

The Portland Comeback

**IDEAS FOR THE
BIGGEST ELECTION
IN PORTLAND
HISTORY**

Created by:



We love Portland.



And not just the Portland of 20 years ago...

Over the past 20 years, Portland has elected a total of 12 new city councilors (including Mayors). Portland is about to elect that many city councilors – 12 – to a new system of city government in a single year.

At the very same time, the city is working to come back from high housing prices, a global pandemic, ecommerce and thinning downtown shops, justice reckonings, and more.

Some would like to use this moment, along with dark money and shady objectives, to blame what's best about Portland – our compassion, our creativity, and our commitment to justice –

to pander to the powerful interests who would like to be even more powerful, and to extract from Portland what's best about us.

We are united on a path to a Portland comeback rooted in what's best about Portland. And that Portland has always been strongest when the people have been in charge.

What follows are solutions emerging from a process of months of discussions with community members and policy experts. We offer it in the hopes of encouraging a discussion that will ground the coming election in ideas and solutions.



I. HOUSING

We want to ensure that people of many circumstances can live in all of Portland's neighborhoods. Artists and teachers living next door to plumbers and executives. Construction has to become easier, faster, and cheaper, without gutting our values, to empower developers to build the dense and affordable housing that we need. The root causes of our housing crisis are related not only to supply, but also ownership. More of the money generated from the real estate economy in Portland should circulate with the people of Portland.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & LIVABILITY

Portland can lead the country in building a sustainable, beautiful, appealing city for current and future generations. Human-caused climate change is warming the planet beyond what modern humanity has ever experienced. Portland's brand needs to (again) be clean and green: a healthy place to live, where parks abound, residents have access to nature, and an urban landscape that absorbs carbon instead of adding more.





III.

REAL SAFETY REAL JUSTICE

We all want our city to feel safe. In our streets, parks, and homes, the city must do more. Our youngest and oldest neighbors should be safe crossing the street and when they get home. We also need to know we'll get the right help when we call 911. Some situations call for physical force or a fire truck; even more call for unarmed human expertise. And a truly safe city requires confronting upstream causes. Here are some ideas to promote real safety.

IV.

A Thriving Democracy

To make any of this possible, City Government must work. And for Portland to work best, we need to empower the creativity and commitment of everyday Portlanders. Democracy thrives under shared prosperity and is more difficult in extreme inequality. Portland's policies should make our town a great place to work and to have a business, no matter what you look like or where you come from. With a City Council now elected by district, it's more important to have councilors with a city-wide vision. We need policies that bring us together — not just politically but also physically, economically, and as a community.



I. Housing

Portland is our home, so we start with our homes.

- **Expand Homeshare Programs** — There are unused bedrooms throughout the city. HomeShare Oregon connects those with extra rooms with those needing a place to live, provides homeowners with additional income, and fosters community.
- **Respectful Temporary Housing** — We must invest in interim housing – safe rest villages, motel shelters, etc. – that meets the needs of people currently living unsafely outside. We need spaces with showers, laundry, and secure storage as well as places to shelter families, pets and people currently in addiction.
- **Establish Community Land Trusts** — Community Land Trusts are non-profits that buy land to hold for benefit beyond flipping or speculating. An example: Seattle's CLT offers affordable long-term renewable leases. We can ensure stability, prevent displacement, and build community wealth.
- **Increase Public Ownership and Investment** — The City has huge purchasing power. Buying and building more housing directly helps our city shape our community democratically and creates a more equitable and sustainable community. City government can take a longer-term and broader perspective, allowing us to pursue goals (like residents aging-in-place) that require sustained interest.
- **Streamline Permitting** — Permitting needs to be simpler and faster. Bureau consolidation was a strong first step. Investing in a slate of pre-approved plans (e.g., for new ADU's) and training more staff can help speed applications further. Existing technology like video conferencing for remote inspections can leverage staff capacity. Assigning new concierge experts can guide applicants through the permit application process and increase chances of success.
- **High Density Housing** — The city should aggressively pursue all manner of housing production (e.g., accelerating infill), and a limited number of parcels in the city are ready to be developed with high density, mixed-income housing. The former downtown Post Office, the OMSI district, Alpenrose Dairy, and Lloyd Center are generational opportunities to create tens of thousands of housing units, create jobs, and define new and thriving additions to our city. The City should be leading the charge to make these developments happen.

II. Environmental Justice & Livability

Portland must regain our mantle as international leader in clean technology, climate-positive innovation, and sustainable planning.

- **Be Smart & Bold with the Clean Energy Fund (PCEF)** — Portland has some of the nation's only reliable funding for climate-focused work. We need to protect and leverage the funds for high-impact projects that follow the spirit of PCEF.
- **Address Critical Energy Infrastructure** — We need new energy infrastructure, from community solar to home batteries. Meanwhile, old infrastructure needs attention. The aging chemical tanks on the Willamette River banks pose disaster risk. The Council must safeguard the river, and private owners need to upgrade and maintain their tanks.
- **Invest in Transit & Active Transportation** — Walking, riding, biking, and taking transit should be safe and easy anywhere in the city. It should be easy, healthy, and fun to make short trips in our city by bike or foot. Instead of billions to expand freeways for out-of-state commuters, we should expand active transportation options and efficient public transit.
 - **Trip Times & Transit Signal Priority:** Giving buses priority at traffic signals amplifies transit efficiently. Partnering with TriMet to reduce wait and trip time for affordable routes can give more time for workers and families.
 - **Transit-Smart Development & Active Transportation Stations :** We can partner with TriMet to buy/design property around better transit rather than spreading transit thin.
 - **Age Friendly Transportation Citywide:** East Portland continues to suffer from the largest share of traffic deaths. We want safe transportation that works if you're 8 or 80.
- **Reclaim the River & the Riverbank** — Vera Katz endorsed a vision for burying or trimming the Eastbank I-5 interchange. Vera was right. It's time for a process to reclaim the most valuable real estate in Oregon, currently covered in concrete and exhaust. Let's embrace being a city on the water.
- **A Circular Economy & A Cleaner City** — We can invest in local-scale urban food systems to improve nutrition and build more resilient food infrastructure. And we can clean up trash and model new methods of waste reduction and reuse. The Bottle Bill and the blue-and-green bins aren't enough.
- **Zero-Emission Delivery Zones** — We should learn from the successes of the current pilot project and create a citywide plan to bring all local deliveries to zero emission.
- **Bring Life to City Centers** — It should be obvious to every visitor and resident that Portland is a natural and sustainable city. Innovations like green roofs and exterior walls, planting many more trees, and using nature in our cityscape should be standard practice in planning and development. Let's green downtown to save downtown.

III. Real Safety & Real Justice

We all want our city to feel safe. Our youngest and oldest should be safe crossing our streets, safe playing in our parks, and safe at home anywhere in the city.

- **Portland Street Response 24/7 Citywide** — This innovative program is one of Portland's biggest success stories, but the City Council has dragged its feet. PSR embodies Portland's values, saves money, puts more eyes on the street, and considers root causes. Funding and staffing are needed so Portland Street Response can respond anytime, anywhere.
- **Accountable Landlords & Stopping Vandalism & Theft on Local Businesses** — Buildings around the city shouldn't be criminal hotspots. The owners of these buildings should do their part to fix these problems or compensate Portlanders for our compromised safety. At the same time, we should support efforts to stop vandalism and theft at local businesses.
- **A Real Anti-Addiction Campaign** — We need to reduce addiction for those suffering now and prevent that suffering in the first place. Prevention is the least expensive and most effective way to save lives. The city can lead with public education, mental health services, sober housing, and sobering centers – all connected to a network of providers to address root causes.
- **A Police Department We Can Trust** — Police accountability still matters. We must reject cynical attempts to backslide on accountability, and we need to enact public will by implementing 26-217 as voters intended. Any community policing strategy needs civilian oversight and a police department that builds trust. The Mayor and Police Chief need to prioritize a reflective police culture focused on safety for all, including officers, victims, suspects, families, and neighbors.
- **A Proactive Plan for Domestic Violence** — We want to be safe with our loved ones, and we need safe ways of getting help when we can't. The city can site and fund temporary shelters and boost survivor housing. We should implement proven practices, like sending a survivor advocate with first responders and assessing lethality when screening calls.
- **Safe Streets Include Not Getting Killed by a Car** — Portland needs more intersection improvements, protected bike lanes, sidewalks, and safe transit. Street racing kills, and so do badly planned streets.
- **Youth Summer Programs** — Young people need safe spaces and activities outside school. The city can use our amazing parks, community centers, employers, city facilities, and creative communities to offer safe and supportive summers to every Portland kid.

IV. A Thriving Democracy

A Portland Comeback will take all of us. We need to engage and empower Portlanders.

- **Respect for Public Decisions** – Make the New Government Succeed. Everyone in City Government must commit to helping the new council succeed. While rigorous evaluation is merited, the City should not undermine the new system before it is implemented.
- **Commit to Small Donor Elections (SDE)** — We need people from all perspectives and walks of life to run for office. SDE makes that diversity possible, casting the widest net for our best ideas and ensuring that the public conversation can yield the public interest.
- **Community Budgeting** — Our communities have wisdom and can exercise real influence over public money. "Participatory" or "Community" budgeting can benefit Portlanders with greater participation, awareness, and agency in government. And Portlanders deserve to know which policies save money and generate results.
- **Land Trusts & Community Investment** — As Portland grows, everyone deserves to benefit. City-supported commercial investment opportunities like the Community Investment Trust program help build wealth and create a virtuous reinvestment cycle.
- **Bank Local** — Depositing public money with Wall Street banks misses an opportunity. A local, publicly chartered bank can save fees, circulate local money here, and support local initiatives without extra taxes. We need to work with legislative allies to facilitate a better way to save and invest.
- **Living Wages for Contractors** — When the city outsources core functions to low wage contractors, predictable turnover impedes city objectives and undermines worker standards. The city can advance long-term goals by attracting top talent in all sectors, including human services, with stable and appealing jobs.
- **Reimagine Neighborhood Associations & Civic Engagement** — Portland is a city led by its people, and Democracy can serve every part of the city. Neighborhood associations are one tool, and training and recruitment can improve shared understanding of diverse neighbors. We can also experiment with new models of representation and civic juries.
- **Arts Leadership** — Art, music, dance, theater, and film are more than products. The arts nourish humanity and flourish a knowledge economy. Artists need housing, so let's start there. Our music scene generates billions each year. We can seed more efforts like the Community Music Center, expand arts summer programs, support festivals to revitalize city centers, and back performance spaces that don't depend on alcohol sales. The rise of AI makes support for artists even more important. Portland can lead the way.

The City Council election in November will shape the future of Portland for decades.

In a time when opportunists lament Portland's demise, we bet on Portland. If we work together, our city's best days are still to come. In so many ways, our city is a wonderful place to live. Natural beauty in every direction, a lively and exciting arts scene, food that inspires envy across the country, and people who are part of a solution.

We might not need to call it a comeback. But our energy and civic pride could use a comeback. Downtown shops could definitely use more people coming back. And Portlanders are coming back together around ideas and a commitment to our city. Portlanders will determine the next election. Portlanders will decide our future.

Portland's best attributes are what will lead Portland Forward.

Our city is coming back.



Let's dream big and see Portland flourish.