



Housing

Every community member has safe, healthy and affordable housing

Goal: Every community member has safe, healthy and affordable housing.

Description

Every member of our community deserves access to long-term, stable housing that they can afford, feels healthy, and is connected to the community. Our homes are our first line of defense against climate-induced weather extremes and other hazards. At the same time, residential buildings also account for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions in Multnomah County.³¹ The way we design, build, and maintain our housing is a critical lever for reducing emissions and building climate resilience.

Housing access, however, has a long and painful history of exclusion in Multnomah County. In the early 20th century, exclusionary policies designed to maintain racial segregation and protect white homeowners' property values were established. Through the use of exclusionary zoning and federally backed redlining, the City of Portland, for example, systematically denied Black residents and other people of color access to home loans and investment. These practices effectively funneled these communities into specific, under-resourced areas while simultaneously preventing them from building generational wealth through homeownership.

Mid-century urban renewal projects further devastated these established communities particularly in the Albina district, Portland's historic Black core. Large-scale infrastructure developments — including the construction of the I-5 freeway and Veterans Memorial Coliseum, and the expansion of Legacy Emanuel Hospital — resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of residents and the destruction of hundreds of local businesses. In more recent decades, the legacy of these planning decisions has manifested as *gentrification* and environmental injustice. Market-rate redevelopment in historically Black neighborhoods has driven up property values and combined with a distorted property tax system to further displace long-term residents who can no longer afford to live in the communities their families helped build.³²

Some displaced families relocated to areas of Multnomah County, such as east Portland and west Gresham, where housing was more affordable, but resources like transit, parks, grocery stores, trees, and pedestrian infrastructure were deficient. Affordable multifamily housing

has only been permitted on the most heavily trafficked corridors, exposing residents to noise pollution, vehicle emissions, and traffic safety issues. These patterns persist to this day. At the same time, many people in Multnomah County cannot afford housing, reflected in a homelessness crisis that has been difficult to address.

Multnomah County and its many partners seek to increase affordable housing options and address homelessness.³³ Housing exists at the critical nexus of community justice, climate resilience, and economic stability. While other planning efforts guide this work more directly than the Climate Justice Plan, it is the hope that emphasizing the intersectional nature of these challenges brings additional momentum and focus to the issue.

How we measure progress

Indicator 1: New private housing structures authorized by building permits in Multnomah County.³⁴

Description: This data represents the total number of building permits for all structure types, including one-unit, two-unit, three-unit, four-unit, and five-unit structures or more.

Current data: 2,040 in 2024; downward trend since 2017.

Data source: [Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Lewis](#)

Indicator 2: Reduction in unsheltered homelessness for priority populations consistent with Homelessness Response Action Plan key performance indicators.

Description: The [Homelessness Response Action Plan](#) (HRAP) has key performance indicators that help inform the implementation of the plan. Certain populations are overrepresented in the unsheltered homeless population and the plan seeks to reduce this overrepresentation. HRAP uses January 2024 as a baseline period and considers this metric met if priority populations are sheltered at rates that exceed the baseline.

Current data: In the most recent period, 4 out of every 6 (67%) people in the priority populations were sheltered at or above the baseline rate.

Data source: [Homeless Response Action Plan Dashboard](#)

Strategy 1: Implement the Homelessness Response Action Plan.

Why does this matter?

Homelessness exposes people to increased climate risks, including a higher exposure to extreme weather, vector-borne diseases that are made more common by a warming climate, and day-to-day environmental hazards.³⁵ In Multnomah County, Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other people of color are disproportionately represented in the unhoused population.³⁶ Addressing homelessness is an urgent climate justice concern.

The joint Multnomah County-City of Portland Homelessness Response Action Plan offers a comprehensive plan for preventing and addressing homelessness. This includes strategies that target root causes like the availability of affordable housing and *wraparound* services. The plan has built in reporting features and is a two-year roadmap focused on preventing inflow into homelessness, expediting housing placement out of shelter and housing placement, expanding behavioral health services for people who are homeless or experiencing housing instability, and improving intergovernmental coordination.

Putting this into practice

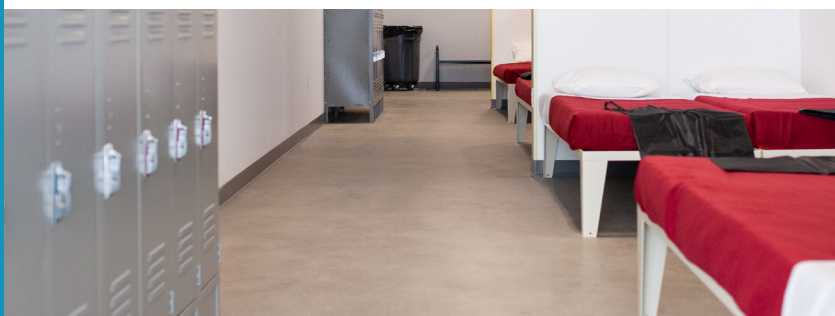
- Housing or sheltering people experiencing homelessness.
- Adding behavioral health beds and funding a drop-off sobering center.
- Increasing the number of adults leaving shelter for permanent housing.
- Reducing homelessness among people of color, people who are LGBTQIA2S+, and people in other populations of focus.
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing through regulatory changes, building conversions, and new construction funding sources, among other strategies.

Authorizing agencies

City of Portland

Lead department(s)

Homeless Services Department



STRATEGY CATEGORY

- ☒ County Strategy
- ☐ Investment Opportunity
- ☐ Community Leadership

STRATEGY TYPE

- ☐ Advocate
- ☐ Research
- ☐ Convene
- ☒ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

- ☒ Existing
- ☐ Additional
- ☐ New

COUNTY CONTROL

Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE

Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY

Low Med High

Strategy 2: Increase housing supply and promote walkable, mixed use communities.

Why does this matter?

Land use reform is an important climate and public health policy. Dense, walkable neighborhoods allow people to meet more of their daily needs without driving. Reduced vehicle miles traveled, in addition to energy efficiency gains of multifamily housing, lead to reduced emissions. An analysis from the Rocky Mountain Institute found that zoning reform could help reduce over a quarter-metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) per person per year, a substantial reduction.³⁷ Studies also show that when individuals can use their bodies in the course of daily activities, they live longer, healthier lives. Denser urban neighborhoods with a mix of housing types, uses, and transit access promote daily activity like walking and riding bikes.

It is also important to recognize the history of land use and government-sponsored segregation policies. By designating vast swaths of the county for single-family homes, the code established a high financial barrier to entry. This effectively excluded lower-income residents, a demographic disproportionately composed of people of color, from the wealth-building opportunities of homeownership. At the time, planners and real estate interests explicitly linked multifamily housing to “lower-class” and non-white populations, using zoning to keep these groups out of preferred residential districts.³²

Today, land use reform, zoning updates, and other policies are opportunities to begin to right historical wrongs while building a healthier and more prosperous community. Land use is a key tool for increasing housing production and lowering housing costs, while simultaneously building communities that are more accessible to transit, walking, and biking. Building code updates that allow for better urban form and more affordable construction are also important. While Multnomah County does not have control over urban land use decisions or building codes, it can influence these predominantly city-level decisions through research, coordination, coalition building, and advocacy.



Putting this into practice

- Support zoning reform initiatives like “Inner Eastside for All” that increases permissible density in urban areas that already have abundant services like shopping districts, parks, transit, libraries, etc.
- Support building code reforms that allow for attached housing types, like *Point Access Blocks*, sometimes called sunlight suites or single stair multifamily housing.
- Support harmonizing the Oregon elevator code with the internal elevator code EN 81, which would allow for more elevator types in more buildings.
- Support social housing development and experimentation.
- Support building code updates that increase energy efficiency, indoor air quality, cooling, other climate resilient building practices, and innovative non-toxic low-carbon building materials.

Authorizing agencies

Oregon State Legislature, Oregon Building Codes Division; Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Climate-Friendly and Equitable Communities program; City land use and building codes departments

Lead department(s)

Office of Sustainability; Health Department, Environmental Health



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COUNTY CONTROL



COUNTY INFLUENCE



COUNTY PRIORITY



Strategy 3: Promote home preservation for cost burdened homeowners.

Why does this matter?

For many, the cost of emergency repairs or energy-efficient upgrades is a barrier to safety. When homes fall into disrepair, they become more vulnerable to heat waves, water infiltration and mold, and storm damage, putting families at risk of being involuntarily displaced. No-cost home repair programs have been successfully used to prevent involuntary displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods.³⁸ Critical home repair is ideally coupled with home energy efficiency and resilience measures like insulation and heat pumps for heating and cooling homes. By supporting home preservation, we protect intergenerational wealth and ensure that the most vulnerable neighbors have a resilient, long-term foundation that can better withstand the effects of climate change.

Putting this into practice

- Pursue funding, including grant funds, to expand the reach of the County's low-income weatherization program and increase funding for critical home repair.*
- Partner with allied organizations to identify legislative and regulatory changes that would help support critical home repair.

*The program offers free weatherization services to low-income homeowners (200% federal poverty limit) and renters to improve home energy efficiency, reduce utility bills by up to 40%, and enhance safety.

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COUNTY CONTROL



Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE



Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY



Low Med High

Authorizing agencies

Oregon Legislature; Oregon Housing and Community Services; Oregon Health Authority; Portland Clean Energy Fund

Lead department(s)

Office of Sustainability; Department of County Human Services, Weatherization Services; Health Department, Environmental Health



Strategy 4: Support circular economy models that integrate social needs with resource reuse.

Why does this matter?

While support exists for housing placements, rental assistance, and related services, home furnishings are an often-overlooked necessity. Access to home furnishings can be a critical component of the transition into housing for unhoused individuals that helps to strengthen and stabilize an individual or family. At the same time, consumer goods represent a large portion of global emissions,³⁹ making efforts to reuse durable goods an important strategy to reduce emissions.

Rather than having each household purchase new furniture and household goods — each carrying significant carbon footprints — using their limited resources, this model enables resource sharing that serves both environmental and *social justice* goals. Families experiencing housing instability often also experience furniture poverty, or the inability to access, afford, or maintain essential household furniture and goods for a functional, safe, and healthy home.⁴⁰ Multnomah County is lucky to have a robust *reuse economy* with several nonprofits that provide services for low-income households. For example, Community Warehouse diverts over 1,500 tons of furniture from local waste streams through their “furniture bank” model that allows households to receive all the furnishings and household goods they need. Models like this are vital for supporting households and reducing emissions.

Putting this into practice

- Review current practices for how households are provided needed furnishings and other resources when making housing transitions. Pursue additional opportunities to support re-use organizations in the region.
- Provide rent assistance “wraparound” support for basic resources. Leveraging the re-use economy and local organizations like Community Warehouse can help provide cost-effective, low-carbon essential household goods including furnishings, kitchen supplies, fans, and even AC units.

Lead department(s)

Homeless Services Department; Department of County Human Services



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Strategy 5: Support the health, well-being, and stability of households that rent.

Why does this matter?

Housing that is substandard due to quality issues like cracked walls or rodent damage, or lacking essential components like heating or cooling, exposes households to greater environmental and climate risks. In the Portland metropolitan area, about 25% of renters do not have air conditioning, and that number jumps to 34% for low-income households. Extremely low-income households are far more likely to occupy rental housing with one or more of these substantial deficiencies.^{41,42} Climate impacts are therefore anticipated to fall more severely on low-income rental households.

Supporting the health and stability of renting households combines financial aid, legal protections, and physical housing quality. Substandard housing is more than a maintenance issue — it is a primary driver of chronic illness, displacement, and financial crisis. By enforcing health and climate standards alongside stronger renter protections, we can reduce energy burden and environmental hazards that disproportionately impact cost-burdened families. Ultimately, these efforts provide the stable foundation necessary for households to transition from immediate crisis to long-term self-sufficiency.

STRATEGY CATEGORY

- ☐ County Strategy
☐ Investment Opportunity
☒ **Community Leadership**

STRATEGY TYPE

- ☒ Advocate ☐ Research
☒ Convene ☐ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

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COUNTY CONTROL



Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE



Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY



Low Med High

Putting this into practice

- Support the City of Portland [Climate and Health Standards for Existing Buildings](#).
- Consider establishing maximum indoor temperature standards by convening stakeholders to understand current regulations and develop recommendations, including enforcement mechanisms and alternatives like cooling space requirements in multi-unit buildings.
- Increase funding for multifamily affordable housing preservation.
- Convene broad partnership to consider alternative approaches to renter protections that help promote household health and stability.
- Explore pathways to improve rental housing standards and mandatory inspection programs to ensure all rental units are safe, healthy, and resilient to climate impacts.
- Provide property owners with resources, such as technical assistance or retrofit grants, to help them meet new standards without passing significant costs onto tenants.
- Provide [Flexible Client Assistance](#) for relief from the trauma associated with the scarcity of resources.

Authorizing agencies

Oregon Legislature; Oregon Health Authority; Oregon Housing and Community Services; Cities

Strategy 6: Promote homeownership for first-time homebuyers and communities historically excluded by discriminatory housing practices.

Why does this matter?

Homeownership is a primary driver for building intergenerational wealth and long-term stability. Homeowners often have greater control over their living environment, allowing for critical climate adaptations such as weatherization, solar installation, and air filtration that protect against extreme heat and smoke. For generations, these benefits were denied to Black families and other families of color.³⁸

Promoting homeownership for first-time homebuyers, particularly if they come from a family with no experience of homeownership or were intentionally excluded from homeownership, requires a multi-prong approach that includes wraparound support, including homebuyer education, financial counseling, and foreclosure prevention. Promoting homeownership successfully depends on building trust, increasing awareness of available opportunities, and ensuring communities are equipped to retain their homes long term. The County can bridge the racial wealth gap and provide the security necessary to withstand future economic and environmental shocks.

Putting this into practice

- Proactively connect residents within the County’s existing social service programs to homeownership resources.
- Partner with community-led organizations to leverage trust-based, peer-to-peer outreach through which residents who have successfully navigated homeownership pathways can share their success stories and guide their neighbors through the process.
- Provide down payment assistance to close the affordability gap for historically excluded buyers and expand support for Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) to help residents save for homes that accommodate multigenerational living.
- Prioritize housing assistance for residents with historical ties to areas like North and Northeast Portland to combat displacement.⁴³

Authorizing agencies

City of Portland Housing Bureau; City of Gresham

Lead department(s)

Department of County Human Services

STRATEGY CATEGORY

- ☐ County Strategy
- ☐ Investment Opportunity
- ☒ **Community Leadership**

STRATEGY TYPE

- ☒ Advocate ☒ Research
- ☒ Convene ☐ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

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