

The Oregonian

Homeless Portlanders want mental health, crisis support instead of weapons in first responders

*By Molly Harbarger
September 19, 2019*

A survey of people living on the street underscored Portland's need for an alternative to police responding to low-level 911 calls -- but who those first responders will be remains up in the air.

Portland State University researchers canvassed homeless camps and centers where people receive meals and services to find out what their experiences with police have been and what they would like to see instead.

The results will be used to help create Portland Street Response, the working name of program expected to divert calls for homelessness issues away from police. Street Roots, a nonprofit newspaper, helped lead the surveying effort, along with other homeless service providers. The report is available on the newspaper's website.

Of the 184 people surveyed, 65% said they want a responder who fills the role of crisis counselor, mental health worker or peer support rather than a cop in a uniform. They don't want every interaction with a first responder to include a check to see if they have warrants for their arrest.

Instead of a hospital or jail, they want more options for finding the help they need.

They said that when they have had positive interactions with police, it has mostly been when they felt listened to and were allowed to decide the kind of help they receive.

"If you ask anyone in the community, you'll see their needs are not met," said Vince Mosiello, who sells Street Roots newspapers and helped lead the canvassing.

Mosiello spoke at a press conference announcing the results, and said that his and other homeless people's experiences show that the Portland Street Response effort is needed. They often feel like they are treated as less than human by Portland residents and first responders.

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty is leading a group of public and private leaders in public safety and homelessness services to figure out how to send first responders to calls about homelessness without defaulting to police. The group commissioned the study.

"When over half of the arrests in the city were of people who without being houseless wouldn't have been arrested, we know we are wasting resources," Hardesty said.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported that 52% of all arrests in 2017 in the city were of homeless people. Street Roots used the statistic, as well as the newspaper's own reporting, to call for the Portland Street Response effort.

As they consider a new program, officials have looked at Eugene's CAHOOTS program, which pairs a crisis counselor with a medic. In a given year, the program's two teams field an average of 20 percent of all calls to the 911 and non-emergency police numbers.

It works largely independently of police, with only 10% of CAHOOTS calls involving another public safety agency.

About 60% of all CAHOOTS' clients are homeless, even though it was never meant to provide homelessness outreach. But the calls they respond to coincide with the area's population of people who struggle to be able to pay rent.

Portland faces a similar issue in that a majority of the city's 911 calls are about homelessness issues. Greg Townley, director of research for the Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, said that the survey results show that homeless people want Portlanders to be more judicious about what they call police for.

Hardesty echoed the idea that the Street Response effort should work in tandem with marketing about the cost of overusing the 911 system.

"911 is not who you call when you feel uncomfortable with what someone looks like," Hardesty said. "911 is not who you call when someone puts a tent up across from your house."

But before Portland's Street Response program can launch, the pilot program must go to City Council in November. The mayor already set aside \$500,000 to fund what will likely be a small, geographically bound version of an idea that could be scaled up if it is found effective.

Hardesty said that she doesn't know what it will look like yet, or where it will be housed. However, she oversees the fire and emergency dispatch departments, which suggests that the program might live under one of those umbrellas.

The Portland Tribune

Cost estimates increase for Portland water filtration plant

By Jim Redden

September 20, 2019

City Council is briefed on the newest cost estimates for the required plant Thursday afternoon by Portland Water Bureau officials

The estimated cost of building the Portland Water Bureau's required filtration plant has increased from \$500 million to as much as \$850 million and possibly more, the City Council was told during an afternoon work session on Thursday, Sept. 19.

The council did not make any decisions about the project, which is still in the planning stage. Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who is in charge of the Portland Water Bureau, said she will consult with the other members of the council before submitting a resolution authorizing a contract for the next phase.

Mayor Ted Wheeler expressed concern about potentially higher cost increases, saying that the city is also involved in a number of other large and expensive project. They include the clean up of the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

"If each of these projects expands by 50%, that is going to be a large increase in liabilities on our balance sheet," said Wheeler, a former State Treasurer, who wants to safeguard the city's AAA bond rating.

The council approved building the plant to comply with a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requirement to remove a potentially harmful parasite from water in the Bull Run Watershed, the primary source of water for Portland and much of the region.

The original estimate was largely based on surveys of similar plants in the country. But the estimated cost has increased as the bureau began detailed planning for the plant to be located in East Multnomah County, between the watershed and Portland.

On Thursday bureau officials estimated the cost of a plant that minimally complies with the EPA requirement at \$670 million. A plant that meets other goals, such as better removing other contaminants from the water and better surviving an earthquake, was estimated at \$850 million. The first phase of such a better plant was estimated at \$730 million, although the total cost of completing it later would be higher.

Bureau officials recommended building the \$850 million plant.

The council was also told final costs could still vary based on economic and other conditions. They could potentially range from under \$600 million to more than \$1.2 billion, depending on the option chosen, bureau officials said. Actual costs could vary by as much as 50% because the design phase has not yet started.

Water rates will have to be raised to build any of the three options. The increase would range from \$4.19 to \$10.91 a month by 2028, the council was told. Bureau customers receiving low-income assistance would pay between .84 cents and 2.18 more.

The council does not vote during work sessions. It is expected to give the bureau direction for a resolution authorizing a design contract to be considered in October or November.

Willamette Week

City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly Opens the Door to Changing the Neighborhood Association Proposal

*By Rachel Monahan
September 19, 2019*

"The proposal may look different than it does now."

Hours after WW uncovered emails showing City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly threatened a colleague with political ruin, Eudaly offered a more conciliatory public message about the future of neighborhood associations.

"The proposal may look different than it does now, but there is widespread agreement on the values asserted and the fundamental purpose of a more equitable and inclusive policy," she wrote on her official Facebook page Sept. 18.

She promised to talk with her colleagues and community members before debuting a new version of the plan for the Office of Civic and Community Life, which oversees neighborhoods. That may signal an overhaul of the proposal—which appears necessary, since she has no other votes on the City Commission for the proposed ordinance.

Eudaly has been shepherding an effort to change the way the city invites citizen involvement and has advocated for an overhaul of the city's recognition of neighborhood associations, a system that has excluded other groups.

In Sept. 10 emails Eudaly sent to Mayor Ted Wheeler as well as Commissioner Nick Fish and Jo Ann Hardesty, which WW first reported earlier this week, Eudaly implied they'd all face political

consequences for failing to support the proposal. She was particularly irked with Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who is a fierce advocate of neighborhood associations.

"I have barely begun to rally support," Eudaly wrote in the email. "You may have noticed I'm really good at rallying support."

Eudaly did not apologize, but she acknowledged that she could have listened more to her critics.

"It was initially hard for me to see past the wild speculations and false accusations to hear the legitimate concerns behind them," she wrote. "No one is at their best when under attack."

She says she'll now be talking to "community, all involved bureaus, and my colleagues. I have a list of questions I need answered and ideas to vet," she added.

Portland Moves One Step Closer to A More Rational Emergency Response to Homeless People

By Nigel Jaquiss

September 19, 2019

Officials release a new study aimed at building a case for civilians, rather than police to respond to calls for service.

City and county officials and advocates for the city's expansive homeless population today released a new Portland State University report that describes how people on the street would prefer to interact with police.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty and County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Commissioner Susheela Jayapal all spoke about the need for a different response for calls for service involving the nearly 40,000 people in the city and county who lack permanent homes.

The PSU survey is part of building political support for a more humane and effective way of such calls.

Officials are calling the nascent program "Portland Street Response."

Portland is attempting to build on a 30-year-old private nonprofit program in Eugene called Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS). Rather than sending police to low-acuity calls involving the homeless, CAHOOTS sends two person teams staffed by civilians—usually a medic and person trained in crisis intervention.

That response reportedly produces fewer violent confrontations, fewer arrests and reduces the demands on police.

As part of trying to shift Portland's 911 response to such calls from sending police officers, who are expensive, few in number and not necessarily trained to deal with mental health crises and other issues people who are homeless may face, PSU organized outreach that in July surveyed 184 people living on Portland's streets about how they'd like to be treated.

"Who better to offer opinions than those who use the services?" asked Wheeler, who is the city's police commissioner.

Those surveyed said they welcomed a police response when the situation involved violent crimes but not for more routine issues such as "camping, sleeping, drug overdoses, and mental health crises."

Behind the various officials as they spoke this morning were a variety of hand-lettered signs that survey respondents had made with messages such as "more love, less frisking" and "doctors not cops."

A key piece of the puzzle is the question of where first responders can take people in crisis who cannot stay where they are.

Multnomah County Chairwoman Deborah Kafoury provided a partial response to that: The county recently purchased a building in the west end that it hopes to convert to a drop-in center with temporary beds.

Hardesty, who oversees Portland Fire & Rescue and the Portland Bureau of Emergency Communications, said the current approach to responding to calls for service involving homeless people is often a "waste of public safety resources."

About half the arrests Portland police made last year involved homeless people Hardesty said, which in many cases amounts to criminalizing poverty.

Hardesty and Wheeler will bring a \$500,000 Portland Street Response pilot project to city council in November.

"What we are doing now just doesn't make sense," Hardesty said.

The Portland Mercury

Homeless Portlanders Suggest Mental Health Providers— Not Cops—Respond to Low-Level 911 Calls

*By Alex Zielinski
September 19, 2019*

Mental health professionals. Not the police.

That's who should be responding to most low-level 911 calls in Portland, according to a recent survey of homeless Portlanders.

The survey found that most homeless Portlanders believe officers play an important role in the city—but it shouldn't include responding to 911 calls about someone sleeping in public, reacting from a drug overdose, or simply suffering from a mental illness.

"If someone is just camping, minding their own business, [police shouldn't be present]," said one unidentified respondent who was quoted in a report on the survey's findings, released Thursday.

These findings, informed by 184 homeless Portlanders surveyed in July and September, will shape the future of Portland's emergency response system. The survey was conducted by community volunteers and city staff tasked by Portland City Council to help craft a new 911 response program—one that could reverse Portland Police Bureau's (PPB) trend of arresting a disproportionate number of homeless people for low-level offenses by dispatching mental health experts, social workers, or physicians to certain 911 calls. The city suspects the program could

help connect more homeless Portlanders to useful services (instead of jail) while freeing up overworked officers to respond to more critical 911 calls.

Street Roots was the first to pitch this alternate 911 response program to the public in March, dubbing it Portland Street Response (PSR). The idea got traction in City Hall, and commissioners earmarked \$500,000 of the city's 2019-2020 budget to fund a PSR pilot project with two employees. Staff for Mayor Ted Wheeler and Commission Jo Ann Hardesty are working together—along with numerous community groups—to present a rough draft of the PSR pilot to City Council in November.

There's still many unanswered questions the city needs to address before that point. It's still uncertain if PSR would be part of the police bureau, what exact services they would offer, or how they'd be dispatched to specific calls.

The majority of homeless Portlanders surveyed said 911 calls related to loitering, camping, mental health issues, or drug overdoses should be addressed by mental health professionals, peer counselors, or social workers who could help connect people to housing and health services. Many said they'd be more trusting of first responders if they didn't carry a weapon and didn't check every homeless person for outstanding warrants.

"When cops appear, people with warrants disperse," the report reads. "The ones who disperse are often the ones who need help."

Asked what training PSR first responders should have, the majority of those surveyed said "mental health awareness." "Listening" was the runner-up, followed by "de-escalation."

"When stepping into a situation, keep an open mind," said one anonymous respondent quoted in the report. "There is always more to a story than what you first see. Don't assume or judge, ask questions, ask what they think would resolve the problem the best."

Others suggested PSR members wore identifiable uniforms and brought water or food with them. Many asked that first responders assist them in finding "somewhere to go"—like a place to sleep, shower, or just get out of the way.

The report offers eight sweeping recommendations for city staff to consider when drafting the pilot, from "Portland Street Response should not be armed or run warrant checks" to "educat[ing] community members about emergency calls."

"Several respondents discussed frustrations with community members who call 911 whenever they see a homeless person or tent, typically when no emergency is present," the report reads.

Perhaps the most consequential suggestion from the report: "Portland Street Response needs to be separate from the police."

City staff will consider these suggestions—along with feedback from PPB officers, homeless service providers, business associations, 911 call center staff, and others familiar with the current response system—before presenting the PSR pilot proposal to City Council in November.

Portland's Youth Bring Demands for City Government to Friday Climate Strike

*By Blair Stenvick
September 19, 2019*

When the school year began a few weeks ago, Lincoln High School student teacher Suzanna Kassouf asked the students in her freshman US history and ethnic studies class if they ever worried about climate change. Every student raised their hand.

“They’re feeling a lot of fear,” Kassouf told the Mercury. “They’re seeing things change right before their eyes, and they’re afraid they’re going to witness the total breakdown of society. Which, if we stay on the course we’re on now, they will witness the total breakdown of society. And they’re just not going to stand for that.”

Kassouf shares her students’ concerns. A grad student at Lewis & Clark College, Kassouf fell into a months-long depression last year, after an intergovernmental report estimated the world had about 12 years to curb the effects of climate change before they became permanent. Then, she started organizing.

“After a few months, I said, ‘I can’t live this way anymore, I need to do something about this,’” she said. “I decided there wasn’t any more time for being depressed, so I started going to any action or event I could find.”

But the local environmental action groups Kassouf found at the time were “a sea of gray hair.” So she joined with other young climate activists to create a local chapter of the Sunrise Movement, an American youth-led movement to address climate change. Today, that chapter boasts a listserv with over 400 members, and has about 50 core organizers, ranging from middle school-aged to 35 years old. Kassouf serves as the co-coordinator of its “actions and strategies” team.

This Friday, Sunrise Movement PDX will join a coalition of groups to hold a climate strike in Portland, part of a worldwide day of strikes led by 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. Other organizing groups include Youth Igniting Change, 350PDX, and the Portland chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Climate strikers plan to meet in front of Portland City Hall at 10:30 am Friday, then march through downtown Portland and over the Hawthorne Bridge. The march will end outside OMSI, where a climate festival goes until 5 pm. According to the Portland Police Bureau, organizers have secured a permit for the demonstrations, which could impact traffic and TriMet routes.

Kassouf said many of her Lincoln High students plan to take part in the strike. Portland Public Schools will give students an excused absence for the strike, as long as they notify their teachers before leaving school.

“Why should these students be in class?” Kassouf said. “Why should they be learning about a future they’re not going to have, unless we take immediate action?”

The striking youths have some demands for Portland city government. They want Portland City Council to establish a “climate test” to apply to any new policy or ordinance being considered, and they want the city’s climate action to specifically address frontline communities, or those communities—often low-income people or people of color—who are most affected by climate change. They also want Mayor Ted Wheeler to abstain from attending a climate summit in Copenhagen next month, arguing that taking action at home—pushing back against Zenith

Energy's crude oil trains, for example—is more important than putting on a show on the world stage.

A new report from the city's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) shows that Multnomah County's carbon emission reductions have plateaued in recent years, rather than continuing to improve. From the report, which BPS has been quoting on social media leading up to Friday's strike:

“Despite 26 years of climate planning and mitigation in Portland, local carbon emission reductions have started to plateau around 15% below 1990 levels, see Figure 1. This is both a success story, and a warning. The reductions to date are impressive given we've welcomed 38% more people and 34% more jobs during the same time. Collectively we have reduced per person emissions in Multnomah County by 38% since 1990, although these reductions have slowed. Despite our successes, our emission reduction efforts clearly need to rapidly accelerate.”

In the week leading up to the climate strike, Wheeler has promised to declare climate change an emergency, and determine next steps for curbing the area's carbon emissions.

Kassouf told the Mercury that she hopes Sunrise Movement PDX's member numbers will grow on Friday. She said the climate festival will include trainings and educational workshops, giving young climate activists the chance to channel their fear into action.

“With something like the Women's March, maybe you get 100,000 people to show up, and they march, and they go home, and maybe they show up to march next year,” Kassouf said. “Our goal with the climate festival is to help people get actually involved in the movement, so they show up to something next week.”

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Huge Portland project ‘closer to tangible action’

*By Chuck Slothower
September 19, 2019*

Government agencies are one step closer to beginning a \$1 billion-plus project to clean up the Willamette River's polluted Superfund site through North Portland.

Last week, the Portland City Council authorized the Bureau of Environmental Services to enter into a settlement agreement for remedial design of the Willamette Cove area – a portion of the entire site targeted for cleanup. The bureau will work with the Port of Portland, U.S. Department of Defense and state agencies on the project.

The goal is to design for a “100 percent remedy” of the 10.1-mile stretch of river from Sauvie Island to south of the Fremont Bridge. The design phase is expected to take three to five years, followed by 13 years of construction. The site will then be monitored for 17 years.

River cleanup will be a long process, with a myriad of government agencies involved. The agreement represents a concrete step forward, said Annie Von Burg, an environmental policy manager for the Bureau of Environmental Services.

“This is an exciting phase of the project,” she said. “This is where we get closer to tangible action.”

The agreement – known as an administrative settlement agreement and order on consent – has been negotiated among the government agencies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is overseeing the work. The cleanup also involves the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of State Lands, which owns the riverbed.

The agreement now goes to state and federal agencies for their approvals, which starts a clock for the design work.

“Once that is officially signed, we have a clock ticking that we are legally bound to,” Von Burg said.

A request for proposals was issued June 28. The Bureau of Environmental Services is evaluating the proposals now, and officials expect to award the contract in early to mid-October, Von Burg said.

The contract is for an estimated \$8.1 million, although such contracts tend to vary in actual cost.

“My experience is these change pretty significantly, so I’m not sure where we’ll land, but that’s the target,” Von Burg said.

The work is expected to involve dredging and capping the riverbed in certain places.

“We are looking at engineered designs that will guide the cleanup of construction itself,” Von Burg said.

Different places in the river will require different solutions. As one example, the agencies face a complex problem at water mile 11, slightly north of the Broadway Bridge. An underwater cable there is complicating the design work, Von Burg said.

The river is polluted from decades of industrial operations, and the city lists “chemicals of concern” including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

In general, the work is likely to begin upriver, closer to where the affected area begins south of the Fremont Bridge. There may be some exceptions in places where there is a reduced risk of recontamination, Von Burg said.

“There are areas that could possibly go sooner because of the water dynamics,” she said.

The Swan Island lagoon is one such area because it is less impacted by water circulation, Von Burg said.

The remedial construction crews will also have to work around the ongoing operations of Portland Harbor.

The EPA is encouraged that the state and local governments are coming together, spokeswoman Suzanne Skadowski said.

“We’re always happy when the parties are moving forward,” she said.

OPB

Portland Report Highlights Need For New Response To Homeless Emergency Calls

*By Rebecca Ellis
September 19, 2019*

Portland City Council is in agreement: The city needs a new way to respond to emergency calls involving people who are experiencing homelessness. To that end, the city allotted \$500,000 in July for a program to address low-severity emergency calls.

Now, city officials are trying to home in on what an improved response to emergency calls would look like.

A report released by the city Thursday details the results of a survey of 180 Portlanders who are living in the city's shelters, streets and camps about who they would want to see arriving after a call for service.

The majority of those interviewed said they believed police officers should be present for calls involving crimes, such as theft, robbery and harassment.

But for lower-level incidents, such as calls concerning a homeless person camping or loitering, drug overdoses, or mental health crises, respondents believed no officers should be present.

Instead, many survey respondents said they'd like to see mental health professionals and social workers respond to these low-level calls. Many would want an insurance that their IDs would not be run for a warrant, and would want the professional to provide food, water, medical care and hygiene projects.

Portland commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty said the commission is still in the "information gathering stage" and it doesn't know what the pilot program will look like. But there would likely be less police involvement and more of an emphasis on mental health professionals.

"The fact that first responders are responding to so many calls that have absolutely nothing to do with criminal behavior is a disgrace and a waste of public safety resources," Hardesty said.

Mayor Ted Wheeler said he has considered Eugene's Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets system as a potential model. Eugene maintains a 24/7 intervention service, which dispatches one medic and one mental health professional to calls reporting a person in crisis.

A Portland State University report released in August estimated that 38,000 people were homeless in the Portland metro in 2017.

Final recommendations for a pilot project will be presented to the city council in November.