

# Ombudsman’s Report: City’s reliance on complaints for property maintenance enforcement disproportionately affects diverse and gentrifying neighborhoods

November 2021

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## Scope

The Ombudsman’s Office analyzed six years’ worth of maintenance complaints received by the Bureau of Development Services. The analysis focused on owner-occupied properties that were the subject of a total of 15,227 complaints (about 2,500 complaints per year) from 2013 through 2018.

## Data sources

The Bureau of Development Services provided data on complaints. Information about individual complaints was stored in a narrative format. We evaluated the text for content and coded complaints into categories based on keywords. Assessments, Finance, and Foreclosure, a division formerly in the Auditor’s Office and now in the Revenue Division, provided information used to quantify financial impact on homeowners, including fines, fees, and liens.

We used sources outside the City for demographic and descriptive data about Portland neighborhoods. The data sets are listed and linked below.

<b>Use</b>	Neighborhood Information
<b>Data source</b>	Portland Monthly Magazine  Example 2018: <a href="https://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2018/3/27/portland-neighborhoods-by-the-numbers-2018-the-city">https://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2018/3/27/portland-neighborhoods-by-the-numbers-2018-the-city</a>
<b>Date range</b>	2016, 2017, and 2018

<b>Use</b>	Neighborhood Demographics
<b>Data source</b>	2010 Census/Portland Civic Life  <a href="https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/28387">https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/28387</a>
<b>Date range</b>	2010 Census

## Methodology for Neighborhood Correlations

We mapped complaints by geographic boundaries of Portland neighborhoods. All but 0.3 percent of complaints matched an available mapped address. Complaints for each neighborhood were totaled. Counts of complaints per neighborhood were normalized by the number of owned homes in the neighborhood. We determined the number of homes using 2010 Census data to combine homes with a mortgage or loan with homes owned free and clear.

Neighborhood	Complaints per 100 Households	Liens per 100 Households	Neighborhood	Complaints per 100 Households	Liens per 100 Households	Neighborhood	Complaints per 100 Households	Liens per 100 Households
ALAMEDA	5.45	0.22	HAYHURST	7.43	0.13	PARKROSE HEIGHTS	16.54	1.03
ARBOR LODGE	10.98	0.44	HAZELWOOD	12.06	1.02	PEARL DISTRICT	0.00	0.00
ARDENWALD-JOHNSON CREEK	2.42	0.00	HEALY HEIGHTS	7.58	0.00	PIEDMONT	9.92	0.05
ARGAY TERRACE	12.34	0.30	HILLSDALE	12.22	0.28	PLEASANT VALLEY	7.35	0.34
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS	12.88	1.14	HILLSIDE	12.47	0.12	PORTSMOUTH	18.47	1.12
ARNOLD CREEK	5.22	0.18	HOLLYWOOD	4.41	0.00	POWELLHURST-GILBERT	16.63	1.52
ASHCREEK	2.52	0.00	HOMESTEAD	8.42	0.00	REED	9.71	0.31
BEAUMONT-WILSHIRE	6.49	0.16	HOSFORD-ABERNETHY	10.56	0.39	RICHMOND	11.73	0.33
BOISE	19.38	0.34	HUMBOLDT	17.06	1.17	ROSE CITY PARK	6.09	0.00
BRENTWOOD-DARLINGTON	20.65	1.74	IRVINGTON	8.06	0.19	ROSEWAY	8.78	0.33
BRIDGETON	0.00	0.00	KENTON	18.17	0.16	RUSSELL	8.00	0.61
BRIDLEMILE	5.44	0.13	KERNS	8.75	0.31	SABIN	10.69	0.31
BROOKLYN	13.65	0.49	KING	15.29	0.62	SELLWOOD-MORELAND	7.23	0.07
BUCKMAN	17.63	0.40	LAURELHURST	10.28	0.25	SOUTH BURLINGAME	7.20	0.34
CATHEDRAL PARK	12.05	0.11	LENTS	20.94	1.53	SOUTH PORTLAND	5.99	0.13
CENTENNIA	15.02	1.42	LINNTON	6.03	0.00	SOUTH TABOR	9.10	0.13
COLLINS VIEW	8.28	0.17	LLOYD	0.00	0.00	SOUTHWEST HILLS	6.77	0.07
CONCORDIA	13.36	0.30	MADISON SOUTH	11.89	0.46	ST. JOHNS	16.72	1.19
CRESTON-KENILWORTH	14.12	0.37	MAPLEWOOD	8.65	0.00	SULLIVAN'S GULCH	7.12	0.18
CRESTWOOD	15.25	0.00	MARKHAM	11.05	0.00	SUMNER	17.02	1.78
CULLY	14.99	0.82	MARSHALL PARK	7.84	0.00	SUNDERLAND	0.00	0.00
DOWNTOWN	0.45	0.00	MILL PARK	12.01	0.58	SUNNYSIDE	14.40	0.44
EAST COLUMBIA	8.60	0.19	MONTAVILLA	13.05	0.81	SYLVAN-HIGHLANDS	7.51	0.00
EASTMORELAND	5.09	0.07	MT. SCOTT-ARLETA	23.97	1.36	UNIVERSITY PARK	12.89	0.09
ELIOT	12.38	0.19	MT. TABOR	10.51	0.28	VERNON	22.24	1.45
FAR SOUTHWEST	7.78	0.23	MULTNOMAH	6.45	0.27	WEST PORTLAND PARK	8.51	0.24
FOREST PARK	2.00	0.08	NORTH TABOR	12.99	0.50	WILKES	8.82	0.36
FOSTER-POWELL	19.43	0.63	NORTHWEST	7.00	0.05	WOODLAND PARK	29.55	0.00
GLENFAIR	11.03	0.69	NORTHWEST HEIGHTS	0.99	0.00	WOODLAWN	14.42	0.39
GOOSE HOLLOW	3.94	0.12	OLD TOWN	0.00	0.00	WOODSTOCK	11.76	0.29
GRANT PARK	5.15	0.00	OVERLOOK	10.12	0.12			
HAYDEN ISLAND	0.00	0.00	PARKROSE	14.45	1.27			

We compared complaints per household to neighborhood variables with Pearson's correlation coefficients, which can range from -1.0 to 1.0. The value of the coefficient is used to assess the strength of the association between variables. In the social sciences, strengths are often assessed using the following rules<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Strength</b>	<b>Value</b>
Weak	.10 to .29 <b>OR</b> -.10 to -.29
Moderate	.30 to .49 <b>OR</b> -.30 to -.49
Strong	.50 and above <b>OR</b> -.50 and below

The values can be interpreted in relation to an increase in the dependent variable (for example, complaints per household). A positive value means that as that factor increases, the variable of interest tends to increase. For example, positive values can be interpreted as:

- Higher percentages of people of color in a neighborhood are associated with higher complaints per household.
- Higher five-year percent changes in home price are associated with higher complaints per household and liens per complaint.

A negative value means that the dependent variable increases as that factor tends to decrease. Negative values mean higher values of the dependent variable (for example, complaints per household) are associated with lower values of that neighborhood factor. For example, neighborhoods with lower percentages of residents with a graduate degree are associated with higher complaints per household.

The statistically significant coefficient values for complaints per neighborhood were:

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavior sciences*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Percent people of color	0.512	.000
Change in median home price (2013 to 2017)	0.431	.000
Average days homes stay on market	-0.421	.000
Percent of condo sales	-0.410	.000
Percent of population over 25 with a graduate degree	-0.398	.000
Median age of population	-0.369	.000
Crimes reported per 1,000 residents	-0.346	.001
Percent who commute by walking	-0.329	.001
Adjusted population	0.319	.002
Average year built (homes)	-0.309	.003
Percent of population who speak English as their only language	-0.306	.003
Minutes by car to downtown	0.305	.003
Average home cost per square foot	-0.304	.003
Median household income	-0.297	.004
Median monthly housing expenses for renters	-0.292	.005
Number of MAX and streetcar lines	-0.285	.006
Miles of bike path per square mile	-0.268	.010
Homes sold in 2017	0.268	.010
Percent of population that has never married	0.267	.010
Percent of population over 25 with a bachelor's degree	-0.258	.013
Vehicle thefts reported	0.255	.014
Percent of population below the poverty level	0.251	.016
Burglaries reported	0.237	.023
Percent of households with children under 18	0.234	.025
Average home price	-0.231	.027
Percent of the population that is married but separated	-0.213	.041