

The Oregonian

Portland to be left out of FBI's 2015 crime report due to programming problems

By Carli Brosseau

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In April 2015, Portland and more than 40 surrounding communities began using a brand new \$12.6 million computer system to handle record keeping for local law enforcement.

But when it came time to send crime data this year for the FBI's Crime in the United States report, the software wasn't ready to do the job.

As a result, the most authoritative compendium of American crime statistics will include nothing about Portland and its neighbors when it's published in November.

The FBI's report contains information that helps grant writers make their case, homebuyers to make decisions and researchers to spot trends. It's the data most commonly used to show whether crime is going up or down and to compare crime rates across cities.

For example, the 2014 report showed Portland ranked 55th in per capita violent crime among cities with more than 250,000 people. The rate of reported violent crime in Portland was about half the rate in New Orleans.

As for 2015? That will be anyone's guess.

Melaney Koch, records manager for Washington County Sheriff's Office and member of the board that oversees the new regional records system, said the region's failure to report crime data is a real frustration.

"Reporting is what makes us accountable," Koch said. "It's like closing the loop and showing what we did."

Portland and the other agencies using the new computer system have until February to fix the problem if they want their crime data included in the FBI's 2016 report.

The breakdown is the second time in two years that the FBI's crime report was missing key elements for Oregon's largest city.

The Oregon State Police gathers crime data from local agencies and sends it to the FBI each year. But Portland hate crime information didn't make it into the 2014 report because a state supervisor retired without showing his replacement how to send it.

As for fixing the current software issue, administrators are applying for a grant to cover two full-time employees and a payment to the software vendor, Versaterm, said Kim Roark, the Portland Police Bureau employee managing the process. No dollar figure was available Tuesday.

Portland chose software that is supposed to report to the newest FBI standard, which is different from the more elaborate system that the Oregon State Police uses. Roark said difficulties arose when Portland tried to customize the database to fit Oregon's system.

The governing board for the shared data system decided this spring to give up on the customization effort. Now programmers must convert all of the data back to the national format, Roark said. And the Oregon State Police must modify its system to receive the data in that form.

Eventually, the 2015 Portland data that should have gone to the FBI on March 28 will be submitted, Roark said. It will be entered into the FBI's internal database, available upon request but not on the federal law enforcement agency's website.

John Roman, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute who studies crime control policies, said it's not unusual to see glitches when rolling out new technology. Law enforcement computer systems are often outdated and cumbersome. Portland's last computer system was about three decades old.

Roman sees Portland's failure to report 2015 data to the FBI primarily as a sign of the scale of the region's ambition for improvement. He applauded the effort to create a record-keeping system that will allow for more information sharing and better crime analysis.

"Is it a little bit of a black eye? Of course it is," Roman said. "It's a bad situation, but a good prognosis."

The Portland Business Journal

City's building permit process can be painfully slow

By Jon Bell

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The building boom is big in Portland, which has been good for developers, builders and many others connected to the industry.

But the rush has also overwhelmed the city's Bureau of Development Services, which reviews plans, issues permits and conducts inspections.

In turn, the permitting process has, at times, slowed to a crawl. One project of Killian Pacific's — the developer behind the Clay Creative office building and the LOCA mixed-use project on the Goat Blocks — took nearly a year to land its permit.

In this week's cover story, we take a look at just how the permitting process, which can be slow, complicated and lengthy, is impacting Portland's bustling construction scene, and how the city is trying to make improvements.

It's an important topic, and one that touches not just builders and developers, but also small businesses, city agencies, neighborhoods and many others. Have a read, and for those impacted by the process, take our poll and let us know how it's made a difference for you.