

## Underway in 2019 ...

Individual complaint investigations can reveal system-wide problems and lead to longer-term reform efforts.

Below are some of our ongoing efforts to improve policy.

**Car camping**  
*Making course corrections*

The City has many initiatives to assist people who are experiencing homelessness and to mitigate its impacts. However, there are other City functions that interact with people who are homeless that are not aligned with the City's overall efforts. Parking enforcement often engages people who are homeless and living in vehicles. At its disposal are the abandoned auto code and the derelict RV program, but neither is designed to deal with "car camping." As a result, we are seeing problematic outcomes when these tools are applied to people living in non-derelict vehicles. We recommended programmatic adjustments and are working with officials to implement changes.

**Debt Collection**  
*Creating an effective and equitable approach*

The City has neither a centralized debt collection agency nor a standard policy. Instead, each bureau develops its own approach, which often does not adhere to best practices. We've observed cost-ineffective practices, like referring trivial amounts of debt to a private collection agency. We've also seen bureaus overlook a person's ability to pay, pursuing people for years who have no assets and no income. Moving forward, we are looking at whether the City should adopt a standard collection policy that maximizes returns and incorporates equity.

**Trees in the public right-of-way**  
*Deciding who should pay*

Homeowners are held responsible for removing dangerous trees in the public right-of-way next to their property. Typically, this involves "street trees" in narrow planting strips between the sidewalk and street. However, sometimes it involves trees within vast, unimproved and inaccessible public rights-of-way. We've repeatedly challenged the practice of holding homeowners responsible for dangerous trees that are down steep slopes and/or far beyond private property lines. Council established a Street Tree Task Force to look at the issue and is expected to present options for shifting responsibility to the City in mid-2019.

## YOUR ROSE CITY WATCHDOG

We are here to make sure city government treats residents and businesses fairly.

We investigate complaints and identify ways to resolve them. As part of the Auditor's Office, we're independent and impartial.

The role of an ombudsman is part fact-finder, part investigator, part systems analyst, part judge, part conciliator, and, if necessary, part advocate for the citizen.

— Sam Zagoria  
*Former Washington Post Ombudsman*

### Contact Us

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Mayor Katz (pictured) started the ombudsman program in 1993. It was codified and located in the Auditor's Office in 2001, where it resides today. In 2017, voters enshrined the ombudsman in Charter. (Photo credit: Michael Lloyd, *The Oregonian*, 1994.)



**m-buhdz-muhn**  
Funny name. Serious work.

## Annual Report 2018

**Mary Hull Caballero**  
Auditor

**Margie Sollinger**  
Ombudsman

Portland City Auditor  
Portland, Oregon



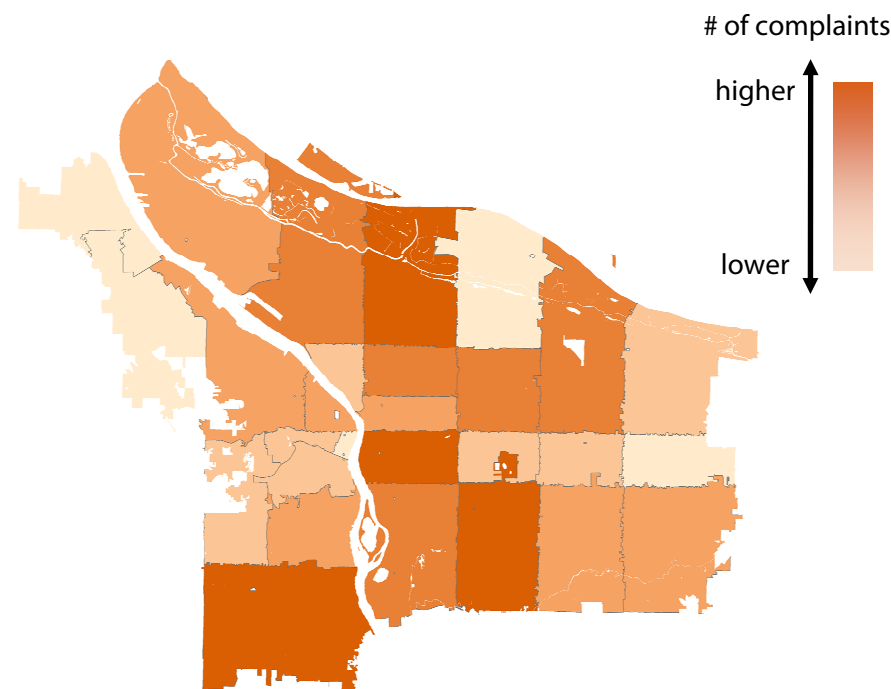
## 17% ↑ Jurisdictional complaints

### Demand for services

We received 609 requests for assistance in 2018. Of those, 290 involved City bureaus. That represents a nearly 17 percent increase over last year and marks the fourth consecutive year that demand for our services has grown from the previous year.

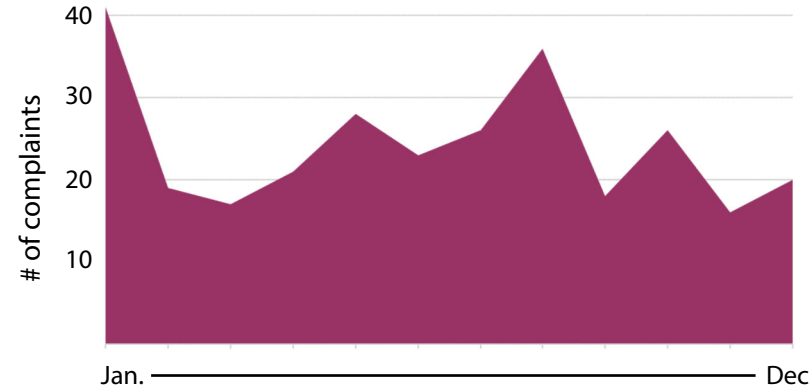
The remaining 319 requests for assistance were comprised of complaints outside our investigative authority, including complaints against elected officials and issues handled by state ombudsman offices. For all requests, we provide information about options and referrals to the appropriate agencies.

The vast majority of jurisdictional complaints to our office come from members of the public. Although our goal is to be accessible to all Portlanders, the concentration of complaints shown in the map over the last five years reveals that we need to improve our outreach efforts.

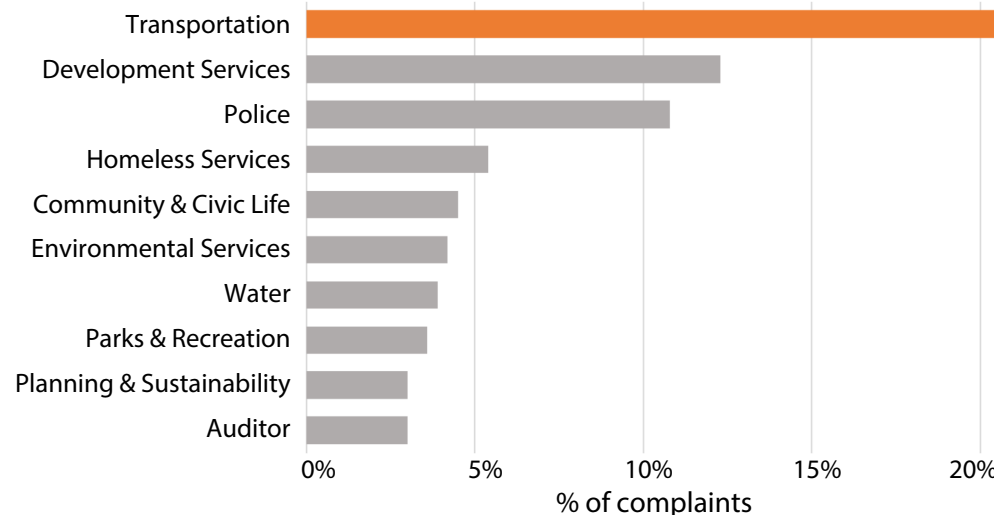


### Complaint trends

We receive a steady stream of complaints throughout the year, although sometimes a City proposal or decision will cause a temporary spike in complaints. In January of 2018 for example, we received a higher than usual number of complaints, stemming from the proposed siting of an emergency shelter for homeless adults in the Mt. Scott-Arleta neighborhood.



Nearly every City bureau is the subject of a complaint at some point. Higher numbers of complaints are expected for bureaus performing regulatory functions, but high numbers can also reflect a systemic problem. Transportation routinely gets the most complaints, and several of our complaint investigations found structural unfairness within transportation programs, requiring reform. To learn more, check out the case examples on our website.



### Investigations

55% ✓  
Substantiated

43% ✗  
Unfounded

2% ?  
Indeterminate

Our goal is to resolve complaints informally and flexibly, providing information and facilitating resolution in lieu of investigation wherever possible. Investigated complaints tend to be those that involve an important principle of good government, affect vulnerable community members, or suggest a system-wide problem.

In 2018, we investigated 25 percent of complaints against City bureaus. For completed investigations, we partially or fully substantiated nearly 55 percent of the complaints. Another 43 percent we determined to be unfounded. We had insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on the remaining 2 percent.

### Bureaus generally accept recommendations

We work to resolve substantiated complaints through recommendations to the bureau. Recommendations may include asking the bureau to take corrective action or change policy. City bureaus accepted nearly all of our recommendations in 2018.

In several cases, we recommended that the bureau cancel charges that it erroneously or unfairly assessed against members of the public. In 2018, financial savings to complainants topped \$156,000.

