



# THE PROGRESSIVE PORTLAND 2017 CITY COUNCIL SCORECARD



The idea for this scorecard began when a group of Portland residents went looking for information on the voting records of their city councilors and discovered that the information was surprisingly hard to find. To find the voting records of councilors on the city's website, a voter would have to go through PDF copies of council meeting minutes that include so much obscure shorthand and legal jargon that it's impossible to make sense of it without days of background research.

**"This is a great tool to let voters know the issues in the city. Thanks!"**

*—James Holt, Deering Center resident*

This scorecard does something that no other organization or media outlet in the city does: provides a user-friendly summary of the key votes cast by councilors over the course of the year.

Of course, no scorecard can assess every aspect of a councilor's performance. Less quantifiable parts of the councilor role, like constituent service, are necessarily left out.

We also recognize that not everyone will agree with our view of what the "correct" position on every vote will be. That's ok. Progressive Portland is up front about our left-of-center point of view. If you're a registered Republican or more of a centrist Democrat, then you probably don't agree with us on a number of issues. Also, progressives don't always agree on everything all the time.

**"What is of most interest to me are the votes when there is disagreement on the Council. I like to see where people come out when the issues aren't so 'clear cut.'"**

*—Phil Steele, West End retiree*

The goal of the scorecard is to spark discussion and debate on issues—and to elevate our political debate above personal attacks that often get more attention in our politics than is warranted.

You may notice some differences between the 2016 scorecard and this year's edition.

First, to make the scorecard a more complete public education tool, this year's edition includes both "scored" votes that can be assessed on a left-right spectrum as well as other notable votes that didn't affect scores but represented important policy decisions, like the rezoning of Camelot Farms.

Second, the average voting records of councilors improved. In 2016, the average score was just 57 percent. This year, it's 75 percent. That's especially notable because the council considered a significantly more proactively progressive agenda in 2017 than 2016.



The biggest issue in the 2016 scorecard was the shutdown of the India Street HIV Positive Health Clinic—a cut in services and a defeat for progressives. In 2017, the biggest issue was the \$64 million bond to

repair four crumbling elementary schools—the biggest bond in Portland history and a victory not just for progressives but for all the city's kids.

Other important victories in 2017 include the passage of targeted tax relief for seniors, an extension of general assistance for asylum-seekers, zoning incentives for affordable housing, the strengthening of clean energy goals in the comprehensive plan, and prevailing wage standards for taxpayer-subsidized construction projects.

Arguably, each of these policies was a bigger proactive progressive victory than anything that passed in 2016.

**"This is such a helpful resource for voters. Votes are completely objective. Either yes or no. It's information voters should have."**

*—Tracie Reed, architect and 2008 Barack Obama presidential elector*

Why did councilors vote on the progressive side of issues more often in 2017? In part it was due to a change in council membership, with Ed Suslovic, the councilor with the least progressive voting record in 2016 (37%), replaced by Brian Batson, who ranked third, with a score of 82%. In particular, this change was decisive for the school bond.

Another important factor was the noticeable upsurge in grassroots activism. In 2017, organizations including

Portland Protectors, Protect Our Neighborhood Schools, Sierra Club, Fair Rent Portland, Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council, March Forth—and Progressive Portland—were energized and active in city politics.

Without that grassroots push, many of these issues never would have come before the council at all.



No, we didn't win everything. That's not realistic when you're working for real change. But 2017 is evidence of the old Margaret Mead quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Let's keep it up and make 2018 even better.



**Progressive  
Portland**

[ProgressivePortland.org](http://ProgressivePortland.org)

# 2017 CITY COUNCIL SCORECARD



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## VOTE KEY

= cast progressive vote

= opposed progressive vote

= absent

## < MORE PROGRESSIVE OVERALL > LESS PROGRESSIVE OVERALL >



Mayor	Ethan Strimling	Pious Ali	Brian Batson	Spencer Thibodeau	David Brenerman	Justin Costa	Jill Duson	Nick Mavodones	Belinda Ray
	94%	88%	82%	76%	76%*	71%	65%	65%	53%

	2016 score	83%	N/A	N/A	67%	44%	56%	56%	42%	47%
<b>General Assistance for Asylum-Seekers.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> The council voted to continue providing aid to asylum-seekers who had been excluded by LePage administration policy changes. General assistance covers basic needs, including rent, food, and other essential services. Motion passed 9-0, December 19, 2016.										
<b>\$64 million bond to repair Longfellow, Lyseth, Presumpscot, &amp; Reiche Elementary Schools.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> The 4-school bond fell one vote short of the 7-vote supermajority needed to pass the council and advance to the voters without a competing option. Motion failed 6-3, March 20.										
<b>Fee Increase for Non-Owner-Occupied Airbnb Units.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> While debating a first-ever ordinance regulating short-term rentals, the council considered an amendment by Councilor Brian Batson to increase registration fees for non-owner-occupied units by 50 percent. Motion failed 4-5, March 27.										
<b>AirBnB Regulation.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Amid Portland's tight housing market and affordability crisis, the council capped the number of short-term rental units allowed in the city and required hosts to register and pay a fee. Motion passed 8-1, March 27.										
<b>Thames Street Extension.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: NO</i> Last year, the city council voted to sell a plot of city-owned waterfront land to a private developer (58 Fore Street) for \$400,000—less than half the appraised value. This year, the council voted to allocate \$1.4 million of taxpayer money to build a road to that same piece of property. Motion passed, 8-1, April 5.										
<b>\$24 Million One-School Bond to Repair Only Lyseth Elementary School.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: NO</i> While debating the 4-school bond, Councilor Belinda Ray offered an amendment opposed by the PTOs of all four elementary schools and Protect Our Neighborhood Schools to reduce the bond to \$24 million and fully renovate only Lyseth Elementary School. Had this amendment passed, the 4-school bond would have been dead. Motion failed 2-7, April 24.										
<b>Final School Bond Compromise.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> After weeks of negotiation, the council passed a historic compromise allowing Portland voters to vote on the 4-school bond, with a 2-school competing option cutting out Reiche and Longfellow also placed on the ballot. Motion passed 8-1, April 24.										
<b>100% Clean Energy by 2040.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Councilor Spencer Thibodeau proposed a resolution backed by the Sierra Club's Climate Action Team, setting a goal of powering 100 percent of city operations with clean energy by 2040. Motion passed: 9-0, May 1.										
<b>Locate Homeless Shelter Within 2.75 Miles of Downtown.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Those who work with homeless people stress that people need connections to normalcy, not isolation, to escape homelessness. The council considered an amendment to rule out industrial parks and the remote outskirts of the I-95 corridor as options for future homeless shelters. Motion failed: 1-8, June 5.										
<b>Strengthen Clean Energy Goals in Comprehensive Plan.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> The comprehensive plan is a legally binding document setting priorities for Portland's development. The council considered two amendments to strengthen the climate and clean energy provisions in the comprehensive plan. Motions passed 7-1, June 5.										
<b>Put Rent Stabilization on the November Ballot.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> After an error by Portland's city clerk threatened to delay ballot questions on rent stabilization and zoning, the council corrected the error to ensure both questions would appear on the November ballot. Motion passed 9-0, September 6.										
<b>Zoning Incentives for Affordable Housing Developments.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Backed by Avesta Housing and the Portland Housing Authority, the amendments relaxed setback rules and density and height restrictions for affordable housing developments known as Planned Residential Use Developments. Motion passed 8-1, September 6.										
<b>Join Lawsuit Against Opioid Manufacturers.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> In 2016, 376 Mainers died of drug overdoses, including 42 in Portland. The national lawsuit against manufacturers of opioids would, if successful, hold drug companies accountable for fraudulent marketing and bring new resources to the city to fight the epidemic. Motion passed 9-0, September 18.										
<b>LED Lights in City Street Lamps.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> The council voted to approve \$8.5 million for efficient LED street lights, which over time will save the city money while reducing energy use and pollution. Motion passed 8-0, October 16.										
<b>Targeted Tax Relief for Low-Income Seniors.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Proposed by Mayor Ethan Strimling, the Portland Senior Tax Equity Program provides property tax rebates to nearly 900 low-income seniors. Motion passed 8-0, November 20.										
<b>Prevailing Wage Requirement for Taxpayer-Subsidized Projects.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Backed by the Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council and introduced by Mayor Ethan Strimling, the prevailing wage amendment requires that contractors receiving a TIF subsidy pay no less than the wage paid to most workers in the field in the area. Motion passed 8-0, November 20.										
<b>Apprenticeship Requirement for Taxpayer-Subsidized Projects.</b> <i>Progressive Vote: YES</i> Apprenticeship programs are proven to be effective in growing the pool of skilled labor and helping young workers gain a path to the middle class. Backed by the Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council and introduced by Mayor Ethan Strimling, the amendment would have required contractors receiving a TIF subsidy to participate in an apprenticeship program. Motion failed 3-5, November 20.										

## OTHER KEY VOTES

<b>Eliminate Assistant to the Mayor Position.</b> The council voted to defund the position of assistant to the mayor. The position existed for just one year. Motion passed 6-3, May 15.										
<b>Approve Camelot Farms Rezoning.</b> The council voted to rezone 45 acres of open space on outer Westbrook Street to allow the construction of 95 single-family homes while preserving 25 acres of recreational open space. Motion passed 5-4, July 24.										
<b>Approve Zoning Change for West End Cold Storage Facility.</b> The council voted to raise the height limit from 45 feet to 75 feet to accommodate the construction of a refrigerated warehouse on Portland's western waterfront. Motion passed 8-1, September 6.										
<b>Place Full Text of Citizen Initiatives on Ballot.</b> Typically, ballots include a brief, plain-English summary of a proposed ordinance with a complete copy available in the polling place. The council instead voted to print the entire text of two citizen initiatives on the ballot, creating a confusing 4-page ballot, which was seen as an attempt to discourage yes votes. Motion passed 8-1, September 6.										
<b>Bayside Land Sales.</b> The council voted to sell 4.1 acres of prime city-owned property in Bayside to be developed for mixed uses. Motion passed 7-0, October 2.										

\*Former Councilor Brenerman's term ended in December 2017.  
\*\*Councilor Thibodeau was absent for the full council vote due to a health emergency but voted yes in committee.  
\*\*\*Councilor Thibodeau was absent for the full council vote due to a health emergency but voted no in committee.