seven bureaus and City Council responsible for building permit reviews — resulted in no one entity managing system-wide performance. Depending on the scope of a project, as many as 17 different city review groups spread across those seven bureaus could be involved in a single permit application.

Economic impact: By fiscal year 2022-23, total building permit volume in Portland was down 30% from its peak in fiscal year 2015-16, and total project valuation had fallen 35% to \$1.79 billion — a loss of investment the City Council itself acknowledged "sets in motion a negative cycle with worsening outcomes." Despite Portland having some of the highest housing prices in the nation, builders were pulling just 7.6 permits per 10,000 residents in the first quarter of 2022, compared to 31.1 per 10,000 residents in Austin, Texas.

2024 reform: The city consolidated permitting into a single bureau called Portland Permitting & Development in July 2024, after auditors noted that reports going back more than 20 years had called for exactly this consolidation.

Downtown Office Market and Vacancy Rates

Portland's downtown office market continued to deteriorate through late 2025, diverging from broader national recovery trends. According to Colliers, the Central Business District office vacancy rate reached 37% in Q4 2025, more than double its level just a few years prior and among the highest in the country.

At the same time, demand for office space has collapsed. The Portland Metro Chamber reported that quarterly office leasing fell from approximately 400,000 square feet in 2024 to about 250,000 square feet in 2025, the lowest level on record except for 2020. This sustained drop in leasing activity reflects a continued lack of tenant demand rather than a temporary market fluctuation.

The national office market turned a corner in 2025. Over half of U.S. office markets recorded positive demand for the full year. Portland was not among them though.

Retail conditions reinforce the same pattern. Data from Prosper Portland shows downtown retail vacancy at 32% as of Q4 2024, significantly higher than peer cities such as Austin, Minneapolis, and Raleigh (approximately 26%) and Boston (21%), with only Oakland reporting a higher rate.

A single transaction illustrates the scale of value decline. Portland's most prominent office tower, the U.S. Bancorp Tower ("Big Pink"), sold in 2025 for \$45 million, compared to approximately \$373 million in 2015—an approximately 88% decline in value over a decade. The sale reflects a broader repricing of downtown office assets, with market values in some cases approaching underlying land value.

Taken together, these indicators point to a consistent pattern: vacancy rising, demand falling, and asset values declining, even as national office markets begin to stabilize. Across the

country, office vacancy is sitting at about 18%, and it's starting to improve after peaking last year.

Peer city comparisons:

- In places like Manhattan (13%) and Miami (14%), offices are filling back up faster than the national average.
- Seattle is around 27% vacant — still high, but noticeably better than Portland.
- Denver is in the mid-30% range, which is similar to Portland downtown, although the broader Denver area is doing better than its core.
- Nashville is around 20% and improving, and Minneapolis is also starting to recover, making them some of the few cities moving in the right direction.
- Looking at a broader group of cities, places like Austin, Minneapolis, and Raleigh are around 26% vacant, while Boston is closer to 21%.
- Only Oakland is clearly worse, at around 37% vacancy.

Job losses

The greater Portland area lost jobs from April 2023 to April 2024, earning the distinction of the largest employment loss among the top 50 largest U.S. metro areas during that period. In 2024 alone, the region lost 9,600 jobs in the information, financial services, manufacturing, and professional services sectors — the highest-paying industries in the regional economy.

Voting with their feet: Oregon vs. Washington

The income gap between people moving to Clark County, Washington versus Multnomah County tells a stark story: the average income of individuals moving to Clark County was \$105,800, compared to just \$73,540 for those moving to Multnomah County — indicating that higher earners are choosing the Washington side of the border at a disproportionate rate. Multnomah County is losing income through out-migration while Clackamas and Clark counties are gaining. The trend is most acute in Multnomah County, which has seen net outflows to the rest of the region, Clark County, and the rest of Oregon.

Housing Affordability and Housing Stock

Rents in Portland remain high relative to what residents actually earn, and the systems intended to improve affordability are falling short. While the city has added housing over the past decade and a half—largely through multifamily development—its own planning documents show that construction is not occurring at the pace or price point needed to meaningfully reduce the housing shortage.

The gap is clear in the numbers. The median renter household earns about \$59,000 per year, while the median homeowner household earns more than \$126,000. Under standard affordability guidelines, that places a typical renter at about \$1,400 per month in affordable housing costs. A typical one-bedroom apartment rents for about \$1,500 per month, with

lower-cost units closer to \$1,300 and newer or centrally located units often ranging from \$1,700 to \$2,000 or more. In practical terms, the typical Portland renter is at or beyond the affordability threshold for a typical one-bedroom apartment.

This burden does not fall evenly. City data shows that the average Black household in Portland can afford a two-bedroom apartment in only one of the city's 23 neighborhood analysis areas, while a low-income family of three can afford a two-bedroom in fewer than half of Portland's neighborhoods. Portland has renewed its housing emergency multiple times since 2015, yet the underlying conditions have not improved.

The policy response has not closed the gap. The Inclusionary Housing program, intended to expand affordability, has struggled to deliver units accessible to the lowest-income residents. A 2024 city audit found that many units labeled "affordable" remain out of reach, with lower-income renters often unable to qualify for or afford them. City leadership acknowledged the program was not designed for the poorest households, raising a fundamental question about who affordability policy is actually built for.

Portland's housing stock reflects the same imbalance. The city has approximately 304,113 housing units, with 54% single-family homes, 32% multifamily, and 14% middle housing. Over the past 15 years, Portland has added about 65,000 new units, averaging 4,300 per year, with most of that growth in multifamily housing. Yet the city's own analysis shows it will need approximately 120,000 additional units by 2045, meaning production must roughly double to meet demand.

Publicly funded affordable housing remains a small fraction of what is needed, with approximately 1,559 completed units and 2,093 more in development. At the same time, the rental vacancy rate has risen to 8.8% in 2024, up from 6% in 2022. While higher vacancy might suggest relief, affordability continues to worsen, pointing to a mismatch between what is being built and what Portland renters can afford.

In plain terms, Portland is building—but not yet at the speed or price point needed to close the gap. See table next page.

Category	The number	What it means
WHAT WE HAVE		
Total housing units	304,113	Portland's entire housing stock as of 2019–2023 ACS data.
Single-family homes	54% (~164,000 units)	Still the majority of Portland's stock — but single-family construction now accounts for less than 8% of new units being built.
Multifamily buildings	32% (~98,000 units)	Apartments of 5+ units. Nearly 75% of all new housing built in the last 15 years has been multifamily.
Middle housing	14% (~41,000 units)	Duplexes, triplexes, townhomes. A growing share of new construction as zoning has opened up.
WHAT WE'RE BUILDING		
New units added (2010–2024)	~65,000	Averaging about 4,300 units per year. Annual permits peaked in 2017 and have declined since.
Pace needed to meet 2045 demand	~8,600/yr	The city needs 120,000 more units by 2045: roughly double the current pace of production.
Affordable units completed (bond-funded)	~1,559	Another 2,093 are in development but experts put our need in the tens of thousands.
WHAT IT COSTS		
Average asking rent (2024)	\$1,677/mo	Up 3.3% from 2023. Rent has risen faster than renter income every year.
Median renter income	\$58,946/yr	At 30% of income, a renter at this income can afford ~\$1,474/month — below the citywide average for even a one-bedroom unit.
Median homeowner income	\$126,117/yr	More than twice the median renter income. Only a dual-income couple household can afford to buy a home in any city council district.
Rental vacancy rate (2024)	8.8%	Up from 6% in 2022. Rising vacancies alongside worsening affordability indicates units are sitting empty because they are priced above what typical renters can pay.

K-12 education and the family exodus

Oregon's K-12 education crisis is not separate from the story of Portland's economic and population decline, rather it is a central driver of it. When families with children leave, they take enrollment, tax base, and long-term civic investment with them. The data on where Portland's families are going, and why, cannot be separated from the data on what is happening inside Portland's schools.

Oregon's K-12 system is in measurable crisis. Fewer than half of students are proficient in English, and fewer than a third are proficient in math — both below pre-pandemic levels and well behind neighboring Washington state. Oregon ranked last in the nation for chronic absenteeism. Portland Public Schools has cut tens of millions from its budget over three consecutive years, faces additional cuts ahead, and may close multiple schools by 2027 as enrollment has fallen by thousands of students since 2018 with no recovery projected for over a decade.

Academic performance — Oregon and PPS scores: In eighth-grade and eleventh-grade math, half or more of all students tested came in at the lowest performance level.

Portland Public Schools outperformed the state average but still posted deeply concerning numbers: 57% proficient in English language arts and 48.5% in math as of the 2024-25 school year — meaning more than half of PPS students are not at grade level in math. Education experts flag third-grade reading and eighth-grade math as the two most critical indicators of future student success. Statewide, those figures currently sit at 40.3% and 28.9% respectively — meaning roughly 6 in 10 Oregon third-graders cannot read at grade level, and roughly 7 in 10 eighth-graders are not proficient in math.

Oregon vs. Washington: Oregon's scores are meaningfully lower than neighboring Washington state, where 52.6% of students are proficient in English language arts and 41.7% are proficient in math — well above Oregon's statewide averages.

Chronic absenteeism: Oregon was the state with the worst chronic absenteeism in the country in 2022-23, when nearly 4 in 10 students statewide were chronically absent — missing at least 10% of the school year. Nationally, the average was 26%. The David Douglas School District in Portland saw chronic absenteeism jump from 21.8% in 2019 to 40.1% in 2023.

Teacher absenteeism is also at crisis levels: 68% of Portland teachers were absent more than 10 days in a year — a significant jump from 58% the year before, as reported by The Oregonian. This mirrors a broader Oregon trend of an average 11% increase in chronic teacher absenteeism since 2019.

Budget crisis and enrollment collapse: Portland Public Schools has made \$75 million in budget cuts over three consecutive years — \$10 million in 2023-24, \$15 million in 2024-25, and \$40 million in 2025-26 — with another \$50 million in cuts now being planned for 2026-27. PPS has lost 6,000 students since 2018 — the equivalent of three high schools — and enrollment

forecasts project a further 13% decline by 2034-35, down to approximately 37,000 students. Oregon funds schools based on enrollment, so every student lost means less revenue.

PPS Superintendent Armstrong announced in March 2026 that the district may need to close five to ten of its 74 elementary, K-8, middle, and alternative schools by fall 2027, driven by a \$50 million budget shortfall for 2026-27 on top of a newly discovered \$10 million gap in the current year's budget.

A note on nuance: PPS does outperform the Oregon state average by meaningful margins — roughly 10 to 14 percentage points in both English and math. That relative strength is worth acknowledging. But even Portland's best numbers still leave more than half its students failing to meet grade-level standards in math. The problem is systemic, not merely local.

David Douglas School District

Portland's education crisis cannot be accurately told through Portland Public Schools data alone. The David Douglas School District — a fully independent district within Portland city limits, covering outer East Portland east of I-205 — serves a distinct and significant portion of the city's student population with its own schools, budget, and governance entirely separate from PPS. By nearly every measure, its students are facing conditions more severe than those documented in PPS.

Who: The district's approximately 8,700 students are 70% minority, more than 53% economically disadvantaged, and nearly 24% English language learners — with 67 different languages spoken across its 14 schools. David Douglas High School is both the district's only high school and the largest high school in Oregon by enrollment.

Academics: In 2024-25, David Douglas posted proficiency rates of 34% in English language arts, 23.8% in math, and 22.4% in science — largely flat from the prior year. To put those numbers in context: David Douglas students perform significantly below Oregon's already-low statewide averages of 43% in English and 31.5% in math. They perform well below Portland Public Schools' 57% in English and 48.5% in math. In a city where PPS is rightly criticized for leaving more than half its students below grade level in math, David Douglas is leaving more than three quarters of its students there.

Enrollment decline/cuts: The district has experienced an 18% enrollment decline from 2015 to 2024. Because Oregon funds schools based on enrollment, this sustained loss has created a direct revenue problem — the district anticipated spending \$17.5 million more than it would receive in 2024-25, relying on reserves to cover the gap. In spring 2025, that pressure resulted in the elimination of all four graduation mentor positions — a program that had driven graduation rates to 86% before the pandemic. The Class of 2024 graduated at 70%.

4. Fiscal misalignment and lack of accountability

The pattern across every issue examined in this report is consistent: programs are approved with large promises, money is collected, and results do not follow. No one is held responsible. This section documents the fiscal mechanics of that pattern — how money is collected, misallocated, and left unspent while the problems it was meant to solve continue to worsen.

Preschool for All

The voter-approved Preschool for All program, funded by an income tax on higher earners passed in 2020, is one of the clearest illustrations of a gap between revenue collection and program delivery.

In its first three years, the program collected approximately \$213 million more in tax revenue than originally projected and generated an additional \$20 million in interest, while also underspending significant portions of its allocated budget. In fiscal year 2024, the program spent roughly one-third of its workforce and coaching budget and about half of its facilities expansion funding.

The tax contributes to Portland having one of the highest combined local tax burdens in the nation. Yet despite higher-than-expected revenue, the program ended fiscal year 2024 with approximately \$485 million unspent, far exceeding initial projections, while delivering fewer than 3,800 preschool seats toward a stated goal of 11,000 by 2030.

Governor Tina Kotek described Preschool for All as “not responsive to the economic realities of 2025,” and a state advisory group recommended that it be paused or scrapped. When voters approved the measure, the county outlined a pathway to scale access over time. For the 2025–26 school year, the program remains below its early rollout targets.

Multnomah County Commissioner Julia Brim-Edwards noted, “What the preliminary data shows is the county is losing a material number of those [individuals] at the highest taxable income... it appears that the very high marginal rate... is a likely driver.”

Parks and recreation spending

Portland spends \$274 per resident on parks and recreation annually — more than double the national average of \$133 per resident according to the Trust for Public Land's 2025 ParkScore Index. Portland's parks are genuinely excellent. That is not in dispute. What is in dispute is the priority this level of spending represents at a time when police response times are nearly double the national average, fire response standards are met less than half the time, streets are crumbling under a \$6 billion maintenance backlog, and the permit system took two decades to reform. Portland's parks budget of more than \$142 million annually placed the city sixth among the 100 largest U.S. cities for park spending per capita. The national median expenditure is just \$83 per resident.

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Proof Point One: System Failure at the Street Level

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