

Creation of Portland Street Response as a behavioral health crisis first response team

WHEREAS, Portland Street Response (PSR) was established by unanimous Council vote on November 21, 2019, as an unarmed first response team to respond to appropriate 911 calls involving people experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

[WHEREAS, the City entered into Letters of Agreement with the Portland Police Association and the Portland Firefighters Association for Portland Street Response in 2021 and 2022 respectively, which agree “The PSR program is intended to complement and integrate with existing public safety responses, including police.” This resolution honors those agreements.](#)

WHEREAS, a PSR Community Outreach workgroup, consisting of partners from Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, Street Roots, Street Books, the Mapping Action Collective, Yellow Brick Road, Right 2 Survive, and Sisters of the Road, conducted a survey of 184 people experiencing homelessness and produced the report, [Believe Our Stories and Listen](#). This report recommended:

1. Creating PSR as an unarmed response, operationally independent from police.
2. PSR responders treat people experiencing homelessness humanely, listen to their needs, and be trained in mental health response.
3. PSR include shuttling to services.
4. PSR have the ability to distribute supplies.
5. PSR should wear colored shirts distinct from other first responders and not use sirens or flashing lights.ⁱ

WHEREAS, [the City is still under a 2012 settlement agreement with the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, created due to a pattern of occurrences of excessive use of force by police against people experiencing real or perceived mental illness.](#)~~the Portland Police Bureau remains out of compliance with a 2012 settlement agreement with the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, created due to a pattern of occurrences of excessive use of force against people experiencing a mental illness.-~~

WHEREAS, PSR originally launched in the Lents neighborhood of Portland on February 16, 2021, operating Monday to Friday from 10 AM to 6 PM.

WHEREAS, since its inception, PSR has been dispatched by the Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) to 911 calls where a person is outside and not in the street, is unarmed, is not displaying physically combative or threatening behavior, is not

suicidal and: is possibly experiencing a mental health crisis, intoxicated, and/or drug affected; is outside and down and not checked; is outside and yelling; or needs a referral for services but does not have access to a phone.

WHEREAS, the Council voted unanimously to fund the 24/7 expansion of PSR on May 11, 2022, as part of the [FY2022-23 Approved Budget](#) process (see page 195).ⁱⁱ

Portland State University evaluation and recommendations for Portland Street Response

WHEREAS, for the first two years of its existence, PSR was regularly comprehensively evaluated by Portland State University (PSU) to determine its overall effectiveness, provide suggestions for program refinement and adaptation, and provide recommendations for scaling PSR up citywide.

WHEREAS, the original [2019 Portland State University and Street Roots report](#) that informed PSR's creation and implementation plan made eight recommendations for PSR to: respond separately from police; prioritize training in mental health, de-escalation, trauma, and listening, and they actively involve peers and people with lived experience in the work; make clients feel safe by responding unarmed, never running warrant checks, and providing resources and supplies; uniforms and vehicles be easily recognizable and distinct from other first responders; provide referrals to housing and health services and help transport clients to shelters, hospitals, and clinics; provide linkages between their clients and places they can go for help; help to educate community members about calling 911; and above all, they treat their clients with compassion and dignity and never lose sight of the importance of leaving people better off than they found them.ⁱⁱⁱ

WHEREAS, in the [October 2021 six-month evaluation](#) completed by PSU, researchers found the program making clear progress towards its three outcome goals to: reduce the number of calls traditionally responded to by police where no crime is being committed, reduce the number of behavioral health and non-emergency calls traditionally responded to by police and fire, and reduce the number of medically non-life threatening 911 calls that are transported to the emergency department.^{iv}

WHEREAS, in the [April 2022 one-year evaluation](#), [December 2022 year two mid-point evaluation](#), and [final two year evaluation](#) completed by PSU, researchers found the program continuing to make clear progress towards its three outcome goals.^v

WHEREAS, the [April 2022 one-year evaluation](#) completed by PSU recommended continuing to expand PSR throughout the city at all hours of the day and to additional call types and continuing to refine and expand targeted community outreach and education.^{vi}

WHEREAS, in the [final two year evaluation](#) in June 2023 completed by PSU, researchers found that:

- “[T]he vast majority of calls that PSR responded to are ones that PPB would have previously been dispatched to.”
- “[T]he vast majority of PSR calls (93.9%) required no co-response, 454 calls (6.1% of all PSR calls) involved co-response with other units (e.g., PPB, PF&R, AMR).”
- The most common outcome of PSR calls with clients was that the client was treated by PSR in the field and released (42.1% of all calls) and only 2.5% of all calls required clients to be treated by PSR then transported to the hospital by ambulance.
- PSR responded to 7,418 calls with no injuries to PSR team members. Of the 7,418 calls only one (a co-response with police) resulted in an arrest by police. In contrast, during this same period, there were 371 arrests associated with police responses to welfare checks and unwanted persons calls during PSR’s operating hours.
- Most PPB interviews noted positive examples of collaboration between PSR and PPB in the field; appreciation for PSR’s greater availability to take calls from police that are more appropriate for PSR; and general belief in the value of the program.
- Staffing shortages and turnover remained a considerable challenge and barrier to the program’s success, and recommended that efforts to address staffing issues be sustained, including providing staff with more structure and support, sufficient staffing to prevent burnout, and time for clinic supervision^{vii}

WHEREAS, in the [final two year evaluation](#) in June 2023 completed by PSU, researchers recommended:

- Continuing to refine call criteria and call types that PSR responds to as staffing increases to meet the demand. Also in June 2023, Portland’s Community Safety Division (CSD) completed Phase I of a [Call Allocation Study](#) that provided recommendations for additional calls that could be diverted to PSR.^{viii}
- Continuing to prioritize communication, outreach, and engagement with community members, fellow first responders, and 911 dispatchers, and prioritizing education to correct the misconception that PSR’s primary purpose is to end homelessness, and thus the suggestion that the continued presence of visible homelessness is a failing of PSR.

- Adhering to the original mission of PSR and resisting scope creep. Researchers recommended that PSR should never be used to carry out sweeps of unhoused people, enforce camping bans, or require individuals to engage in shelter or service use; finding it counter to the central tenet of the program to not operate as an enforcement unit or use enforcement strategies in their work.
- Convening of a community advisory board of both people with lived or professional experience in this work, as well as general community members, to help provide community oversight of PSR's work and serve as a critical point of consultation before any major programmatic decisions or changes are made.
- That PSR operate 24/7, citywide as a multidisciplinary team, noting "the presence of both mental health and medical experts within the same team is a strength of PSR's model, and something that sets it apart from other first response and mobile crisis programs."
- Considering the ideal organizational and reporting structure for PSR, including being properly supported within the Public Safety Service Area, or existing as a standalone Bureau.^{ix}

Portland Street Response lagging behind national progress

WHEREAS, while PSR was one of the first unarmed response teams of the modern era that built off of the innovative Eugene CAHOOTS model, alternative unarmed response has been recognized as a component of public safety by many leading institutions, including Harvard's Government Performance Lab (GPL). Harvard GPL has led Alternative 911 Emergency Response Cohorts of cities across the U.S. since 2021, and Portland participated in the 2023-2024 cohort with cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Baltimore.

WHEREAS, many of the now more than 100 unarmed response programs and pilots nationwide have developed further than PSR. Ten other cities have developed 24/7 unarmed response operations, and three other cities have established unarmed response as a co-equal first responder branch.

WHEREAS, Albuquerque, New Mexico, launched its Community Safety department as a co-equal branch to its police and fire departments in June 2020, dispatching three non-police teams through its 911 system; Durham, North Carolina launched its Community Safety department alongside police and fire in June 2022, dispatching its HEART team through its 911 system; and Seattle, Washington, launched its Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) department in October 2023, establishing a third public safety branch for unarmed crisis response.

WHEREAS, a 2024-25 budget note moved PSR “out of Portland Fire & Rescue and under the Office of the Public Safety Deputy City Administrator.” By placing PSR alongside rather than under other first responder bureaus, Portland inched closer to realizing a co-equal branch as Albuquerque, Durham, and Seattle have done, short of right-sizing the program for 24/7 operations.

Demonstrated effectiveness of crisis response programs

WHEREAS, a [Safer Cities report](#) found that crisis response programs across the country have successfully diverted calls originally directed to police, reducing the likelihood of use-of-force incidents, decreasing emergency room visits, strengthening connections to community-based services, and demonstrating greater cost-effectiveness as a crisis response model. ^x

WHEREAS, the direct costs of the alternative response model are four times lower than police-only responses, according to [research by Stanford University](#) scholars Thomas Dee and Jaymes Pyne, who studied Denver’s Support Team Assistance Response (STAR). ^{xi}

Public support for expanding Portland Street Response

WHEREAS, PSR is extremely popular with Portland’s business community, with 70% of respondents to a March 2023 [Portland Business Journal Poll](#) supporting the 24/7 expansion of Portland Street Response. ^{xii}

WHEREAS, the people of Portland have demonstrated strong support for Portland Street Response, including a [petition](#) that gathered over 10,000 signatures in a week in July 2023 that asked the Portland City Council to restore and expand Portland Street Response. ^{xiii}

WHEREAS, the Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing (PCCEP) in April 2024 recommended that the City "Fund, Stabilize, and Expand Portland Street Response," and former Mayor Ted Wheeler responded favorably in June 2024, noting PCCEP and broader public support for its expansion. ^{xiv}

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the City Council agrees that Portland Street Response:

- [1. Shall be an integrated branch of the public safety first response system, in the same ways that police and fire are integrated, including:](#)
 - [1. Independent reporting structures](#)
 - [2. Dispatched through 911](#)
 - [3. Fully authorized to respond to certain 911 calls independently](#)
 - [4. Called upon to respond alongside other first responders when appropriate](#)

~~1. Should remain an unarmed de-escalation program operationally independent from police response that is dispatched through the 911 system and fully authorized to respond to 911 calls independently.-~~

2. Should not be required to take part in sweeps and other enforcement activities, to avoid departing from its original mission and avoid undermining trust with the populations it serves. PSR shall remain committed to its original mission of addressing mental and behavioral health crises, rather than serving as a program for general outreach to unhoused individuals.
3. Should be adequately staffed by individuals with the experience and credentials needed to provide mental health and peer support to people in crisis.
4. Should maintain and increase access to all life-saving supplies in line with de-escalation best practices; including naloxone, blankets, water bottles, food, and clothing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the City Council urges the Mayor to:

1. Maintain and expand PSR's shuttling capacity for clients who need voluntary transportation to appropriate services. PSR should not be called upon to shuttle individuals who are not PSR clients.
2. Reestablish PSR's communication funding and materials, including culturally responsive and multilingual community outreach.
3. Direct the Deputy City Administrator for Public Safety to support Councilors, including the Community and Public Safety, as Council drafts amendments to Portland City Code to include PSR as a co-equal first response branch of the City's emergency response system (anticipated by ~~October~~August 2025).
4. Direct the Bureau of Human Resources to explore designating PSR staff as First Responders, along with the benefits afforded to other First Responders, and provide recommendations to Council through the Community and Public Safety Committee by ~~October~~August 2025.

5. ~~Immediately launch~~[Prioritize](#) a nationwide search for a new permanent Program Manager of PSR, with community representation on the search community, and seek input from the City Council as well as the Portland Street Response Committee into this selection.
6. Prioritize hiring and comprehensive onboarding and training (including safety training) for PSR staff until it is fully staffed for 24/7 citywide response and provide quarterly reports to the Council on PSR hiring and training through the Community & Public Safety Committee.
7. Review the results of the 2022 Call Allocation Study and continue to prioritize the Public Safety Call Restructuring project and report back to Council, through the Community & Public Safety Committee, on call types that could be diverted to PSR by ~~October~~[August](#) 2025.
8. Continue consultation with the original PSU evaluators and report back to Council through the Community and Public Safety Committee by ~~October~~[August](#) 2025 on ongoing efforts to re-establish an independent program evaluation for PSR.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the City Council:

1. Establishes, pursuant to Portland City Charter Section 2-103 para. 1, the Portland Street Response Committee, to provide recommendations on PSR's future. This committee shall be created in accordance with Exhibit A and shall sunset by ~~December 31, 2025~~[March 31, 2026](#), unless created and defined in City Code through a subsequent Ordinance.
2. Strongly urges the Mayor, through the Office of Civic and Community Life, to create a selection process for the Portland Street Response Committee in a manner substantially similar to Exhibit B, such that applications may be opened at latest by ~~August~~[July](#) 1, 2025.

Sources:

ⁱ Street Roots, 2019, Believe our stories and listen, Portland Street Response Survey Report, [BelieveOurStories_PortlandStreetResponseSurveyReport.pdf](#).

ⁱⁱ City of Portland, Adopted Budget, Vol. 1, City Summaries & Bureau Budgets Fiscal Year 2022-23, [Portland Citywide Summaries and Bureau Budgets \(Adopted\).pdf](#). (p. 195)

- iii Street Roots, 2019, Believe our stories and listen, Portland Street Response Survey Report, [BelieveOurStories_PortlandStreetResponseSurveyReport.pdf](#).
- iv Portland State University, 2021, Portland Street Response: Six-Month Evaluation, [Microsoft Word - PSU Portland Street Response Six-Month Evaluation.docx](#).
- v Portland State University, 2022, Portland Street Response: Year One Evaluation, [Microsoft Word - HRAC Portland Street Response One-Year Evaluation_for public release.docx](#); Portland State University, 2022, Portland Street Response: Year Two Mid-Point Evaluation, [PSR Year Two Mid-Point Evaluation Report Executive Summary for public release](#); Portland State University, 2023, Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation, [Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation](#).
- vi Portland State University, 2022, Portland Street Response: Year One Evaluation, [Microsoft Word - HRAC Portland Street Response One-Year Evaluation_for public release.docx](#).
- vii Portland State University, 2023, Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation, [Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation](#).
- viii City of Portland, 2023, City of Portland completes call allocation study to improve public safety system, [City of Portland completes call allocation study to improve public safety system | Portland.gov](#).
- ix Portland State University, 2023, Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation, [Portland Street Response: Year Two Program Evaluation](#).
- x Safer Cities, 2025, 2. Santa Rosa Mobile Crisis Diverted 3,568 Away From Police Last Year, [Three Things To Read This Week — Safer Cities](#).
- xi Stanford University, 2022, A new Stanford study shows benefits to dispatching mental health specialists in nonviolent 911 emergencies, [Stanford study shows benefits to reinventing 911 responses | Stanford Report](#).
- xii Portland Business Journal, 2023, Advancing Portland: Portland Street Response looks to go 24/7, [Portland Street Response to operate 24/7 - Portland Business Journal](#).
- xiii Friends of PSR, 2023, Save Portland Street Response, [Petition – Save Portland Street Response!](#).
- xiv PCCEP, 2024, Recommendation to Fund, Stabilize, and Expand Portland Street Response, <https://www.portland.gov/pccep/documents/pccep-recommendation-fund-stabilize-and-expand-portland-street-response-approved/download> ; and Office of Mayor Ted Wheeler, Letter to PCCEP in response to recommendations regarding Portland Street

Response (PSR), <https://www.portland.gov/pccep/documents/mayor-wheelers-response-pccep-portland-street-response-recommendation-0/download>

Exhibit B

Initial Selection of the Portland Street Response Committee

1. The Portland Street Response Committee (“PSRC” or “Committee”) will consist of 15 voting members, [including 14 community members and one PSR staff member.](#)
2. The Office of Community and Civic Life will open and administer an application process that will remain open for a minimum of ~~6~~8 weeks.
3. The Office of Community and Civic Life will seek to maximize the number of applicants as well as its overall representation of the population of the City of Portland and the populations most affected by Portland Street Response’s current and potential future operations.
4. The application will ask all applicants to:
 - a. confirm that they live, work, worship, play, and/or attend school in Portland.
 - b. commit to the 6 Core Values of the City of Portland
5. Upon completion of the application process, the City Council will review applications in a manner that conforms to City Council standard practices for advisory committee selection, with the Community and Public Safety (CAPS) Committee designated as the primary committee.
6. Upon completion of the review process, the Council will pass a follow-up resolution appointing the PSR Committee’s membership and defining any other parameters for the Committee. Upon appointment, Committee members may only be removed by City Council.
7. The final Committee membership must be broadly representative of the population of the City of Portland and the populations most affected by Portland Street Response’s current and future operations. Final Committee membership must also include representation from people with lived experience with behavioral or mental health issues.
8. The Council will seek input from the Mayor and [PSR leadership](#) throughout the process of application development, outreach, evaluation, and selection.
9. [An additional, fifteenth member, will be a staff member of Portland Street Response, selected by the Deputy City Administrator for Public Safety.](#)
- ~~9.~~10. The City shall establish a stipend at the maximum amount allowed by law for volunteer stipends to remove barriers that would otherwise prevent community participation.

COMMITTEE STAFF SUMMARY

Community and Public Safety

Resolution (Document 2025-175): Support and expand Portland Street Response as a co-equal branch of the first responder system and establish the Portland Street Response Committee

Action Date: April 22, 2025

Council Action: Referred to City Council with recommendation to adopt

Vote: 3-2

Ayes: Morillo, Novick, Kanal

Nays: Zimmerman, Smith

Absent: N/A

Impact Statements: Financial and Budget Analysis; Community Impacts and Community Involvement

Prepared by: Christopher Herr, Council Operations Policy Analyst

Committee Meeting: April 22, 2025 ([recording and transcript](#))

WHAT THE ORDINANCE DOES:

The Resolution (Document 2025-175) declares City Council's position that Portland Street Response (PSR) shall remain an unarmed crisis response program, dispatched through the City's 911 system and operating independently from law enforcement. The resolution affirms that PSR should not be required to participate in campsite removals or in other enforcement activities. It further states that PSR must be adequately staffed with qualified personnel capable of delivering its core services, and that the program should maintain and expand access to life-saving supplies such as naloxone, blankets, water bottles, food, and clothing.

The resolution petitions the mayor to maintain and expand PSR's voluntary transportation services for individuals served by the program. It calls for the reestablishment of funding and materials for PSR's communication efforts, including culturally specific outreach materials. The resolution urges the mayor to direct the Deputy City Administrator for Public Safety to work with Council on drafting amendments to City Code that would designate PSR as a co-equal branch within Portland's emergency response system. It also requests that the mayor direct the Bureau of Human Resources to explore the designation of PSR staff as first responders, with all the associated benefits.

Additionally, the resolution calls on the mayor to launch a national search for a permanent PSR Program Manager, ensuring community representation in the selection process. It emphasizes the need to prioritize hiring, onboarding, and training for PSR staff to enable 24/7 citywide operations. It further directs the review of the 2022 Call Allocation Study and continuation of the Public Safety Call Restructuring project. The resolution affirms the importance of ongoing consultation with Portland State University evaluators and calls for a report back to Council on both the evaluation and restructuring efforts by August 2025.

Finally, the resolution, pursuant to City Charter Section 2-103, establishes the Portland Street Response Committee to provide recommendations on the future of the program. This committee is scheduled to

sunset on December 31, 2025, unless extended or formally established through subsequent ordinance amending City Code. The resolution urges the mayor, through the Office of Civic and Community Life, to develop a selection process for committee membership.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Reclassifying PSR staff as First Responders, including potential changes to benefits and employment status
- Potential budgetary impacts associated with proposed changes to PSR staff categorization
- How offering 24/7 PSR services may affect eligibility for Medicaid reimbursement
- Deliberation on a reasonable and effective sunset date for the PSR Committee
- Clarification regarding the role and input of the mayor and service area staff in shaping the resolution
- Review of data to determine the hours during which PSR services are most utilized or in highest demand
- Clarification of what PSR as a co-equal branch of public safety could entail
- Understanding what metrics define “fully staffed”
- Portland Police Bureau’s current level of compliance with the terms of the 2012 Settlement Agreement

PUBLIC TESTIMONY IN COMMITTEE:

Twenty-six people testified in Committee, and 254 people submitted written testimony prior to item agenda posting for full Council.

General themes of testimony included:

- Dispatching appropriate first responders to different 911 call types
- Potential cost benefits of alternative response programs
- PSR’s original purpose and scope of work
- Impacts of arrests during a mental health crisis
- Potential to increase first responder coordination and integration without increasing bureaucratic overhead
- Request for more community involvement in decision-making
- Determining when an armed response or alternative response is necessary
- Potential politicization of PSR
- PSR funding amidst current budget cuts
- PSR merger with existing programs like Project Respond
- PSR as a 24/7 service to effectively meet community needs, especially during nighttime
- PSR handling of repeat calls and situations where individuals refuse services

BACKGROUND:

In November 2019, City Council established PSR as an unarmed first response team designed to address specific types of 911 calls that do not require a police or fire response. PSR is currently dispatched citywide by the Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) between the hours of 9:00 AM and 10:00

PM. PSR responds to calls for individuals who are unarmed, not in the street, and not exhibiting combative, threatening, or suicidal behavior. Call types may include individuals who are possibly experiencing a mental health crisis, intoxication or drug-related symptoms, individuals lying outside and unresponsive, those loudly vocalizing distress, or individuals in need of service referrals without access to a phone.

Since its launch, PSR has undergone multiple evaluations conducted by Portland State University. These evaluations have assessed the program's effectiveness, identified areas for refinement, and provided recommendations to support the long-term sustainability and integration of PSR as a component of Portland's first response system.

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3. The Office of Community and Civic Life will seek to maximize the number of applicants as well as its overall representation of the population of the City of Portland and the populations most affected by Portland Street Response’s current and potential future operations.
4. The application will ask all applicants to:
 - a. confirm that they live, work, worship, play, and/or attend school in Portland.
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6. Upon completion of the review process, the Council will pass a follow-up resolution appointing the PSR Committee’s membership and defining any other parameters for the Committee. Upon appointment, Committee members may only be removed by City Council.
7. The final Committee membership must be broadly representative of the population of the City of Portland and the populations most affected by Portland Street Response’s current and future operations. Final Committee membership must also include representation from people with lived experience with behavioral or mental health issues.
8. The Council will seek input from the Mayor throughout the process of application development, outreach, evaluation, and selection.
9. The City shall establish a stipend at the maximum amount allowed by law for volunteer stipends to remove barriers that would otherwise prevent community participation.