



Portland City Auditor

Archives & Records Management



July 15, 2025

Dear Portlanders,

The mission of the Auditor's Office is to ensure open and accountable government by providing independent and impartial reviews, access to public information, and services to City government and the public. The Archives & Records Management Division supports this mission by preserving the City's historic records and making them available to the public.

Since the Auditor was established in Portland's government in 1864, the officer has been responsible for maintaining the City record. Although City records, recordkeeping practices, as well as records policies and places have evolved since then, the Auditor's role as steward of the City's historic records has remained.

Transparency is the bedrock of accountability. Having evidence of action taken by City government makes it answerable to the public. Our archivists seek to help all Portlanders gain a better understanding of their government by providing context about its past. In addition to making the actions of City government transparent, the City Archives also serves as a resource for research, education, and storytelling about Portland and its people.

I am grateful to our archivists, past and present, for maintaining and growing the Archives and look forward to expanding the City's historical record to include more of Portland's diverse communities.

Sincerely,

Simone Rede

City Auditor

Collecting Policy

Archives & Records Management

Purpose

The Archives & Records Management Division of the Portland City Auditor's Office historical collection development policy will:

- Provide an **overview** of our historical public records collections;
- Summarize the **standards** we use to select records and collections for historical preservation;
- Describe **services** we provide to community archives organizations.

This policy will be reviewed every three years to reflect changes in our collections as well as changes to research trends and professional practice.

Our mission

The Archives & Records Management Division of the Portland City Auditor's Office is the official home of the City's historic public records. The mission of the Portland City Archives is to ensure transparent and accountable government by preserving the City's historic records and making them available to the public.

The City's historical records collection preserves the work product of City agencies as well as materials that document the history of the city and City government. Formats in the City's historical records include paper documents, electronic records, microfilm, maps, plans, photos, publications, moving images, sound, artwork, and objects. As stated in our mission, the Portland Archives & Records Center (PARC) serves as a preservation-quality storage space for all inactive and historic public records as well as a research resource for the public and City employees.

Organizational History

The Archives & Records Management Division helps people find and use City records, both historical and current, following Oregon's public records laws.

The Auditor's Office has long been responsible for keeping key City documents, including Council agendas and minutes, the City Charter and Code, and financial and legal records such as contracts and liens. Because of these responsibilities, the Auditor's Office was a fitting authority to care for the original documents from when Portland became a city, and from this role, the Office's archives and records responsibilities grew.

The idea of organizing and preserving City records started in the 1930s, led by then-City Auditor William Gibson. In 1939, the Office applied for federal funds to organize the City's old records. This effort led to the City's first filing system, rules for how long to keep records, and a manual for handling them. Although an official Archives Division wasn't created at the time, the Auditor's Office continued to manage Council records and microfilmed documents during the 1950s as part of national defense efforts.

By the 1970s, many City bureaus kept their own records without coordination, making it hard to find information. A 1976 study convinced City Council to create a unified records program within the Auditor's Office. Stanley Parr was hired as the City's first records manager and created official schedules and manuals for recordkeeping. Liisa Fagerlund became the first archivist and used a federal grant to create a detailed guide to the City's historical records, using an early computer tool called SPINDEX.

In 1981, the City opened the first Portland Archives & Records Center (PARC), a newly remodeled City incinerator building, in Chimney Park on North Columbia Boulevard. Through the 1980s and 90s, the focus was on storing records and delivering files to City staff. The Division also made tech upgrades like automating file checkouts and backing up City IT systems. By the early 2000s, storage space was running out. The City partnered with Portland State University to build a new facility, which opened in 2010. This modern space helped make the Archives more visible to the public and included creative programs like an Artist-in-Residence.

Today, the Archives & Records Management Division sets policy on records management for the City of Portland, manages both paper and digital records for the City, and works to collect and share community history.

Although the City Archives never had race-based collection policies, City records show that from the beginning, Portland's government tried to exclude Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and immigrants from participating fully in civic life. Portland supported racist laws and ideals that aimed to make Oregon a "white utopia," creating a harmful environment for BIPOC and immigrant communities.

Historically, the City government was designed to serve a mostly white population, and the City Archives reflected that by documenting mostly white experiences and serving mainly white City employees. When communities of color, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and other marginalized groups appear in the records, it is often in the context of being harmed by City government; the records neglect to capture the strength of those living under oppressive policies or the vibrancy of their communities. Now, the Archives is working to correct that by expanding its collections to tell a fuller, more inclusive story of all the people who make up Portland.

What we collect

City records

The City's historical records collection preserves the work product created by City agencies during day-to-day functions of City Government.

These records are termed "City records," under City Code 3.76.010.B.A "City record," is defined as:

"Any recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristic, prepared, owned, used, or retained in connection with the transaction of official business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by an agency as evidence of the organization, function, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the City of Portland or because of the informational value in it. [...] These records are public property, subject to Oregon Public Records Law and to [...] records management requirements."

Examples of City records include:

- Executive-level correspondence and calendars.
- Council documents, minutes, resolutions, and ordinances.
- Meeting records including agendas, exhibits, resolutions, staff reports, indexes, petitions, correspondence, and related documentation.
- Agency policy statements and directives, organizational charts, administrative manuals, and standard operating procedures.

- Major project records.
- Press releases, speeches, and public statements.
- Annual and major reports and studies.
- Sewer, transportation, and city building plans.
- City generated photographs and publications.
- Maps, plans, and surveys.
- Annexation records and records of annexed cities and towns.

City records do not include library and museum material kept for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents kept for convenience of reference, or stocks of publications.

Archives & Records does not accept artifacts, though objects that must be kept by the City, such as gifts and commemorative items, may be included in collections.

Community Collections

While Archives & Records Management has a legal duty to preserve and make permanent City records available to the public, we are also a resource for historical materials created by Portlanders about their experiences in the City and the effect of City government on their lives.

Community Collections represent, highlight, clarify or further explain City government, its functions, and actions from the perspective of residents, particularly those whose stories that have not been captured in City records.

In order to build a more complete historical record, a special emphasis is placed on materials documenting subject areas that have been underrepresented in City collections including:

- The experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color, the LGBTQIA2S+ community, senior communities, and individuals with disabilities as well as other systemically excluded people.
- Local civic engagement and community activism without regard to political affiliation or cause.
- Local and Portland-based community organizations and nonprofits.
- Portland neighborhood association and district coalition records.
- Personal papers of elected officials.

Archives & Records collects community materials in a wide variety of formats including paper documents, electronic records, diaries, scrapbooks, maps, plans, photos, negatives, moving images, and sound.

How do I donate a Community Collection to the City Archives?

Want to donate historical materials to the Portland City Archives? Contact Archives & Records staff at PARC@portlandoregon.gov.

All materials donated to Archives & Records Management become the sole and absolute property of the City of Portland. All rights, title, and interest in and to these materials are transferred to the City of Portland (post-custodial donation excepted, see below).

While Archives & Records strongly encourages donors to transfer all donor-held copyright to the City to ensure the broadest level of public access to materials, the Division offers options regarding copyright transfer.

The City Archivist and Historical Collections Manager make final decisions about accepting materials into Archives & Records' Community Collections. Archives & Records reserves the right to accept all or part of, or to refuse, a donation to the City even if the donation meets Archives & Records' mission or collecting scope. Some donations may be declined due to special format needs, preservation, storage, and access considerations.

Unsolicited donations are considered a gift according to Oregon law (ORS 98.450). This material may be accepted as a donation, returned to the donor (if known), offered to a more appropriate collecting institution, or destroyed.

To view the full conditions for donation and terms for transfer of copyright, please see the most current version of the City Archives Deed of Gift form.

Post-custodial Collecting Practice

Portland City Archives & Records Management offers community members the option to donate historic materials using a post-custodial model. The goal of post-custodial collecting is to promote collaborative relationships between archives and communities. Offering a post-custodial option allows Archives & Records to preserve these important experiences while keeping documents, photographs, and artifacts with their communities of origin.

A post-custodial collecting model is an archival collecting practice where an archive borrows historical materials and records from individuals, families, or organizations, digitizes them, describes them, and makes them available online. After digitization, the physical materials are returned to their owners.

This option of donating is offered as a way of building trust with the public. The City Archives hopes community members will feel ownership of the records they entrust to us and that they will see themselves in the City's historical record. Archives & Records will accept materials under the terms outlined in the post-custodial loan agreement.

Community Archives storage

The Portland City Archives & Records Management Division offers storage space at PARC at no cost to independent community archives, Portland-based community groups, nonprofits, and under resourced cultural heritage organizations or educational institutions. Priority is given to organizations whose collections contain materials documenting subject areas that have been underrepresented in City collections to help ensure those histories are preserved. Those subject areas include:

- The experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color, the LGBTQIA2S+ community, senior communities, and individuals with disabilities as well as other systemically excluded people.
- Local civic engagement and community activism without regard to political affiliation or cause.
- Local and Portland-based community organizations and nonprofits.
- Portland neighborhood association and district coalition records.
- Personal papers of elected officials.

The length of short-term agreements will be determined by the City Archivist and the partnering institution on a case-by-case basis. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Archives & Records and the partnering institution will be signed before materials are brought to PARC, unless an emergency requires the immediate move of collection materials.

To view the full terms for Community Archives Storage agreements, please see the most current version of the MOU for Community Archives Storage.