



ENDING HOMELESSNESS:
Many short-term goals met;
now long-term success should be defined

A REPORT FROM THE CITY AUDITOR
August 2007



Office of the City Auditor
Portland, Oregon



CITY OF
PORTLAND, OREGON

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August 27, 2007

TO: Mayor Tom Potter
Commissioner Sam Adams
Commissioner Randy Leonard
Commissioner Dan Saltzman
Commissioner Erik Sten
Will White, Bureau of Housing and Community Development

SUBJECT: Audit of the 10-year Plan to End Homelessness, (Report #336)

Attached is Report #336 containing our review of the City's 10-year Plan to End Homelessness. Written responses to the audit from Commissioner Erik Sten and Housing and Community Development Director Will White are included at the back of the report.

We ask that the Commissioner in Charge direct the Director of the Bureau of Housing and Community Development to prepare a status report in one year, or sooner, detailing steps taken to address the recommendations contained in our report. The status report should be sent to the Audit Services Division.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from the Bureau of Housing and Community Development as we conducted this audit.


GARY BLACKMER
City Auditor

Audit Team: Drummond Kahn
Kristine Adams-Wannberg
Kari Guy
Kristin Johnson
Sharon Meross

Attachment

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Summary Results

This audit is a status report on the first and second year accomplishments of the City's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. During our audit, we found the following:

- Early progress appears to have been made and many annual goals were met
- Most short-term measures are well developed, but long-term goals need refinement
- Data reliability checks in performance information should be pursued



Oregon Housing and Community Services' photo

Background

In 2005 the Portland City Council adopted *Home Again: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County*. The Plan was developed by a 15-member Citizens' Commission on Homelessness, comprised of elected officials, business and community leaders, neighborhood association chairs, and persons experiencing homelessness. The 10-Year Plan was built on three principles:

- Focus on the most chronically homeless populations
- Streamline access to existing services
- Concentrate resources on programs that offer measurable results

The Plan establishes nine actions to end homelessness. First year and second year goals were established for most of the nine actions. To ensure accountability, the Plan requires quarterly progress reports be available to the public, and an annual report be presented to the Portland City Council and the Board of Multnomah County Commissioners for the duration of the Plan.

During the last fiscal year, the Bureau of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) and the County estimated that the number of homeless people served through the homeless system was over 19,000 people. According to a street count conducted in 2005, there were 2,355 people counted as sleeping outside, in a vehicle, or in an abandoned building in Multnomah County. Of these, 1,284 were chronically homeless. In 2007, the street count dropped to 1,438 people sleeping outside. Of these, 386 were chronically homeless. The street count figures provide a point-in-time count, and do not estimate the total number of homeless people, for example people in shelters, those living with relatives or friends, or those who chose not to be identified.

The 10-Year Plan is primarily targeted to chronically homeless individuals. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a chronically homeless person as an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has been living in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency shelter for at least a year or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years.

The Plan envisioned a shift in service delivery towards providing people with permanent housing first, and then providing them with the services they need to stay housed. This was a change from the existing stepped system of shelter, to transitional housing, then ultimately to permanent housing. While this stepped system may work for people experiencing temporary periods of homelessness, it has been less effective with chronically homeless people, who are more likely to cycle back to living on the street.

Research by Dr. Dennis Culhane from the University of Pennsylvania, and supported by the Fannie Mae Foundation, indicates that it costs less in a year to house a chronically homeless individual than to provide an array of social services typically used by people living on the street. According to his study, the average cost of providing a chronically homeless person permanent supportive housing is approximately \$16,000 less in community resources than when permanent housing is not provided. These higher costs are borne by many organizations, some of which include public service providers and hospitals.

A committee oversees the Plan and coordinates work for multiple partner organizations. The Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness focuses on plan implementation among government and nonprofit agencies serving the homeless. The Plan is a partnership between a number of public agencies, such as the City of Portland, City of Gresham, and Multnomah County; private sector businesses; and non-profit organizations. Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development provides administrative support to the Coordinating Committee, and serves as the City of Portland's lead agency on ending homelessness. BHCD has spent over \$5 million annually from the start of the Plan toward the effort, not including funds from the Housing Opportunity Bond. This is only part of the resources spent on the total effort to support the Plan. It does not include various other spending and in-kind donations by the other public and private partners involved in supporting the overall effort.

Audit scope, objectives, and methodology

The purpose of our audit was to perform a high level review of the program accomplishments of the 10-Year Plan and to report on next steps. The audit was approved by the City Auditor and placed on our audit schedule for FY 2006-07. We compared program results as reported by the City's Bureau of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) against the Plan's objectives for the first and second year. We assessed the Plan's performance indicators to determine if they are effective measures. We also reviewed BHCD's progress in implementing its Housing Management Information System (HMIS).

To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and its accompanying action plan as well as quarterly and annual status reports on the Plan produced by BHCD. We collected information from the City's budget documents and financial data from BHCD, based on the City's accounting system. We reviewed the City resolution authorizing the 10-Year Plan, in addition to City ordinances authorizing provider contracts. We conducted over 20 interviews. These included staff from BHCD, City Commissioners' offices, policy and social service staff from Multnomah County, staff from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and providers of homeless services. We also reviewed information from the Federal Register regarding data elements in HMIS. We did not independently verify the reliability of the information systems or formally test the accuracy of the data used for performance results; however, data reliability issues with HMIS are discussed in this report.

We conducted our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Early progress appears to have been made, and many annual goals were met

The 2005 Action Plan outlined several action steps with specific goals to help end homelessness. The Plan takes a learning approach where performance measures and goals are examined annually and are modified as needed by the Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness. We reviewed the goals of the 10-Year Plan for 2005 and 2006 (the first and second years), and found in most cases where there were specific goals, the goals were met or progress was made.

Figure 1 Action steps, goals and results for 2005

	Goals	Results
Step #1 - Move people into housing first	175 chronically homeless people will have homes	660 chronically homeless people moved into housing, 295 directly from the streets
	20 "hard to reach" youth will be working toward housing stability	36 "hard to reach" youth were housed
	250 homeless families with children will be permanently housed, 50 of whom will be high resource users	407 homeless families with children were permanently housed, 208 were high resource users
Step #2 - Stop discharging people into homelessness	No specific goals	N/A
Step #3 - Improve outreach to homeless people	A design will be in place for a day/re-source center to engage homeless people	None
Step #4 - Emphasize permanent solutions	Waiting lists for shelters and turn away counts will be reduced by a minimum 5 percent	34 percent reduction in the waiting list/turn away count
Step #5 - Increase supply of permanent supportive housing	160 new units of permanent supportive housing will be opened and 300 additional units will be under development	254 new units of permanent supportive housing opened, with another 223 units currently under development
	Resources for permanent supportive housing will increase from 12 to 20 percent of the overall homeless service system	Operations and services funding for permanent supportive housing (PSH) increased by 12 percent to 16 percent. Capital dollars for PSH increased by 18 percent. Total PSH funding increased by 37 percent (from \$19.6 million to \$31.3 million)
Step #6 - Create innovative new partnerships to end homelessness	An enhanced partnership to end homelessness will be formalized by public and private community partners	Over 400 volunteers from the private, non-profit, and government sectors, including dozens of private citizens, volunteered for Portland Homeless Connect on January 17, 2006
Step #7 - Make the rent assistance system more effective	Rent assistance program reforms will be completed to produce a streamlined administration and increased outcomes for families and individuals	Rent assistance reforms 100 percent complete with contracts in place
Step #8 - Increase economic opportunity for homeless people	No specific goals	N/A
Step #9 - Implement new data collection technology throughout the homelessness system	The new Homeless Management Information System will be fully operational in 26 homeless service agencies	22 homeless agencies representing 200 different programs are currently participating in HMIS, and an additional 16 non-homeless agencies participate from the economic opportunities initiative

Source: 2005 Goals and Results: Home Again 2005 Status Report

Figure 2 Action steps, goals and results for 2006

	Goals	Results
Step #1 - Move people into housing first	390 chronically homeless people will have homes. Of these, 40 will be ages 24 & younger. 75 percent will remain housed after six months, and 54 percent will remain housed after one year	A total of 379 chronically homeless people moved into permanent housing, including 36 people 24 & under. For those people contacted, 77 percent were still housed after six months, and 83 percent were housed after one year
	250 homeless families with children will be permanently housed, 100 of whom will be high resource users. 75 percent will remain housed after six months, and 65 percent will remain housed after one year	310 homeless families moved into permanent housing, including 134 high-resource using families. Data from a sample confirmed that 84 percent were housed at six months, and 67 percent remained housed after one year
Step #2 - Stop discharging people into homelessness	70 percent of homeless persons, who are assigned to the Jail's Homeless Discharge Planner's caseload, will be placed directly into stable housing upon discharge	57 percent of homeless persons assigned to the Jail's homeless discharge planner's caseload were placed into stable housing upon discharge
Step #3 - Improve outreach to homeless people	Find a location and resources for Access/ Resource Center	Made progress with key stakeholders and partners in developing the concept and process for creating the access center, but property not found
	Ensure outreach provider system connects people from the streets to housing and services to support housing retention (no specific goals listed)	Four "Key Not a Card" programs connected 224 people from the street to transitional or permanent housing. Of the 168 (75 percent) who moved to permanent housing, 90 percent were in housing after six and 12 months
Step #4 - Emphasize permanent solutions	Waiting lists for shelters and turn away counts will reduce by five percent from 2005 levels	The number of people on waiting lists at shelters increased slightly over 2005 numbers. Shelter turnaway counts decreased 35 percent from 2005 levels
	Permanent housing placement from transitional housing will increase from 65.5 percent to 70 percent. After 12 months, permanent housing retention will increase from 59 percent to 65 percent retention	Of 1,779 people who exited transitional housing programs, 1,224 (68.8 percent) exited to permanent housing. Of those who were contacted after 12 months, 532 (65 percent of those contacted) remained in permanent housing

	Goals	Results
Step #5 - Increase supply of permanent supportive housing	85 new units of permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless people and 35 new units of permanent supportive housing for homeless families will be added to the development pipeline	174 new units were added to the development pipeline for chronically homeless individuals, and 98 for families
Step #6 - Create innovative new partnerships to end homelessness	No specific goals	N/A
Step #7 - Make the rent assistance system more effective	250 households will be prevented from becoming homeless through provision of rent assistance. Of these, 75 percent will remain housed after 6 months, and 65 percent will remain housed after one year	1,015 households were prevented from becoming homeless through the provision of rent assistance. Of those households where follow-up data was collected, 74 percent were still in housing 6 months after rent assistance ended. 12 month follow-up data has not yet been completed
Step #8 - Increase economic opportunity for homeless people	No specific goals	N/A
Step #9 - Implement new data collection technology throughout the homelessness system	HMIS will be able to provide timely reports on the numbers of people exiting chronic and other homelessness. In addition, HMIS will capture 75 percent (2,785) of all shelter, transitional housing and McKinney-funded permanent supportive housing beds	HMIS was used to report preliminary 10-year plan results. 50 percent of community beds are included (shelter, transitional housing, and McKinney-funded permanent supportive housing)

Source: 2006 Goals and Results: Home Again 2006 Status Report

In 2005, for the ten specific performance goals listed, BHCD and its partner organizations met or exceeded six performance goals and partially met one goal. The results of getting chronically homeless people into permanent housing, in particular, exceeded the goals established. Three goals were not met. These related to designing a day/resource center, formalizing enhanced partnerships with public and private community partners, and getting HMIS fully operational in 26 homeless service agencies.

In 2006, for the ten performance goals established, BHCD and its partner organizations met or exceeded three goals. Three other goals were partially met. For example, under *Action Step #1: Move people into housing first*, the goal of getting 250 homeless families into housing and retaining that housing was exceeded, but performance fell short by 11 on the goal of getting 390 chronically homeless people into housing and retaining that housing. Four goals were not met, though it appears that some progress was made. Those goals not met related to placement of homeless people assigned to the Jail's Homeless Discharge Planner's caseload, finding resources and a location for an Access/ Resource Center, decreasing shelter waitlists and turn away rates, and capturing more data into HMIS.

The Bureau indicated that some action steps and goals, such as housing placement and retention goals, are more important than others. They provide a better indication of success in reducing homelessness than other steps, such as setting more agencies to use HMIS, according to the Bureau.

Most short-term measures are well developed and performance is monitored, but long-term goals need refinement

Overall, the plan's short-term measures appear to be well developed and include monitoring mechanisms, but long-term performance indicators need to be further developed. From our interviews with City and County staff and our review of year-end reports, we believe the plan sets out clear objectives for the first few years and allows staff and policy makers to monitor results. In addition, agencies responsible for implementing the plan appear to be making progress that aligns with the plan's short-term objectives and targets.

We see evidence that the Plan's Coordinating Committee has more effective performance measures in the second and third year of the Plan. For example, retention targets have been added to the housing placement goals, and the household type has been defined in the permanent supportive housing targets. Retention of people in permanent housing is critical in determining whether the program is succeeding. It is not merely enough to place homeless people into housing – they have to be able to retain that housing in order for it to make a difference.

A formerly homeless woman in new permanent supportive housing



Photo courtesy of Central City Concern

There are two action steps with short-term measures, however, that could be improved. In the 2004 Action Plan, *Action Step #2: Stop Discharging People into Homelessness* indicated that work would be done in various institutions, such as jails, hospitals, and the foster care system toward lessening the number of people who are homeless.

In 2005 there were no goals associated with this measure. In 2006 and 2007, the performance indicators addressed the jail system only. The Coordinating Committee should consider addressing the other institutions mentioned in the 2004 Action Plan in their performance measures. For *Action Step #6: Create Innovative New Partnerships to End Homelessness*, the performance measure is to hold the Portland Homeless Connect event. While this indicator is useful, the addition of other indicators, such as the number of service providers at the event, their level of participation, or the retention of those providers in future events, would provide a more complete assessment of the support being received.

In spite of good short-term measures, success indicators for 2015 need to be further developed. BHCD and its partners are about a quarter of the way through the 10-Year Plan, which begs the question of what success will look like in 2015. Although the Plan is called the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, the 2004 Action Plan does not focus on eliminating homelessness in its entirety. Rather, it identifies a few measures that would mean a significant reduction in the total number of people who are homeless in the community. The 2004 Action Plan presents a few long-term goals:

Action Step #4: Emphasizing Permanent Solutions

- By 2012, we will place and maintain 60 percent of homeless people in permanent housing – more than doubling the number of people placed in permanent housing in seven years
- The length of time that homeless people stay in emergency shelters will be reduced from the current average stay of 150 days to 45 days

Action Step #5: Increase the Supply of Permanent Housing

- By 2015, the City and County will create 2,200 new permanent supportive housing units for chronically homeless individuals and homeless families

The 2004 Action Plan also indicates that success will be determined by observing that there are fewer people who are homeless in the community. This will be observed by reliable evaluations demonstrating that increased numbers of people are exiting homelessness, not returning, and are living independently and self-sufficiently in permanent housing.

It is beneficial that the 2004 Action Plan outlines some of the goals for the end of the 10 years. This gives the partner organizations a few long-term objectives for which to strive and adds accountability to the project. The performance indicators in the 2004 Action Plan, however, could be better developed. The main measure of placing and maintaining 60 percent of the housing population could be a more effective measure if retention of housing were added as an aspect of the measure. The result is also supposed to occur two years before the end of the Plan. We recommend that the Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness refine the performance indicators in the Action Plan and/or develop new measures that would be more effective in assessing whether the Plan has been successful in the long-term.

Most performance data is now in an information system, and data reliability checks should be pursued

Much of the data on the homeless population that is used to provide performance results comes from the Housing Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS is a computer system that collects information on homeless individuals and families using homeless assistance services. The data can be used to better understand the characteristics of homeless people in the community, such as their demographic characteristics, patterns of homelessness, and use of services.

According to the Bureau, using HMIS is mandatory for providers receiving City or County funds. It is not mandatory for providers not receiving funding, though some organizations participate voluntarily. HMIS was put in place in 2005 and was used to generate some, but not all of the performance results data for 2005 and 2006. BHCD indicated that they are trying to get all service providers to use HMIS, but

the Bureau is still currently generating some performance data based on paper reports from service providers. Implementation is taking longer for some providers. Some providers are implementing HMIS while also changing other data systems.

Bureau staff noted that while they try to have good data, the data's quality is only as good as when it is put into the system. Some providers do not have a chance to input all the data. In addition, some of the homeless population may not want to provide certain pieces of information, such as whether they have a disability. Bureau staff emphasized that the data was for administrative purposes, rather than for research.

The Bureau does not currently perform reliability checks on its data, though some elements of a monitoring program are being put into place. The Bureau is developing reports that most providers will be able to run to determine if they are missing data. This will offer the providers an opportunity to check their information. These should be available this fall. BHCD is also working on quarterly feedback reports that providers will submit to the Bureau and acknowledge that they have reviewed their performance data. This will add more accountability for provider performance. The Bureau estimates the feedback reports will be in place within a year. With more performance data being housed in HMIS, we recommend BHCD further develop its monitoring program. One element of this could be to sample provider information periodically to determine the degree of system reliability and data accuracy.

Recommendations

Our review found that most performance measures in place for the plan during the first few years have improved over time, and BHCD and its partners are meeting, exceeding, or making progress toward many of the goals. A few goals for the end of the 10-Year Plan need refinement, and work continues on capturing as much information as possible into HMIS. Based on our audit work, we recommend that the Commissioner-in-charge, through BHCD and/or the Coordinating Committee:

-
- 1. Further develop short-term measures for Action Steps #2 and #6. Performance indicators for Action Step #2 should address some of the community institutions' efforts, such as hospitals and the foster care system, if possible, as laid out in the 2004 Plan. Performance indicators for Action Step #6 should address not only how many Homeless Connect events are taking place but should also address level of participation by community partners.**
 - 2. Develop a monitoring program to determine the reliability of the housing information system and the accuracy of the data. One element of this may be to sample provider information periodically.**
 - 3. Refine and/ or develop long-term performance measures associated with the end of the 10-Year Plan.**

RESPONSES TO THE AUDIT



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August 20, 2007

To: Gary Blackmer, City Auditor

From: Erik Sten, Commissioner of Public Works

Cc: Will White, Executive Director, Bureau of Housing and Community Development

Re: Response to Auditor's Report, "Ending Homelessness: Many short-term goals met; now, long-term success should be defined"

Thank you for conducting a thoughtful review of the achievements to date of the City and County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. I concur that the Bureau has done an excellent job of creating strong, short-term performance indicators and has met or exceeded the most important of those measures - ending people's homelessness. Portland's 2007 Street Count documented a 39% decrease in the number of people who are homeless and sleeping outside since 2005.

I agree with the observations and the recommendations contained in your report. My office will be working closely with Bureau staff to accomplish the following steps in response to your recommendations:

Our primary focus for the next three months will be to site an Access Center for homeless people and then to develop and open the Center within the 2-3 years. This will accomplish the goal of Action Step #3 (Improve outreach to homeless people). It will also respond to your recommendations to further develop short-term measures for Action Step #6 (Create innovative new partnerships to end homelessness). Strong, innovative partnerships are necessary to successfully site, develop and operate the Access Center within the next 2-3 years.

In addition, I will be working with the Bureau to create more opportunities and partnerships to engage the larger community in ending homelessness. We will soon launch a pilot project with faith-based organizations, including the Luis Palau Association, to staff volunteer mentor programs for formerly homeless individuals and families. We have added resources at BHCD, including dedicated staff, to build new relationships and to secure additional private resources. One early accomplishment of this effort is a new partnership with the Portland Trail Blazers to mobilize corporate support to carry out the goals of the Ten Year Plan. These actions respond to your recommendation to develop short-term measure for Action Step #6 (Create innovative new partnerships to end homelessness).

Our next Project Homeless Family Connect will be held on September 18, 2007. We will include indicators in our performance measures that more fully document the level of participation of our sponsors and community partners. These indicators will be included in ongoing reports of future Project Homeless Connect events, and will respond to your recommendation to track the community participation in these events.

This fall, we will revitalize the Citizens' Commission on Homelessness to continue to provide oversight and monitor the implementation of the Ten Year Plan. In addition, Commission members will increase their outreach to individuals, businesses and community partners to secure additional investments in our successful strategies to end homelessness in Portland.

When we adopted the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in 2005, I stated that I would not ask for additional resources until I could demonstrate that the plan's strategies to focus on chronic homelessness, streamline access to existing services, and concentrate resources on programs that offer measurable results were the correct strategies. Now that our initiative has shown very promising results – particularly the 70% drop in chronic homelessness since 2005, I am ready to engage the broader community to leverage additional private and public resources to end homelessness.

Again, thank you for a thorough audit and thoughtful recommendations. These will help to strengthen the next phase of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. I welcome future analysis and feedback of the strategies to achieve our overall goal of ending homelessness in Portland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erik Sten". The signature is stylized with a large "E" and "S".

Erik Sten



CITY OF
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BUREAU OF HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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August 20, 2007

To: Gary Blackmer, City Auditor
Kristine Adams-Wannberg
Drummond Kahn

From: Will White, Executive Director

Cc: Commissioner Erik Sten

Re: Bureau of Housing & Community Development's Response to Auditor's Report,
"Ending Homelessness: Many short-term goals met; now, long-term success should be defined"

BHCD appreciates the Auditor's report examining the City's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. As you indicate, this plan, which has the ambitious goal of ending chronic homelessness and reducing other homelessness in Portland, has seen early success. Heading the list of successes are the 39% reduction in our street counts within two years as well as the 44% reduction in shelter "turnaways" as reported by Multnomah County's one night shelter count, showing real progress toward the ultimate goal of the plan.

We agree with your recommendations to develop short term measures that show efforts to improve discharge planning from institutions. Our efforts on this front already include partnering with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office to retain a homeless discharge planner who has helped 71% of homeless people move into stable housing upon release from jail. Additionally, we are jointly funding a program with Providence Health System, OHSU, Legacy Systems, and other hospitals to effectively provide respite and housing for frequent users of emergency systems. To date, 62% of these individuals were moved into stable housing.

We also agree on the need to improve on our performance indicators that measure innovative partnerships. In addition to the significant efforts to bring people together for the twice annual Project Homeless Connect events, we have a new position whose primary purpose is to build corporate and civic engagement in the 10 Year Plan strategies.

Now that our data system, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), has been implemented with a majority of our providers, it is very important to us that we monitor data accuracy and reliability. We will develop a data sampling work plan to ensure that providers are entering consistent information. This supports your second recommendation.

The audit's final recommendation, to refine and develop long-term performance measures, makes good sense to us. We are one quarter of the way through our 10 Year Plan and we can see that the initial strategies have shown success. Now is the appropriate time to develop the metrics that will help us measure our progress for the duration of the plan. Over the next 6-12 months, we will begin developing these long-term goals and measures in a manner that is consistent with previous methodology and 10 Year Plan strategies, but also flexible enough to accommodate future changes in the environment of the homeless and mainstream care systems that serve homeless people. Our goals will also reflect changes in the direction of the plan. We will be directing our energies toward engaging more community involvement and raising additional resources to support the plan's strategies.

Thank you for a thoughtful review of the Ten Year Plan and for this opportunity to respond.

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now long-term success should be defined*

Report #336, August 2007

Audit Team Members: Kristine Adams-Wannberg,
Kari Guy, Kristin Johnson, Sharon Meross

This report is intended to promote the best possible management of public resources. This and other audit reports produced by the Audit Services Division are available for viewing on the web at: www.portlandonline.com/auditor/auditservices. Printed copies can be obtained by contacting the Audit Services Division.

Gary Blackmer, City Auditor
Drummond Kahn, Director of Audit Services

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