

# The Portland Tribune

## Your City Hall: Upcoming Public Budget Forums

*By Jim Redden*

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**Public testimony on the next city budget will be taken at forums scheduled from April 2 to May 22.**

What is happening? Scheduled public forums for Portlanders to comment on the next city budget begin Tuesday, April 2, and continue through May 22.

Why is this important? The City Council must adopt balanced budgets for all Portland agencies that take effect July 1 of every year. Each agency submits recommended budgets that meet requirements set by the mayor during the first months of the calendar year. The council is briefed on them in work sessions that do not allow public testimony after that.

But then public forums are scheduled where Portlanders can testify on next year's budget. They begin before the mayor submits his proposed budget — which will happen May 1 — and continue until shortly before the council votes to approve its version. These are the only times reserved for public testimony, although letters, emails and phone calls also can be directed to the council offices.

What are the biggest issues this year? The bureau with the biggest potential cut this year is Portland Parks & Recreation, which is facing a potential \$6.3 million funding shortfall. The bureau has proposed laying off up to 50 employees and increasing program fees by yet-to-be-determined amounts to close the gap.

These cuts and fee increases have been proposed despite the fact that the city is taking in a record amount of general fund revenue, the share of funding the council has the most control over.

Mayor Ted Wheeler has directed all general fund-financed agencies to submit proposed budgets with 1 percent cuts, in part to "free up" more money for other uses. That includes homeless services, a priority set by the council when it approved a housing state of emergency in 2015 and subsequently extended it three times.

What can I do? In addition to contacting council offices directly, the city has released a schedule for public forums where anyone can testify.

The first is from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 2, at the IRCO Main Office Gym, 10301 N.E. Glisan St. Public testimony is by lottery, with tickets available starting at 5:30 p.m.

Two community work sessions with public testimony are scheduled next.

Chronic homelessness and supportive housing is the focus of the first one from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, April 6, in Room 220 of the student union at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus, 705 N. Killingsworth St.

The second one focuses on parks, recreation and open spaces from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 9, in the north cafeteria of David Douglas High School, 1001 S.E. 135th Ave.

The hearing on the mayor's proposed budget is scheduled from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, May 9, at a location to be determined.

You can find the schedule for all public forums and council sessions at [www.portlandoregon.gov/cbo](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/cbo).

You can find contact information for all council members at [www.portlandoregon.gov](http://www.portlandoregon.gov).

## OPB

# Portland Considers Helping Tenants With Criminal Histories

*By Amelia Templeton  
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For Dana Schlappie, the worst part about having a criminal record is what's its meant for her 10-year-old son. Her family is currently homeless for the second time in the past few years.

"Right now we're sleeping at a friend's house who's letting him use his room. We're sleeping in a bed. But we've been sleeping on the floor, sleeping on a couch. We sleep wherever we can," she said.

Schlappie worries that her family is a burden on the friends she's staying with. So every few weeks, they move. That creates its own problems. She's driving 40 minutes to get her youngest son to school in the morning to try to maintain some normalcy for him. But she's struggling to manage his moods.

"Like, 'I hate school' one time, he said to the teacher, and I'd never heard that from him," she said, her voice catching. "It's been really hard."

Schlappie says she's submitted 8 applications for apartments to rent so far. Those applications have been denied, denied, denied, denied, denied, denied, denied and denied.

She's never been evicted, or damaged an apartment, and she doesn't owe any money to landlords. But 17 years ago, Schlappie pled guilty to serious felony charges.

"Schlappie household has been denied...Criminal history: manufacture/ delivery of a controlled substance," her housing caseworker, Mary Babcock, reads from the latest email denial Schlappie has recieved.

They sit together in a small office at Portland Homeless Family Solutions, where Schlappie is a client and Babcock talks about Schlappie's options for an appeal. This application was for a two-bedroom in a new subsidized affordable apartment building in the Pearl district, owned by the nonprofit Innovative Housing Inc.

Schlappie's 17-year-old drug dealing charge — delivery of methamphetamine — triggers an automatic denial in the screening policies used by most landlords, rental companies and publicly funded housing.

This week the Portland City Council is debating an ordinance that would change how landlords screen their tenants. One major component of the proposal: it makes it harder for landlords to deny a person's rental application based on older criminal convictions.

It's the latest effort to reduce the stigma for people who've been incarcerated, and it's controversial.

Oregon gives landlords broad latitude to refuse to rent to a person based on their criminal history, but an ordinance that's before the city council this week could change the rules in Portland.

The proposal is from Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, who was elected on a platform of advocating for tenant's rights.

It would create new limits on how landlords can use a wide range of criteria that they have historically relied on to estimate the risks associated with a prospective tenant, like a person's credit history, criminal background and income.

Advocates argue that these screening criteria, while appearing neutral, create barriers to housing, in particular for low income tenants and people of color, who are more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system.

"They use those mechanisms in order to filter people out, and the people they end up filtering out are mostly people of color," said Jamey Duhamel, Eudaly's policy advisor.

In Oregon, for example, African Americans are five times more likely than white people to have spent time in prison or in jail, according to The Sentencing Project.

State law prevents Portland from dictating specific screening criteria to landlords, so Duhamel found a work around.

"What our policy does is it sets up a two-track system," she said.

Here's how: the ordinance creates "threshold criteria" for how far back landlords can consider a person's criminal history: seven years from sentencing for felonies, and three years from sentencing for misdemeanors.

Landlords could adopt more restrictive policies that look further back. But if they do, the ordinance requires them to take a much deeper look at each individual applicant's criminal history and consider mitigating factors.

Duhamel says there's research to support the idea that as time goes by, the risk that a person with a criminal history will re-offend drops.

"We feel very comfortable that we're not asking landlords to house anyone who is dangerous, or will present a risk to their properties," she said.

For example, a recent study of people arrested on federal charges found that people were most likely to re-offend in the first two years after their release, and over time, the rates of recidivism dropped.

Deborah Imse, the executive director of Multifamily Northwest, an industry association that represents apartment and rental home owners, agrees that people who've been incarcerated need better access to rental housing.

But she believes Eudaly's ordinance takes away too much discretion from landlords, who have an obligation to protect their tenants. She points out Oregon has more than 400 different misdemeanors.

"That includes all kinds of sex offense, theft, arson," she said. "I believe that somebody, a senior citizen, of a vulnerable population are not going to think that somebody with some of those offenses are moving in next door to you."

Imse says the ordinance is so complex, most landlords will need to consult an attorney if they want to use screening criteria that are more restrictive than the seven- and three-year thresholds.

She said landlords are selling their properties in response to the increasing regulation of the rental market.

“If you begin to make things so complicated that somebody can’t be a housing provider unless they hire a professional to do it, folks are going to leave,” she said.

Groups that provide subsidized affordable housing have also pointed out the complexity of the new proposal, and asked the city council to make funding available to train managers and property owners on how to implement it.

Back at the offices of Portland Homeless Family Solutions, Dana Schlappie and her housing caseworker work on an appeal letter, asking Income Property Management to reconsider its decision to deny her rental application.

Schlappie was 25 when she was arrested on drug dealing charges. She’s 42 now. She says her boyfriend at the time was the dealer, and she got caught up in his arrest.

“I think it’s changed me, into a better person, and who I surround myself by, from that mistake from years ago,” she said.

Court records show that Schlappie spent three weeks in jail and paid a \$1000 fine. Her parole ended a year early, for good behavior. She hasn’t been charged with other felonies since then.

The proposal to place new limits on the criteria landlords use to screen their tenants will be up for debate in the city council this week. The council will hear public testimony on Thursday, which could be followed by a vote.

Also this week, Dana Schlappie’s appeal was granted; she was accepted for a two-bedroom apartment.