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Portland Central City Task Force reports progress on housing, drugs and more




Image: Jonathan Bach / Portland Business Journal

The Portland Central City Task Force has reported progress on the majority of its goals surrounding the drug and homelessness crises.

JONATHAN BACH / PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL



By **Demi Lawrence** – Staff Reporter, Portland Business Journal
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Three months after **Gov. Tina Kotek shared recommendations from her downtown Portland task force**, the group reports progress on drug use, housing and tax relief.

The task force said in a press release that its early progress “has exceeded expectations.”

“The pandemic’s impact on Central City Portland was profound. Rebuilding will continue throughout this year and into the several that follow. The effort is off to a great start. Don’t bet against Portland.”

The task force said it has made movement on the majority of its goals, and completed two of its highest-profile goals: Declaring a fentanyl emergency and banning the public use of controlled substances.

The 90-day fentanyl emergency was declared weeks after the recommendations were made public on Jan. 30. As of Feb. 28, there were 81 overdose reversals, 99 Measure 110 tickets issued, and 200 grams of fentanyl seized, according to the task force’s incident team.

The ban on controlled substances comes with the passage of a bill to re-criminalize possession of small amounts of street drugs but contains off ramps from the criminal justice system for those who enlist in treatment. **Kotek said previously that she intends to sign it.**

Other goals that the task force has made progress on are increasing housing options for the homeless, cleaning up the city and offering tax relief.

Central City Concern, with financial commitments from the Oregon Health Authority, Multnomah County and the city of Portland, **acquired a treatment center** with 70 behavioral health beds in January.

The task force also aims to shelter 2,700 people by the end of 2025, add 1,000 emergency beds and 300 new substance abuse and mental health treatment beds, and accelerate transitions out of shelters and into permanent housing.

A February report from Oregon Health Authority that said the state needs **3,000 adult residential substance abuse and mental health treatment beds**. This gap will require \$500 million to close, according to the OHA.

The task force's goal to clean up the city was, in part, centered on obtaining \$20 million from the Legislature for trash and graffiti removal and prevention, which it did. Other aspects of the goal include conducting community mapping of the central city's biggest trouble spots to work through a prioritized list of trash and graffiti hotspots.

As for taxes, County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson also told the task force she would ask the Board of Commissioners to delay a voter-approved increase in the Preschool for All tax by one year.

Other parts of the tax relief goal include a three-year pause on new taxes and fees, a tax advisory group to evaluate improvements to the tax structure, and targeted incentives, including an expansion of the business license tax (BLT) downtown tax credit.

The goals that the task force did not report progress on include mental health and homelessness services and outreach, elevating law enforcement response and removing 2020-era fences and plywood, all in the central city.

Along with the progress, the task force's press release cautioned that more work is needed.

“Community leaders and the public need a deeper understanding of governments’ abilities to fund critical public safety and emergency response services, innovative ideas for Central City development need a place to be refined and championed, private resources must be raised to coordinate volunteers to restore the beauty of a city they love, and numerous plans that are already funded must be well-executed,” the task force said.

The Portland Central City Task Force was established last summer with a goal of developing a plan to spur economic success in the city. Its members are drawn from across business, nonprofit, political, sports and health care circles.