

The Oregonian

Multnomah County sees 20% more people sleeping outside in latest homeless count

*By Molly Harbarger
August 1, 2019*

More people are sleeping outside in Multnomah County on any given night in 2019 than the last decade, according to the latest homelessness count released Thursday.

About 20% more people were found living somewhere unfit for human habitation -- in places including tents, in cars and under bridges -- when the count was done on a single night this past winter compared to 2017, the last time the federally required count occurred.

The 2,037 people who were found sleeping outside is the highest the count has found and represents some of the area's most entrenched issues -- they are disproportionately people of color, mentally ill or have a substance abuse problem.

They are also largely people who said they had never been homeless before.

While the overall number of homeless people counted dropped by nearly 4% to 4,015 -- down from 4,177 -- some numbers, such as the increase in people living on the street for the first time, indicate that the tide of extremely poor people losing their housing continues unabated.

The Point in Time count is conducted by the county every two years. It focuses on people who are living on the streets or in cars, transitional housing and shelters. The federal Housing and Urban Development agency doesn't account for people who are doubled up or couch surfing, which would make the number much higher.

Volunteers and staff from the city, county and nonprofits canvass the county to find anyone who might fit the definition of homelessness to put together a census. However, it has limitations, including that it is done in the winter, when many people are most likely to find a warmer place to sleep and thus might not be easily found.

But officials use it as a snapshot of what Multnomah County's streets might look like on any given day of the year.

The data is collected by Portland State University and analyzed by the Joint Office of Homeless Services. The full report was released Thursday.

Multnomah County and the city of Portland have made larger investments in homelessness services each year and have increased the number of people in shelters and permanent housing. In fact, there were about 50% more people receiving financial and staff support to get into housing and stay there this year over 2017.

That translates to 12,480 people who officials say could likely have been on the street if not for those investments.

But even with the now \$70 million that goes to services for homeless people, the latest survey shows gaps in who is being reached.

In 2017, the count found more people living in shelters than out of them. This year's significant reversal could be, in part, due to the fact that the team of people who canvassed the county in 2019 was about twice the size as 2017 and that organizations that focus on serving black, Latino and Native American people were enlisted.

People of color disproportionately experience homelessness on each Point in Time survey. That remains true this year -- and gets slightly worse. While people of color make up less than 30% of the county's total population, nearly 40% of homeless people in 2019 are not white.

Native American people remain the most disproportionately homeless group in Multnomah County.

They also are the most likely to be chronically homeless, which is defined as experiencing homelessness for more than a year and having an addiction, mental health condition or physical disability that makes getting and staying in housing difficult.

The entire chronically homeless population grew in 2019, though. The county found 1,769 who fit the definition -- 37% higher than in 2017.

Native people often take the top spot in being disproportionately homeless, but the problem has become worse, said Paul Lumley, director of the Native American Youth and Family Center. Lumley, who is Yakama, said that his organization is seeing the most stark example of the problem in the high school the organization runs.

Between 40% to 50% of the students experience homelessness at a given time, Lumley said.

This is despite two housing projects underway to specifically serve Oregon's tribal members and other programs.

"This tells us that the current housing system is not working," Lumley said.

Black people in Multnomah County were also overrepresented in this year's count -- even more than past years. Just over 7% of Multnomah County residents are black, but about 16% of the county's homeless residents identify as black.

Both Mayor Ted Wheeler and Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury pointed to the disparities for people of color as some of the data that concerned them most.

"The percentage of people who indicated they are African-American is a startling statistic," Wheeler said. "There's no way to sugarcoat that."

Latinos were likely undercounted in 2019 due to an unwillingness by immigrants to participate. The number of homeless Latino people dropped in 2019 by 13% -- a 55-person difference -- but officials cautioned that the number might not be accurate.

Edith Molina from El Programa Hispano Catolico said that while her nonprofit attempted to better survey the Latino population, many people were afraid to report information to the government.

Another number stands out to officials as suspect: A 50% decline since 2017 in homeless families. This is despite Multnomah County ending its policy of providing shelter for every family that identifies as homeless and wants to be inside -- and closing its dedicated family shelter because of structural problems. Only 12 families total were found sleeping outside -- an 84% decrease.

Officials attribute some of that decrease to increased effort to place families into permanent housing, following the trouble at the family shelter. They also acknowledge that it is likely an undercount, considering more than 900 families are on the waitlist for emergency housing assistance.

Officials' warnings not to interpret too much success from Point in Time numbers aligns with years of caution that few expect much to change until the competitive housing market cools.

Major West Coast cities that released their data earlier this year said the same thing -- there is still a long way to go, even if numbers drop.

Their data shows Portland falls in the middle of major West Coast cities dealing with homelessness crises. Seattle saw a drop in both the total homeless population -- 8% -- and the number of people without shelter -- 17%. It was the first decrease since 2012.

Los Angeles, consistently a city with some of the largest amount of homeless people, saw a 12% increase, even as voters approved a historic bond to build affordable housing.

Marc Jolin, director of the city-county Joint Office of Homeless Services, echoed elected officials that the report didn't hold many surprises.

"As hard as it is to see the number of unsheltered people going up, the reality of people doing this work every day is we're fighting an uphill battle," Jolin said.

The city, county and Metro have committed to building 2,000 units of permanent supportive housing to try to make a dent in the hardest people to serve -- those with disabilities and addictions. Six hundred of those are in the works or already built, according to Jolin.

The 2019 count shows about a 10% increase in homeless people who report either a disability of some form. More than 70% of homeless people reported living with a physical disability, mental illness, substance use disorder, HIV or other disability.

Those services were the focus of many government and nonprofit leaders Thursday. Both Wheeler and Kafoury said that their budgets can't accommodate the growing need for mental health and addiction services, in particular.

"Those folks need more than just keys to an apartment," Kafoury said.

They said the current data underscores the need to create more resources to deal with the growing problem, which could take the form of a revenue generating mechanism on a future ballot.

"We don't have the money for the services in our budget right now," Kafoury said.

About 40% of homeless people surveyed said they had a mental health issue. Almost half of all homeless people surveyed said they used drugs of some kind.

Sean Hubert, chief housing and strategy officer for nonprofit Central City Concern, said that he would link those increases to other troubling data points, such as Oregon having some of the highest rates in the nation for untreated addiction issues and lowest reimbursement rates for addiction treatment."

"It's time to have a dialogue and evaluate our strategies going forward," Hubert said.

Candace Avalos, running as reform candidate, enters Portland Council race

*By Gordon Friedman
August 1, 2019*

Candace Avalos, a student adviser at Portland State University, on Thursday announced her candidacy for the Portland City Council.

Avalos' announcement said that, if elected, she would push to create a system of district representation, making her the first among Council contenders — as well as the incumbents — to announce such a reform position.

Currently, the mayor and commissioners are elected city-wide rather than representing particular parts of town. That system has been criticized as creating an unrepresentative government. Officials are legislators and bureau executives, which has been cast as an oversight system rife with conflicts.

In an announcement video, Avalos said the city-wide elections system is “outdated” and “keeps holding us back as a city.”

“We deserve a City Council that answers to the people,” she said, “not just the bureaus they oversee.”

Similar to other candidates, Avalos said she would also endorse policies that address homelessness, government accountability and a fair economy, but she did not give specifics.

If elected, Avalos would also be among the youngest people elected to the Portland City Council. She is 30; former Commissioner Erik Sten was 29 when elected in 1996.

At Portland State, Avalos advises the student government and Greek organizations, according to a university bio. She was formerly a high school Spanish and English teacher.

Avalos is a member of the Citizen Review Committee, a city panel of volunteers who promote police accountability. Her time on the committee “has been an invaluable experience in best practices around government transparency and the need to rebuild the public trust,” Avalos' announcement said.

In a statement, she said unity among Portlanders would help officials to tackle the city's tough problems.

“When looking out at Portland, many see division and tension, but I am hopeful. I see diversity of thought, diversity of lived experiences as our strength and our path forward,” she said. “Our growth has brought challenges, but only by having everyone at the table can we come together as neighbors and tackle these issues.”

Avalos is running for the seat currently held by Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who is retiring. Carmen Rubio, the leader of a Latino-focused nonprofit and a former City Hall staffer, has also declared for Fritz's seat.

The Portland Tribune

Survey: Street people up, total homeless down

*By Jim Redden
August 01, 2019*

Portland and Multnomah County releases the most recent homeless county, which shows both successes and failures

It's not your imagination — the number of people living on the streets in Portland and Multnomah County has increased over the past two years.

The number of unsheltered homeless increased 22 percent since 2017, jumping from 1,668 to 2,037 people, according to the new semi-annual homeless count released Thursday, Aug. 1.

The 2019 survey found the total number of homeless people in the county actually went down over the past two years, however. Counting those in emergency shelters and transitional housing, the total decreased from 4,177 to 4,015 people, a 4 percent drop.

According to the survey, the increase in the unsheltered count was driven by a significant jump — 479 people, or 37 percent — in the number of people considered chronically homeless. That means they have at least one disabling condition and have been homeless for at least a year. The survey found that roughly two-thirds of those counted as being without shelter fit that description.

At the same time, the survey found that the overall decrease reflected reductions in groups Portland and Multnomah County have prioritized for services. Among women, the count fell by 10 percent. The number of people counted in families with children fell by more than half.

But, according to the survey, the percent of African Americans and Native Americans experiencing homelessness increased since 2017, and both groups are overrepresented compared to their percentages of the general population.

The count was conducted on the night of Jan. 23, 2019. The previous one was undertaken around the same time two years ago.

Portland and Multnomah County officials praised recent efforts to reduce homelessness for helping to reduce the total number of homeless people. The city and county are together contributing around \$70 million to the Joint Office of Homeless Services, which funds and coordinates programs to prevent homelessness and serve the homeless.

Speaking after the report was released, Mayor Ted Wheeler said the decrease in the total number of homeless validates the strategy of focusing investments on specific populations, like women and families with children, which declined over the past two years.

"We've proven that focused, aggressive investments in support services can generate positive outcomes for thousands of people in our community who would otherwise be homeless. That success is reflected in the strides we've made helping families and women," Wheeler said.

Multnomah County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury agreed, saying that the chronically homeless are now a focus of the joint office.

"Too many of our neighbors with disabilities are having to live on our streets. Disability checks and other fixed incomes just can't cover rising rents, and this is exactly why we are prioritizing not just affordable housing, but the type of affordable housing that comes with a case-worker for people to stay housed. We know it works and we need to do a lot more of it," said Kafoury.

Both Wheeler and Kafoury also said the funding was preventing over 12,000 people from becoming homeless when the survey was conducted by subsidizing their rents and providing emergency financial assistance.

Wheeler and Kafoury both said the city and council hope to increase funding for the joint office in coming years, even if the economy slows down and general fund revenues decline.

The survey — officially known as the Point in Time homeless count — is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for local social service agencies to qualify for federal funding. Although many jurisdictions conduct the survey every year, Multnomah County

does it every two years. County officials said this year's survey was the most extensive ever, which may have affected the results.

The 2019 survey was the most extensive one ever conducted in the county. It involved 130 staff members from 30 organizations and 140 volunteers. Despite that, city and county officials said it only represents a ballpark estimate of the number of homeless, with homeless youth and other demographics likely being underrepresented.

The survey was released at a Thursday morning press conference held by the city-county Joint Office of Homeless Services. Director Marc Jolin said the reduction in the total homeless figures was especially significant because of the ongoing affordable housing crisis and continuing lack of social services for those with mental health conditions, addiction disorders, chronic illnesses, and physical disabilities.

[You can read the survey here.](#)

Willamette Week

Candace Avalos Joins the Contest for Portland City Council

By Abbey McDonald

August 1, 2019

The Portland State University advisor will bid for departing Commissioner Amanda Fritz's seat.

Candace Avalos, an advisor of student affairs at Portland State University, has announced her campaign for Portland City Commissioner with a platform of ending the city's commission form of government.

Avalos is Vice Chair of the Citizen Review Committee, which seeks to improve police service and accountability. She says that her work there and with students at PSU motivated her to start campaigning.

A first-generation immigrant from Guatemala, Avalos launched her campaign with a message of unity. "When looking out at Portland, many see division and tension, but I am hopeful," she wrote. "I see diversity of thought, diversity of lived experiences as our strength and our path forward."

Avalos wants to end the commission form of government—also known as a "weak mayor" system, in which five commissioners, including the mayor are elected citywide. Instead, she wants elections by geographic district, a reform backed by the City Club of Portland. She pledges to "address the outdated commissioner system of government that keeps holding us back as a city."

She is one of two women who wants to replace Commissioner Amanda Fritz upon her retirement.

The other, Carmen Rubio, is the director of the nonprofit Latino Network and was an early contender to fill Fritz's seat. Rubio, who announced her campaign earlier this month, has over 70 endorsements.

The candidates will compete in next year's May primary.

Lime to Offer Additional Scooters and Discounted Rides Near Lloyd Center During MAX Station Closures

*By Elise Herron
August 1, 2019*

TriMet's work to improve the Lloyd MAX station will disrupt the red, blue and green MAX lines.

E-scooter company Lime plans to deploy hundreds of scooters and offer discounted rides for commuters affected by the Lloyd District MAX train closures Aug. 4 through Aug. 17.

TriMet's work to improve the Lloyd MAX station will affect the red, blue and green MAX lines, which will arrive less often and on special schedules during the two week period.

To help commuters, Lime will give riders who start or finish trips in the vicinity of the Lloyd Center or Rose Quarter a free unlock—usually \$1—for their first ten rides with the code LIME2MAX.

Portland Bureau of Transportation has also temporarily increased the number of scooters allowed in the Lloyd District during this year's pilot program, so that Lime can deploy a total of 165 extra vehicles.

The company plans to have staff stationed at designated scooter parking areas to help riders navigate the MAX changes and park correctly and to sign up eligible riders for Lime's low fare program.

County Officials Found 369 More Portlanders Officially Living on the Street

*By Rachel Monahan
August 1, 2019*

The number of homeless people overall in the county declined slightly since 2017.

The number of people living on the streets on Multnomah County this year rose to 2,037, up 22 percent from 2017. But the number of homeless people, including in shelters, declined slightly to 4,015 when compared with 2017.

The every-other-year, federally required count of the homeless population is a one-night look at who's on the streets and shelters. This year's tally (and the 2019 Point-In-Time report) provide some contradictory information about whether the county and city will continue to see increasing numbers of people at risk of sleeping outside, and whether the county and city response to that risk is adequate.

The overall numbers show that one one night this winter, 2,037 people were unsheltered, 1,459 people sleeping in emergency shelter and 519 people in transitional housing. That's 4,015 people who were homeless.

Among the reasons the report offers for the increase in the number of people on the streets: A better effort to find people in 2019 than in 2017, as well as less severe weather. That second reason may have shifted some people inside to outside. The weather (among other reasons) led to the shelters being less occupied on the night the count was conducted.

That change alone would have led to a simple 10 percent increase in people on the streets.

The decline in the number of people living in shelters partly reflects a change in policy.

Multnomah County's Joint Office of Homeless Services ended its policy of providing shelter to any homeless family and instead returned to a system that requires wait lists. As the report notes, that does not mean a shortage of families at risk of homelessness. While there was more investment in housing for families, the report cites a range of factors that could impact why the families are not showing up in the count:

"Other factors, such as changing immigration policies, the tendency of homeless families to double up, and displacement pressures that are forcing people in poverty out of the County, would suggest that a large number of families who are still homeless are simply not showing up in this Count. We know, for example, that more than 900 families who report being either doubled up or literally homeless are on the County's waitlist for emergency housing assistance."

The Portland Mercury

New Council Candidate Calls for Police Oversight Reforms and District Representation

By Alex Zielinski

August 2, 2019

The race to fill outgoing Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz's office in 2020 has begun to grow. Candace Avalos, a student government advisor at Portland State University, announced her plans to run for Fritz's seat Wednesday evening.

Avalos, the 30-year old daughter of Guatemalan immigrants, is a relative newcomer to Portland politics. But as the vice chair of Portland's Citizen Review Committee (CRC), the 11-member volunteer board that reviews police misconduct claims, she's quickly familiarized herself with systemic issues that hinder the city's democratic process—starting with its style of government.

Avalos is running on a platform to end Portland's outdated commission form of government.

Portland is now the last remaining major city in the US that relies on this wonky government style, where commissioners represent city bureaus instead of geographic regions of the city. Instead of candidates being voted in by people living in the area they represent, they're appointed through at-large elections—where the victors are those who collect the most citywide votes. To Avalos (and a recent report by the City Club of Portland) that process works directly against the city's equity goals.

"We've been slow-walking on this issue for far too long," says Avalos. "It's time we remove the barriers between the public and their elected officials."

Since introducing this form of government in 1913, Portland voters have rejected proposals to change the format no less than eight times. Yet, as Portland becomes increasingly diverse and areas of stark underrepresentation in city government become clearer, more are coming around to the idea of axing the commission system.

With a long career in student government (Avalos was a member of her high school, college, and graduate school student bodies), Avalos says she feels comfortable making decisions that truly represent her community.

Along with overhauling Portland's government system, she wants to restore trust in city government and its police force. Though her work on the CRC, she's witnessed the slow, "arduous" process members of the public must go through to file a complaint against a Portland Police Bureau (PPB) officer—and the general inaction that follows it.

"The CRC has opened my eyes to how flawed the police accountability process is," she says. "I now understand how difficult it can be for citizens to engage with their city and hold their leaders accountable. This is not how you strengthen a community."

Her complaints lie with the process more than the officers themselves. Avalos says she's been surprised how many policy ideas she shares with police officers she's interacted with.

"Many officers want more training, they want to help the houseless, they want to confront biases. We need to be open to the fact that they're doing good work," she says. "But we also need to be brave enough to have hard conversations, and say [to officers], 'Look, we want you to succeed as much as you want to succeed, you just need to be willing to listen to other communities and value their trust.'"

Avalos says she "one hundred percent" supports the idea behind Portland Street Response, the city-funded program that's considering sending social workers or mental health experts to respond to low-level 911 calls instead of police officers.

It took Avalos' recent training with Emerge Oregon—a program that primes Oregon women for political office—to throw her hat into the council race.

"I realized—I teach my students that they are capable of leading, that their experience in government will transfer into the real world," she says. "I care about Portland, I care about this community, so why not step up and be that leader?"

Avalos has yet to report any donations since registering her campaign with the state on July 30. She says she plans on using the city's Open and Accountable Elections program, which incentivizes candidates who refuse large financial donations by matching their small donations with public funds.

Carmen Rubio, Avalos' sole competitor (as of now) has also enrolled in the city's publicly-funded election program. Rubio, the 45-year-old director of the Latino Network, has reported \$6,200 in donations since announcing her campaign in early July. [Here's a snapshot](#) of where the multiple City Council races stood as of July 18.

OPB

New Candidate For Portland City Council Calls For District Representation

By Amelia Templeton

August 1, 2019

Political newcomer Candace Avalos announced Wednesday she has launched a campaign for a Portland City Council seat.

Avalos works for Portland State University in student affairs and is vice-chair of the Citizen Review Committee, the city's volunteer police oversight body. She has not previously held elected office.

She is running for the seat left open by retiring Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

Avalos is placing an unusual issue front and center in her campaign: Portland's form of government.

She says as Portland has grown, its government hasn't kept up. It's the last large American city where council members are all elected citywide.

Avalos believes having council members elected by geographic district would lead to better representation for Portlanders.

"We have seen a lack of representation from many of our neighborhoods on city council because of this at-large system," she said.

"Just being able to say, you know, I have something going on in my community, my roads need fixing, this is happening, and here is the city counselor who sits on this council and represents my needs."

Avalos's argument about the form of government may be timely.

By 2021, the City Council has to convene a group of 20 citizens to review the city's charter and recommend changes to put to voters for approval. This year, the City Club of Portland released a report calling Portland's commission system "inherently inequitable," and recommending an overhaul.

At least five previous attempts to overhaul or eliminate the commission system have failed.

Avalos sees herself as someone who belongs to a number of different communities. She's a renter in the Hollywood neighborhood in Northeast Portland.

She says her parents immigrated to the United States from Guatemala in the 1960s, and she identifies as "a Blacktina" — African-American and Latina.

"I feel like I represent this movement of young voices that are trying to be heard and represented in their government," she said.

Avalos hasn't filed any fundraising reports yet. She says she's planning to opt in to the new city-funded campaign system. Launching this fall, the system gives matching dollars to candidates who meet certain fundraising targets, if they agree to only take money from individual donors and to cap contributions at \$250.

Fritz has said she hoped that, by not seeking re-election, she would encourage a new generation of people to run.

Avalos said the choice by Fritz to retire early, and the commissioner's push for the Open and Accountable elections program, both encouraged her to run for the seat.

Carmen Rubio, executive director of the Latino Network and a well-known community leader, is also running for the open seat. She has reported \$6,200 in contributions so far.

Rubio previously served as a policy advisor to former Portland Mayor Tom Potter and Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish.