



Legacy Business Preservation Study and Program Recommendations

February 2026



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Executive Summary

Purpose and Rationale

Portland’s legacy businesses—longstanding, independently owned, public-facing establishments—are foundational to the city’s identity, economy, and community life. They anchor neighborhood commercial corridors, provide trusted “third spaces” for social connection, and embody the histories and narratives of communities that have too often faced marginalization, disinvestment, and displacement.

These businesses employ tens of thousands of workers, pay billions of dollars in wages and benefits, and contribute significantly to the city’s GDP. Just as importantly, they provide career pathways and ownership opportunities—particularly for families and workers seeking to build intergenerational wealth through small business succession. Yet, despite the cultural and economic importance of these vital institutions, currently no program is specifically designed to recognize, stabilize, and support them.



Figure 1: Powell’s City of Books is internationally recognized as the world’s largest independent bookstore. Its iconic marquee on West Burnside Street is an unmistakable Portland landmark.

In 2021, the City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) established the strategic goal of creating a citywide Legacy Business Preservation Program, aiming to align Portland with cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Antonio that have already implemented targeted legacy business initiatives. In 2023, Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley advocated for a U.S. Small Business Administration grant for Portland to study the need, rationale, and structure for such a program and to develop actionable recommendations for implementation. This study is the product of that grant award.

This study responds to a clear and urgent problem: Portland is losing legacy businesses at a devastating pace in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Rising commercial rents, increased operating costs, challenges with succession planning, and inequities in access to capital threaten legacy businesses citywide. The closure of beloved, longstanding establishments since 2020 has left cultural, social, and economic voids across the city—losses that cannot be repaired by new business formation alone. Untold numbers of the city’s remaining longstanding cafés, restaurants, bars, small grocers, retailers, and beauty and barber shops are at risk of loss without targeted intervention.

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Define legacy businesses in the Portland context and document why they matter.
2. Assess the threats legacy businesses face and gaps in existing City support systems.
3. Study and learn from other cities’ legacy business programs.
4. Recommend a framework for establishing a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program that complements existing service offerings by addressing unmet needs.

Research Approach and Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data to generate rigorous, community-informed insights and program recommendations. The methodology included a review of academic literature, policy reports, media, and legacy business programs nationwide, supplemented by interviews with program staff to identify effective intervention strategies. Reconnaissance interviews with representatives of geographically, sectorally, and demographically diverse longstanding Portland businesses and subsequent online questionnaires to Portland business owners and the public were employed to identify key challenges, prioritize potential service offerings, and gauge support for a potential legacy business program.

Portland-based economic research firm ECONorthwest developed a citywide inventory of independently owned Portland businesses operating for 20 or more years, analyzed their economic contributions, and assessed neighborhood, demographic, and market trends affecting these businesses. Throughout the process, an inter-bureau City of Portland work group informed research design, reviewed findings, and helped develop this study’s recommendations.

Key Findings: Why Legacy Businesses Matter—and Why They Are at Risk

Portland is home to approximately 4,500 independently owned businesses that have operated for 20 years or more. Collectively, these businesses employ over 39,000 workers, pay \$3.7 billion in wages and benefits, and contribute more than \$6.0 billion to the city's GDP.¹ When supply chain and employee spending effects are included, these longstanding Portland businesses support over 70,000 jobs and \$16.6 billion in regional economic output.²

Beyond their economic value, legacy businesses are irreplaceable social and cultural assets. They function as community anchors, safe spaces for Portlanders of all backgrounds, and living repositories of local history—particularly for communities that have faced marginalization and displacement.

In neighborhoods that have experienced gentrification, remaining legacy businesses stand as visible links to essential community histories and create vital connections between residents who have stayed and those who have been displaced. Many legacy businesses have served the same families across generations, marking celebrations, rites of passage, and moments of mourning, and often provide culturally specific products and services that may not otherwise be available in a homogenizing retail landscape. When these businesses close, the loss is not merely economic—it represents erosion of social networks, cultural expression, and community self-determination.



Figure 2: Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop on NE Hancock Street is a National Register-listed landmark founded in 1956 and the longest continuously operating African American-owned salon in Portland. Dean's has weathered cycles of disinvestment, gentrification, and displacement of its neighbors in Lower Albina, standing as a symbol of resilience and continuing to serve loyal clientele in its original location today (see Appendix E for business profile).

¹ Using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data, Prosper Portland estimates 2023 city of Portland GDP at \$77.7 billion, equal to the city's 5-year (2019 – 23) average: <https://embed.clearimpact.com/Measure/Embed/100716943>

² See Appendix F, under separate cover, for more information.

In addition to their intangible cultural value, legacy businesses' storefronts, signage, interiors, and longstanding traditions contribute to the distinct flavor of Portland and its neighborhoods and commercial corridors. These character-defining features offer familiarity and pride of place for locals and anchor the city's reputation and competitive advantage as a cultural destination. Visitors are not drawn to Portland to eat, drink, and shop at interchangeable national brands—they come to experience the authentic, deeply rooted local institutions that embody the city's unique identity.

Yet, despite their cultural and economic value, many legacy businesses face compounding threats including, but not limited to:

- Rising rents and vulnerability to displacement.
- Deferred maintenance, aging equipment, and limited access to capital.
- Thin operating margins in sectors such as food, retail, and personal services.
- Lack of succession planning as owners approach retirement.
- Fragmented and difficult-to-navigate business support systems not tailored to their needs.

While the City of Portland offers a range of business support resources, none provide recognition, coordinated assistance, or policy advocacy specific to the needs of legacy businesses. Recognizing that this gap leaves some of Portland's most valuable community assets uniquely vulnerable, this study recommends the City of Portland join the 24 other cities across the country that have established dedicated programs to support longstanding local legacy businesses.

Recommendations to Establish a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program

Recognizing that Portland's legacy businesses are economically significant, culturally irreplaceable, and increasingly vulnerable, this study recommends establishing a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program to slow the loss of those longstanding local institutions that give Portland's communities meaning, continuity, and resilience. Such a program would provide coordinated recognition, technical assistance, and financial support tailored to the unique needs of legacy businesses, rather than leaving them in competition with 40,000+ other Portland businesses for limited and insufficiently targeted City resources.



Figure 3: Darcelle XV Showplace, a National Register-listed Portland institution, has entertained Portlanders and visitors from around the world for decades, and was Portland's first historic site designated as a landmark for its association with LGBTQ+ history. Opened in 1967, the business and its namesake owner set Guinness World Records for Oldest Drag Performer and Longest Drag Artist Stage Show. While Darcelle passed away in 2023, a new owner is seeking to continue the business's legacy.

Success of such a program would mean preventing the loss of legacy businesses by prioritizing those at the highest risk of displacement or closure; supporting intergenerational transitions of ownership, enabling younger generations to make meaningful community contributions and build long-term wealth; and investing in the retention and restoration of character-defining physical features such as historic signs and storefronts that contribute to Portland’s distinctive sense of place.

Taken together, the study’s seven recommendations, described in detail in Section 7 of this study, provide a clear administrative framework for establishing a program and define a discrete set of services and benefits designed to meet the unique needs of legacy businesses. They are organized in the following two categories:

- Establish and Maintain a Legacy Business Register, and
- Provide Services and Benefits

Establish and Maintain a Legacy Business Register

As a foundation for the Legacy Business Preservation Program, establishing a formal Legacy Business Register would confer honorific recognition of select legacy businesses and serve as the official roster of program participants. The Register would not be intended to recognize all older businesses, but rather the most culturally, historically, and community-significant among them—those that have demonstrated enduring contributions to Portland’s identity and community life.

The following three actions would be necessary for the establishment and maintenance of the Register:

- 1. Establish an induction process**
- 2. Define eligibility criteria**
- 3. Maintain the Legacy Business Register**

Provide Services and Benefits

Participating business on the Legacy Business Register would be eligible for a suite of services and benefits intended to celebrate their longevity and community contributions, grow and engage customer bases, efficiently navigate and access City resources, and address threats to long term viability.

The following four actions would address many of the unique operational challenges identified by Portland’s longstanding local businesses:

- 4. Provide promotional opportunities and support**
- 5. Offer contracted professional services**
- 6. Deliver dedicated staff support**
- 7. Provide financial assistance**



Figure 4: Oaks Amusement Park is one of the oldest continuously operating amusement parks in the nation, opened in 1905 as an attraction timed to coincide with the Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition.

A Timely and Necessary Investment

Establishing a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program would not merely be an honorific initiative—it would be a strategic investment in Portland’s economic stability and the preservation of vital cultural and community assets. Portland should be a city where businesses are able to serve their communities across generations; where family-owned and community-rooted enterprises can adapt and thrive without losing their identity; where locals and visitors alike can have experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere; where familiar storefronts remain open; and where neighborhoods remain centered around the places that make them feel like home.

The recommendations outlined in this study—grounded in local data, national best practices, and the lived experiences of Portland business owners—provide an achievable path toward stabilizing and strengthening legacy businesses and the communities they serve, that cannot be realized with existing resources alone. Implementing this program would affirm Portland’s commitment to preserving its authentic character while supporting the vitality of businesses and communities that have shaped the city for generations.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020 Portland has seen significant loss of longstanding, independently owned local businesses that anchor neighborhoods, sustain cultural identity, and contribute significantly to the local economy. In response, in 2021 the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) established the strategic goal of implementing a citywide legacy business preservation program. In 2023, with support from Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, the City secured a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration to study the need, rationale, and structure for such a program. This study is the product of that effort.

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Define legacy businesses in the Portland context and document why they matter.
2. Assess the threats legacy businesses face and gaps in existing City support systems.
3. Study and learn from other cities' legacy business programs.
4. Recommend a framework for establishing a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program that complements existing service offerings by addressing unmet needs.

The sections that follow examine the cultural and economic importance of legacy businesses in Portland; present data on the presence, challenges, and business support needs of longstanding Portland businesses; evaluate existing City of Portland business support offerings and identify gaps as they relate to longstanding businesses; review national legacy business program models to highlight best practices and eligibility considerations; and outline a recommended framework for establishing a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program, including induction process, eligibility criteria, and means of support.

Appendices to this study detail its methodology, provide a case study of the nation's first and most robust local government legacy business program, and profile three longstanding Portland businesses representing key industries and geographies and exemplifying common legacy business attributes and challenges. Also provided as an Appendix under separate cover is a complete report from Portland-based economic research firm ECONorthwest detailing the scale, industry composition, and economic contributions of longstanding Portland businesses, as well as community change factors potentially impacting them.

This study concludes that legacy businesses constitute a small but vital segment of Portland's business ecosystem whose preservation carries significant public value, and provides the analytical foundation and strategic framework necessary for the City to determine whether and how to act on the urgent unmet needs of Portland's legacy businesses.

2. The Importance of Legacy Businesses

The term “legacy business” is a relatively recent addition to the urban planning and economic development lexicon, gaining currency in recent years as cities have grappled with the loss of longstanding commercial institutions. In 2015, aiming to stem the loss of beloved longstanding local businesses, the City and County of San Francisco became the first local government in the nation to implement a legacy business program (see Appendix B for program case study). Since then, over 20 additional cities have enacted their own dedicated legacy business initiatives.

Legacy businesses are typically defined by local government programs as independently owned local enterprises that have operated in the same community for a significant period, often measured in decades (e.g., 10, 20, 30, or more years), and have made significant contributions to community history, character, and/or identity. Cities with legacy business programs recognize these businesses for their intangible contributions—serving as cultural landmarks, community gathering spaces, and repositories of local history and character.³

Deeply rooted public-facing establishments such as neighborhood cafés, restaurants, beauty shops, florists, clothiers, booksellers, specialty markets, and independent theaters feature prominently in many legacy business programs’ registries. For the purposes of this study, legacy businesses are defined as independently owned, public-facing Portland businesses that have operated continuously for 20 or more years and have made meaningful contributions to community history, character, and/or identity. This definition is reflected in the recommended eligibility criteria detailed in Section 7 of this study.

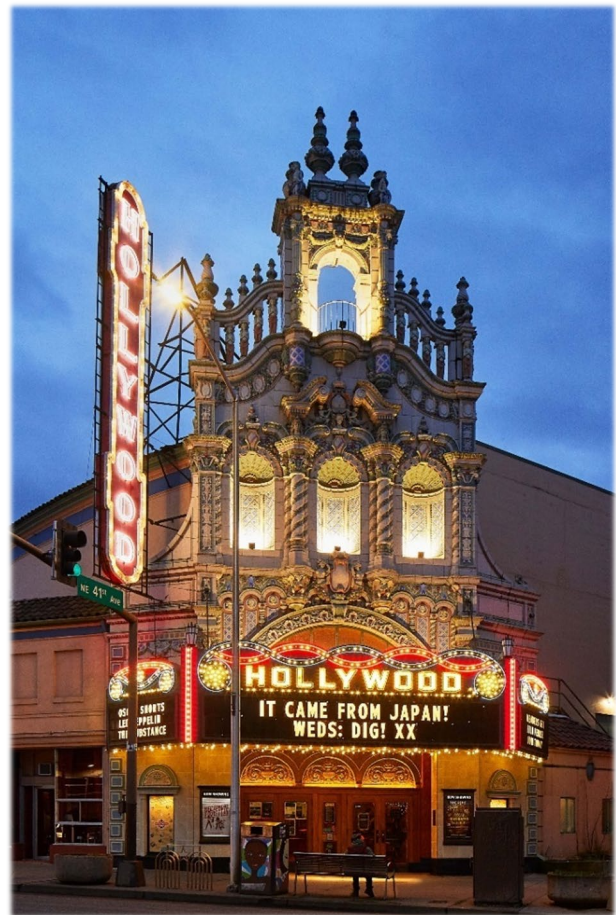


Figure 5: The Hollywood Theatre on NE Sandy Boulevard has served its namesake neighborhood since 1926.

³ Swicegood, E. (2020). Celebrating Mom and Pop Shops: The Importance of Legacy Business Programs for Conserving Living Heritage.

Legacy businesses play a defining role in making Portland Portland.

Portland is a city whose economic and cultural identities are largely defined by localism, independence, and distinct neighborhood and community identities. The civic pride felt by many Portlanders and the city's reputation as a cultural destination are closely tied to the diverse assortment of shops, restaurants, bars, and service providers that serve its unique enclaves.

Legacy businesses' contributions to the city's distinct character go far beyond a "weird" or quirky Portland brand. These institutions stand defiantly against creeping commercial homogenization, defining and maintaining Portland's identity and the authentic and unique character of its commercial corridors and neighborhoods. Visitors don't come to Portland to eat, drink, and shop at national chains—they come to experience Powell's City of Books, historic neighborhood movie theaters, and venerable cafés, restaurants, bars, and brew pubs.

Portland is also a city with a fraught history, wherein public policy decisions have disadvantaged and contributed to the displacement of countless businesses owned by and serving members of the city's BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and other marginalized communities⁴. In her 2021 American Planning Association memo *Legacy Business Programs: Emerging Directions*⁵, Dr. Elizabeth Morton outlined the role of legacy businesses as cultural anchors and repositories of intangible cultural heritage. Dr. Morton found that they foster a sense of place, often acting as "third spaces" where people can connect outside of their homes and workplaces, and play a key role in building positive community narratives and promoting social cohesion. This characterization fits Portland's legacy businesses. They serve as community and cultural hubs, offering essential—and often culturally specific—products and services, and providing safe, familiar, and supportive spaces for Portlanders of all backgrounds. Some have withstood waves of gentrification and



Figure 6: Music Millennium on East Burnside Street has been serving Portland music lovers since 1969. In early 2026, ownership announced that they are seeking a buyer for the business.

⁴ Wollner, C., Provo, J., Schablisky, J (2005). *Brief History of Urban Renewal in Portland, Oregon*. (n.d.). <https://prosperportland.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Brief-History-of-Urban-Renewal-in-Portland-2005-Wollner-Provo-Schablisky.pdf>

⁵ Morton, E. (2021). *Legacy Business Programs: Emerging Directions* (Techreport No. PAS MEMO No. 109). American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service.

disruption to their neighborhoods, and now proudly represent the past, present, and future of their communities.

Legacy businesses are living history.

Legacy businesses are vital cultural and historic community assets, yet they often don't fit within the prevailing model for historic recognition and preservation, which focuses primarily on the built environment rather than intangible assets like businesses. This has significant consequences where equitable representation of community history is concerned. In her 2019 *CityLab* article "Why Historic Preservation Needs a New Approach," Patrice Frey, president of the National Main Street Center, noted that only eight percent of National Register Sites and three percent of National Historic Landmarks then represented people of color, women, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Recognizing these inequities, BPS has collaborated with property owners and partner organizations to expand the documentation and designation of underrepresented historic resources in Portland. This work has prioritized the protection of African American, Asian American, and LGBTQ+ historic resources through local landmark designation, support for individual property nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, and the development of foundational documentation through initiatives such as the City's African American Historic Sites Project and LGBTQ+ Historic Sites Project.

At the same time, City staff have received repeated requests to broaden the Historic Resources Program beyond the designation and documentation of significant buildings to include Portland's living historic institutions—particularly those that serve historically marginalized communities—regardless of their association with architecturally or historically significant structures. For many longstanding businesses, traditional historic designation is neither practical nor accessible—often because business owners do not own their buildings, because the buildings themselves do not meet designation criteria, or because the administrative and financial burdens of nomination are prohibitive. For many of Portland's deeply rooted community-facing businesses, official recognition and support from the City feels long overdue.

Legacy businesses are important economic contributors.

Portland's longstanding local businesses are key to regional, citywide, and neighborhood-level economic strength and resilience—essential ties that bind our economy together. They are more likely than their competitors to source their inputs and services from local suppliers, and, as detailed in Section 3 of this study, through their direct operations, supply chain purchasing, and worker spending, they support tens of thousands of local jobs, pay billions of dollars in wages and benefits, and contribute billions more to the city's and region's respective GDPs.

The tenure of these longstanding businesses represents durability through economic cycles and neighborhood change. Many offer vital career pathways, cultivating long-term staff and transferring valuable industry knowledge. Importantly, they also represent opportunities for ownership transitions that allow longtime employees, family members, or local entrepreneurs to build wealth through succession.



Figure 7: Jake's Famous Crawfish has been serving Portland since 1892.

Legacy businesses play a meaningful role in heritage tourism and civic branding, driving tourism-related revenues and contributing to Portland's reputation as a cultural destination. Visitors are drawn to Portland in part for its distinctive, independent commercial landscape that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The city's historic bookstores, neighborhood theaters, restaurants, music venues, and specialty retailers are tourist attractions in their own right, and generate visitor spending not only within their own walls, but throughout surrounding corridors and across the city.

Legacy businesses are also more likely to offer culturally specific products and culturally competent services than homogenized national chains. For immigrant communities, communities of color, LGBTQ+ Portlanders, and other historically marginalized groups, legacy businesses often provide trusted spaces, language access, culturally relevant goods, and services grounded in lived experience, meeting market demands that less community-rooted firms may overlook or inadequately serve. Their survival therefore has implications not only for economic diversity, but also for equity, inclusion, and community health.

In addition to their value to community members, legacy businesses are often vital to the stability of commercial areas, anchoring business clusters and supporting complementary businesses. Their recognizable storefronts, long-established customer bases, and predictable operating presence reduce vacancy risk and help sustain foot traffic. When a longstanding business closes, the loss can reverberate beyond the individual storefront, diminishing corridor vitality, weakening supplier relationships, and eroding the sense of continuity that fosters customer loyalty.

3. The State of Longstanding Portland Businesses

This section describes the quantity, scale, industry composition, geographic distribution, economic contributions, and key challenges facing longstanding, independently owned businesses in Portland, along with insights into challenges facing these businesses and their preferred modes of support from the City of Portland. To facilitate this analysis, BPS tasked Portland-based economic research firm ECONorthwest to:

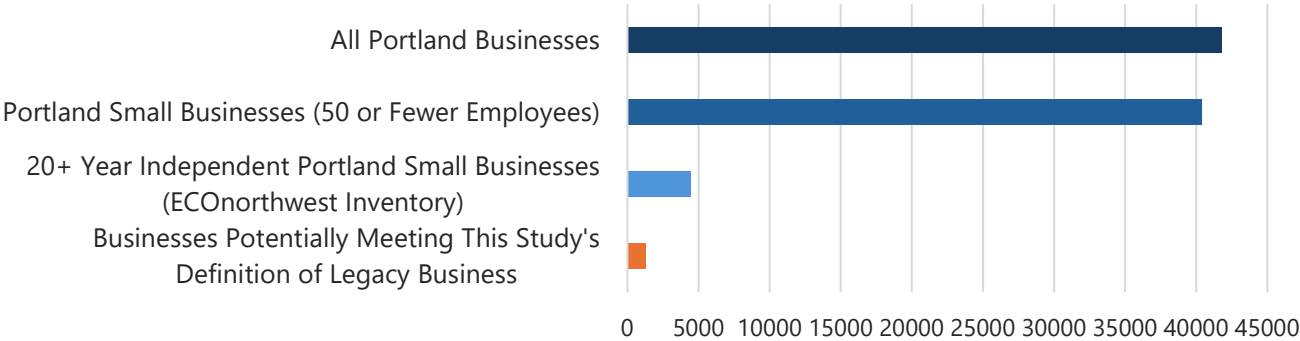
- Produce an inventory of Portland-based businesses with 20 or more years of continuous operation, that are independently owned, and have 50 or fewer employees.
- Model the economic contributions of the businesses making up the inventory.
- Analyze how neighborhood and market changes intersect with the presence of Portland’s longstanding independent businesses.

The Quantity, Industry and Employment, Geographic, and Economic analyses below are derived from ECONorthwest’s research, detailed in its BPS-commissioned report *Portland Legacy Business Economic Analysis* (Appendix F, under separate cover). The Interview and Questionnaire Insights subsection is the result of direct BPS engagement with relevant businesses and from questionnaires made available to Portland businesses and the public in October 2025.

Quantity

ECONorthwest’s research found that 11% (approximately 4,500) of Portland’s nearly 42,000 registered business entities are independently owned small businesses with 20 or more years of continuous operation. Even fewer, approximately 3–4% of Portland businesses, are estimated to meet the narrower definition of legacy business established in this study.

Figure 8: Portland businesses by category—All Portland Businesses, Portland Small Businesses, 20+ Year Independent Small Businesses, Potential Legacy Businesses



Industry and Employment Analysis

Understanding the industry composition of Portland’s longstanding local businesses provides insight into the types of services, social and economic relationships, and jobs they support. This data also informs where concentrations of risk occur and where tailored interventions may be needed.

Portland’s 4,500 longstanding local businesses represent 9% of the city’s total employment, largely concentrated within ten industries with clusters of 200 or more firms (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Industries with more than 200 firms within Portland’s longstanding local business inventory

Industry	Number of Businesses	Number of Employees	Avg. Number of Employees per Business
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	670	4,610	7
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	530	3,570	7
Health Care and Social Assistance	510	4,450	9
Retail Trade	450	3,850	9
Wholesale Trade	370	3,340	9
Construction	330	2,350	7
Accommodation and Food Services	270	3,700	14
Manufacturing	250	2,700	11
Finance and Insurance	240	1,600	7
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	210	1,310	6

Top industries, by number of firms, include Professional Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Wholesale Trade—reflecting a mix of community-facing and business-to-business firms. Among these, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Other Services (including personal services like hair care) most closely align with the common emphasis among other cities’ legacy business programs of prioritizing support for public-facing businesses (see Section 5). Some businesses in the Manufacturing and Wholesale Trade industries could also align with this emphasis, such as clothing manufacturers with retail storefronts or brewers with onsite pubs.

To better understand threats facing longstanding local businesses, ECONorthwest examined small business “churn” (the combined scale of new business formation and permanent closure) across industries, comparing longstanding business industry clusters to broader small business trends.

Figure 10: Top 3 industries by combined small business formation and closure in Portland since 2004

Top 3 Industries	Small Business Formations	Small Business Closures
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5,700	2,400
Health Care and Social Assistance	4,500	1,400
Accommodation and Food Services	2,600	1,600

Their analysis found that in industries with high small business churn, longstanding businesses are more likely to face pressures from new competition, shifting consumer demand, and volatile margins. Businesses in the Accommodation and Food Services industry—including restaurants, cafés, and bars—are subject to particularly high churn. As noted in Figure 9, Accommodation and Food Services businesses also have the highest average number of employees among longstanding business industries. Subject to increased competition and a less stable commercial ecosystem, longstanding businesses in industries experiencing high churn may be more likely to require targeted intervention to remain viable.

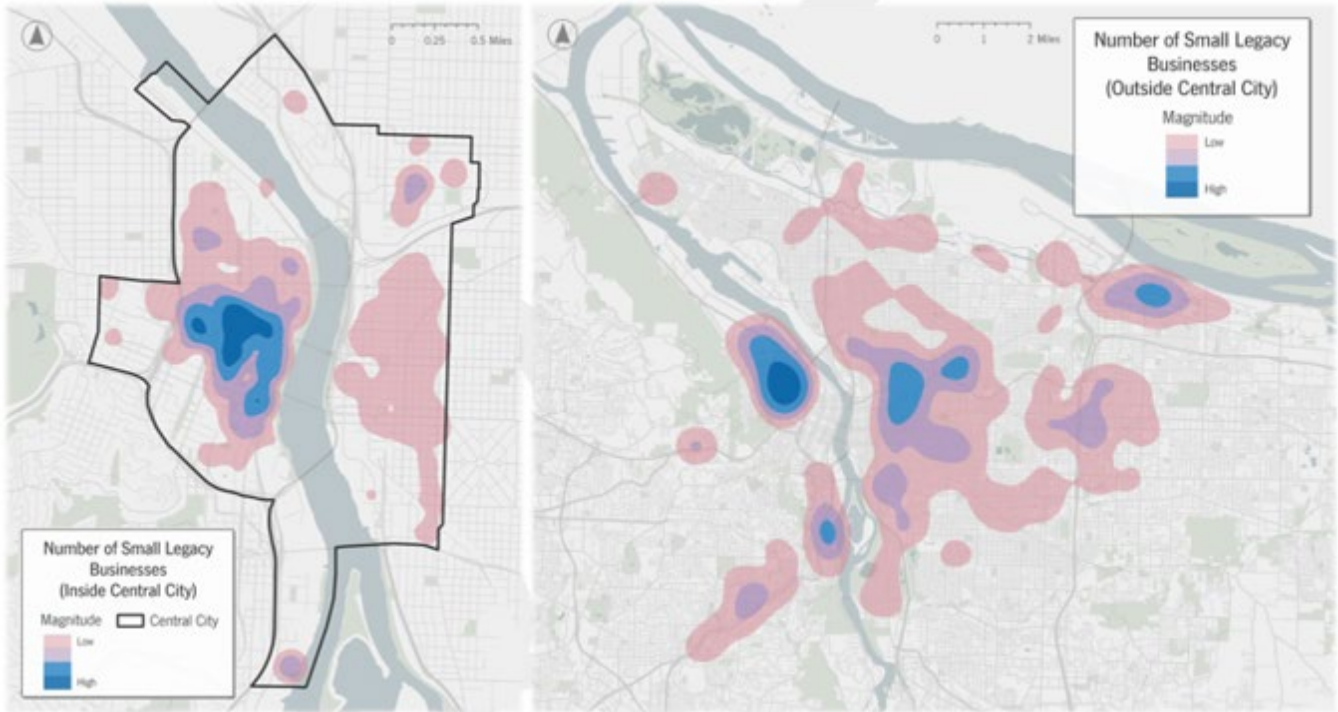
ECONorthwest found that longstanding businesses operating within low-margin industries such as Retail, Other Services, and Accommodation and Food Services are particularly vulnerable to rising overhead costs. Rising rents likely factor significantly into these cost pressures, as retail rents citywide have climbed by 49% since 2006. Among respondents to a BPS questionnaire (detailed later in Section 3), 52% of those representing longstanding Portland businesses lease their space, making them subject to Portland’s challenging commercial rental market.

Geographic Analysis

Unsurprisingly, Portland’s longstanding local businesses are primarily concentrated in the Central City and along the city’s historic commercial corridors. As shown in Figure 11 (next page), the highest concentrations of longstanding local businesses are in the central city areas of Downtown and the West End; older mixed-use corridors including SE Hawthorne Blvd. and NE Sandy Blvd.; and historic neighborhoods including Parkrose and Northwest Portland. These locations are typically characterized by walkable environments, historic building stock, and long-term commercial activity, making them natural anchors for small, independently owned businesses. ECONorthwest noted that many of these corridors also overlap with areas that have experienced significant demographic change and market pressure over the last two decades.

Concentrations of longstanding businesses were also found in areas that have experienced large population growth in the last 20 years, particularly in the Central City, Inner Northeast, and Southeast. The stability of longstanding businesses in these areas could indicate that the additional consumer demand that goes along with population growth is supporting these businesses. ECONorthwest found that areas of East Portland have seen significant small business growth recently but have fewer longstanding businesses overall.

Figure 11: Geographic distribution of longstanding Portland businesses: Central City (left) and outside Central City (right). Source: ECONorthwest, 2025.



ECONorthwest noted overlaps between clusters of longstanding local businesses and areas with accelerated residential displacement typologies (such as the City of Portland’s Economic Vulnerability Assessment dataset,⁶ which the City uses to identify census tracts where residents are particularly vulnerable to economic shifts). Overall, 40% of longstanding local businesses are located within tracts where residents are more vulnerable to changing economic conditions. ECONorthwest found that some of Portland’s most culturally significant businesses are in areas of high economic vulnerability, including parts of the Central City, Northeast Portland, and the Interstate Corridor where BIPOC populations have declined and where commercial rents have risen rapidly. These are neighborhoods that have long served as social, economic, and cultural hubs for communities of color, where local businesses, institutions, and gathering places are deeply tied to community identity and resilience.

Remaining culturally specific businesses located within neighborhoods that have seen residential displacement are likely disproportionately impacted by the loss of the BIPOC population, according to ECONorthwest:

⁶ City of Portland (2025). *Economic Vulnerability Assessment*. <https://gis-pdx.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/vulnerability/about>

“When long-time residents are displaced, local businesses lose a reliable customer base. Conversely, the arrival of new, higher-income residents can shift consumer demand away from culturally specific goods and services, often to the detriment of BIPOC- and immigrant-owned legacy businesses.”

ECONorthwest also found that 24% of Portland’s longstanding local businesses are located within current Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts. Some impactful financial support tools, like Prosper Portland’s Prosperity Investment Program grant, are available exclusively within TIF districts. While potentially valuable for businesses in these areas, the geographic limitations of TIF districts leaves over three-quarters of Portland’s longstanding local businesses without access to these valuable financial resources.

Economic Analysis

Collectively, the approximately 4,500 longstanding Portland businesses making up ECONorthwest’s inventory contribute significantly to the city and regional economy. They directly employ over 39,000 workers, pay \$3.7 billion in employee wages and benefits and are estimated to directly contribute over \$6.0 billion to the city’s \$77.7 billion GDP, representing over \$10.2 billion in gross economic output.

According to ECONorthwest’s analysis, these businesses are more reliant on localized supply chains than other Portland businesses, supporting an additional \$37.8 million in economic output from local supply chain and household consumption-related businesses, including an estimated \$11.7 million in wages and benefits paid. Furthermore, these businesses support an additional approximately 32,000 jobs and \$6.4 billion in secondary economic output across sectors within the greater Portland regional economy.

In total, Portland’s 4,500 longstanding local businesses support over 70,000 jobs and \$16.6 billion in economic output through their direct operations, supply chain purchases, and worker spending throughout the region.

Interview and Questionnaire Insights

Interviews

BPS staff conducted in-person reconnaissance-level interviews with owners and managers of over twenty longstanding Portland business in the first half of 2025, to generate early insights into prevalent issues facing these businesses and to inform the approach to subsequent research.

Issues identified by interview participants included:

- *Financial pressures*, often related to lost revenue resulting from decreased foot traffic (relative to pre-pandemic levels), high taxes and fees (imposed by multiple jurisdictions), and increasing labor, inventory, and service costs.

- *Challenging neighborhood conditions*, including theft, vandalism, unsanctioned camping, and individuals in addiction or mental health crisis near the business. These were cited by many interviewees as a potential deterrent and danger to patrons and employees, and an additional cost burden in instances of theft or vandalism. Some reported hiring private security firms to discourage trespassing and property crime; several said that they had absorbed the cost of numerous repairs of break-ins and vandalism out of concern that they could lose insurance coverage or that insurance premiums would become unaffordable due to claims.
- *Government-imposed burdens*, including permitting and code challenges, were cited by some interview participants. Some noted that their businesses had been adversely impacted by public works projects, or had suffered as a result of COVID restrictions. Conversely, others cited COVID relief funding disbursed by the City as critical to their businesses' survival through the pandemic.

Questionnaires

Subsequent to conducting reconnaissance interviews with longstanding local business owners, in October 2025 BPS made questionnaires available to Portland business owners and the general public. Over 200 longstanding local businesses were directly invited to participate, and community-based organizations and businesses contacted during the earlier phase of project outreach were asked to share the opportunity within their networks. The questionnaires were publicized via BPS's and other City communications channels. In total, 238 responses were collected.

Business Respondent Feedback

Business respondents were asked to provide information on their business's age, geography, and number of employees. The business questionnaire characterized issues known or suspected to impact Portland businesses (informed by prior reconnaissance interviews and review of other jurisdictions' legacy business program information) and potential service offerings of a City of Portland legacy business program; the questionnaire then prompted respondents to indicate which issues posed the most significant challenges to their business currently or in the recent past, and which potential City service offerings would be most valued by their business. Finally, respondents were asked whether they supported implementation of a support program exclusively for legacy businesses and invited open-ended feedback on the concept.

Of the 153 respondents representing Portland-based businesses, 70% supported implementation of a City legacy business program. Business respondents who did not support the idea of a City legacy business program tended to express a preference for reduced taxation and/or reduced regulation rather than new City programming, and/or general skepticism of City intervention in matters of business viability. Notably, 20% of unsupportive respondents reported utilizing City business support resources in the past five years.

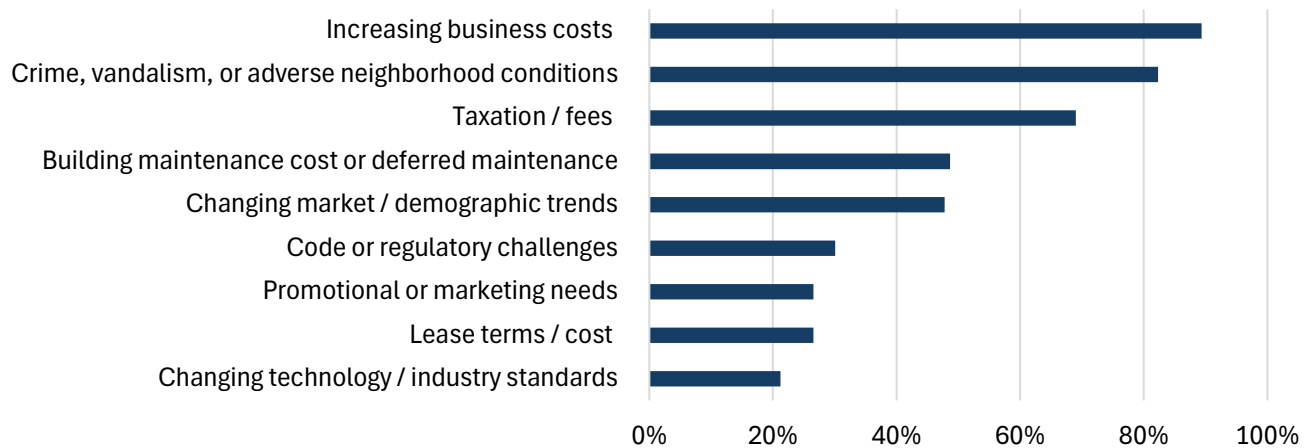
Among business respondents, 113 (74%) represented 20+ year old businesses; these longstanding business respondents were distributed among Portland’s four City Council Districts as follows:

Figure 12: Questionnaire respondents representing 20+ year old businesses by Portland City Council District

Portland City Council District	# of Longstanding Business Respondents
District 1	12
District 2	19
District 3	34
District 4	48

A range of challenges were cited by longstanding business respondents, led by increasing business costs, adverse neighborhood conditions, and high taxation and fees, as detailed in Figure 13 below:

Figure 13: Challenges cited by 20+ year old businesses in Portland



The business questionnaire asked respondents to rank their top five choices among potential legacy business program service offerings. Figure 14 below represents the preferences of 20+ year business respondents:

Figure 14: Preferred service offerings among 20+ year old businesses in Portland



Financial assistance such as grants, tax abatements, and fee reductions was the top choice, ranked among the top five preferences of 88% of 20+ year business respondents. Priority status for existing City business support programs and services ranked second, chosen by 61% of this group of respondents. City-led promotion of legacy businesses and professional marketing and promotional assistance (aimed at helping businesses develop internal capacity to grow and engage their audiences) ranked third and fourth, respectively.

Public Respondent Feedback

The public questionnaire was completed by 85 respondents, 84% of whom supported implementation of a City of Portland legacy business program. Many respondents expressed strong sentiments that legacy businesses are vital community and cultural assets warranting dedicated City support, in some cases characterized as overdue. Examples (excerpted from anonymized questionnaire data) include:

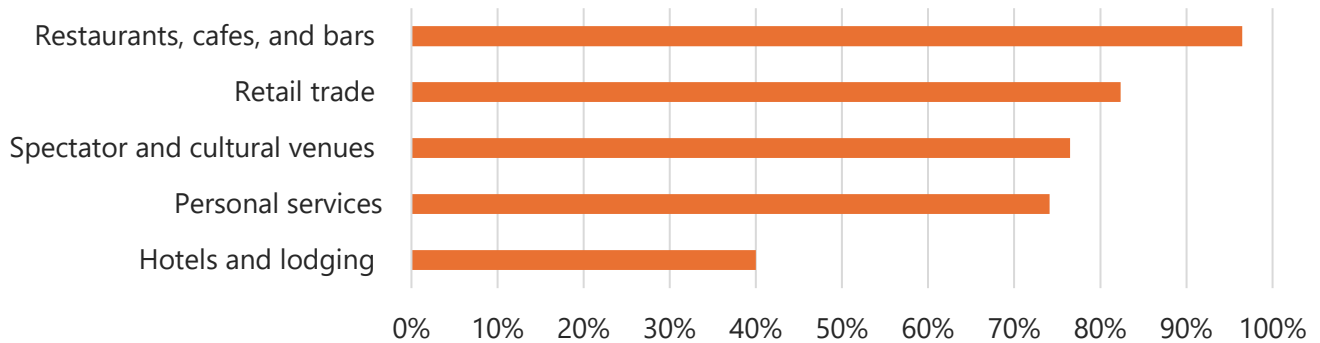
- “We've lost so many legacy businesses in my 27 years as a Portlander, and it's hard and sad. These are places I quite literally have a lifetime of memories visiting. These are important places to all Portlanders. I imagine we each have our own and I think they're worth city funds to help stay open.”
- “I moved here 16 years ago from a city where most of the local legacy businesses were gone. Losing those transformed the city for the worse. One of the things that drew me here was the love of local businesses seemingly across all sectors. Losing local businesses, especially legacy ones, means losing the character of the city.”
- “One of Portland's best attributes is how much small-scale neighborhood character remains throughout the city, particularly the neighborhood bars/taverns and movie houses that have been able to survive recent waves of urban change. Legacy businesses are also so important to racial/ethnic/sexual minority communities (RIP Scandals). If the City wants to support economic development and new housing but is ambivalent about the businesses that have been active here for decades, then the city will become unrecognizable in no time.”

Public respondents were asked to choose up to five business sectors representing their preferences for inclusion in a City legacy business program from the following list:

- Restaurants, cafes, and bars
- Hotels and lodging
- Retail trade
- Personal services (beauty / barber shops, auto repair, etc.)
- Spectator and cultural venues
- Construction trades
- Manufacturing
- Warehousing and transportation
- Wholesale trade
- Professional services (legal services, tax preparation, etc.)

The chart below shows public respondents' preferred business sectors for inclusion in a legacy business program:

Figure 15: Public questionnaire showing respondent preference by business sector.



Public respondents were also asked what they would like City leadership to know as it considers potential implementation of a legacy business program. Notable responses included:

- "The City should think holistically about how legacy businesses contribute to their neighborhoods. The primary goal should be to help them stay in business. A secondary goal should also address the physical fabric of their properties."
- "Legacy business support cannot be done in a silo ... It has to be in lockstep with other City-supported efforts to attract new business from outside of Portland and to make more neighborhood pockets an attractive place for businesses to thrive and consumers and residents to experience."
- "I'd encourage City leadership to build this program with business owners, not just for them. Too often, well-intended initiatives get bogged down in process or symbolism. If Portland wants this to succeed, it should focus on outcomes that help legacy businesses stay viable, not just celebrated."

4. How Does the City of Portland Currently Support Local Businesses?

The City of Portland offers numerous services to residents and businesses alike, including solid waste and recycling, stormwater disposal, and fire protection. This section summarizes the City's key business support offerings. This list is not an exhaustive accounting of all City services or support offerings, but summarizes those most relevant to longstanding Portland businesses.

Prosper Portland

Prosper Portland (Prosper) is the City's economic and urban development agency. Its business support offerings include:

- The Office of Small Business, serving Portland's 40,000+ small businesses by helping connect them to the appropriate City resources; providing assistance navigating business challenges including permitting, licensing, procurement, and funding/finance; collaborating with business districts and associations; and creating peer-to-peer and community networking opportunities for small business owners.
- The Inclusive Business Resource Network, a citywide program connecting small businesses and entrepreneurs to a network of partner organizations offering a variety of support services with a focus on serving entrepreneurs of color, women, and other underrepresented communities.
- The Affordable Commercial Tenancing Program, available at select Prosper-owned and leased properties, offering reduced rent, tenant improvement contributions, and technical assistance for participating tenants.
- The Business District Assistance program, serving Business District Associations, Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative Districts, and Enhanced Services Districts with training opportunities, technical assistance, and grant funding.
- Grants including:
 - Prosperity Investment Program Grants, offering reimbursable funding of up to \$75,000 at a 75/25 (City/grantee) match for tenant improvements. This grant is currently available only in the City's tax-increment financing (TIF) districts.
 - Local Small Business Expanded Repair/Restore Grants, providing funding to small businesses citywide that have sustained physical and economic damage due to break-ins and vandalism. Eligible businesses may receive up to \$25,000 over the life of the program for eligible repairs.
 - The Affordable Commercial Tenancing Grant, available within the Interstate Corridor or Gateway Regional Center TIF districts, designed for property owners and small business owners who are in the process of negotiating a lease. The program helps local small

businesses lower the costs of moving into ground-floor storefronts by providing funds to improve and build out the space.

- Lending:
 - Prosper offers a range of lending options, including a Small Business Loan available citywide for equipment purchases, working capital, and tenant improvements. Other loans options are available for commercial property development, acquisition, or renovation (including energy efficiency and seismic resiliency upgrades), and are available citywide (funded by Prosper’s Strategic Investment Fund when delivered outside of TIF districts, and using district-specific funding inside TIF districts). Prosper serves primarily as a gap lender, offering financing to businesses or projects that may not qualify for traditional bank loans.

Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) is the City’s lead bureau for long-range planning, climate policy, waste management, community technology, and digital equity. It offers business assistance via the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF), Graffiti Abatement Program, Solid Waste Program, Digital Inclusion Fund, and Historic Resources Program.

- PCEF invests in community-led projects that reduce carbon emissions, create economic opportunities, and help make Portland more resilient as it faces a changing climate. These efforts include a \$45 million loan fund providing flexible, low-cost capital for carbon-reducing projects, delivered in partnership with qualified local community-based organizations and lenders. PCEF prioritizes projects serving Portland’s frontline communities and neighborhoods, including those most impacted by the effects of climate change as well as those who have been long underserved and underrepresented.

PCEF provides financial support to local for-profit businesses via the \$25 million Building Energy Efficiency (BEE) Grant program (PCEF funded, administered by Prosper Portland), which is available to small businesses and small (less than 40,000 square feet) commercial building owners, providing funding for energy efficient upgrades that reduce energy usage and cost, create health benefits, and increase business resilience.

- BPS' Graffiti Abatement program grants as much as \$1.2 million annually in in-kind resources to small businesses.
- BPS’ Solid Waste Team provides ongoing composting and recycling technical assistance to businesses.
- The Digital Inclusion Fund, aimed at bridging the digital divide in Portland, was introduced as a pilot program in fiscal year 2024–25. In FY 2025–26 the fund will award \$200,000 in grants, 30% of which will be allocated to businesses through the Veteran Tech Readiness Small Business Grant, aimed at building digital capacity among military veteran-owned small businesses.

- The Historic Resources Program staff regularly provide local business owners with information and guidance related to available technical and financial tools including potential historic property designation, which can unlock financial incentives for rehabilitation.

In recent years, the Historic Resources Program has provided technical and professional support for nominating properties to the National Register of Historic Places, a designation that makes commercial properties eligible for a federal tax credit of up to 20% of qualified rehabilitation expenses and a state 10-year property tax special assessment program. The 2022 designation of Dean’s Barber Shop and Beauty Salon in Northeast Portland as a National Register Landmark is an example of Historic Resources Program efforts to support longstanding local businesses.⁷

Portland Solutions

Portland Solutions was established in 2024 to create a centralized program hub to address Portland's most pressing homelessness and livability challenges including outreach, shelter, impact reduction, and reclaiming public spaces. Its programs include the Public Environment Management Office (PEMO), whose Problem Solvers Network brings together business district associations, neighborhood associations, significant community organizations, and other vested parties every two weeks in neighborhood-specific meetings to discuss and strategize around local public realm issues.

In January 2026 Portland Solutions published a report detailing a plan to implement a citywide Storefront Support Program, recommending a unified response structure wherein Portland Solutions would assume a coordinating role for all City programs providing support to storefront businesses.⁸

Revenue Division

The City of Portland Revenue Division offers the Downtown Business Incentive Program, a temporary \$25 million nonrefundable tax credit designed to incentivize commercial lease signings and lease renewals aimed at supporting the recovery and revitalization of Portland’s central city. Eligible businesses will have signed new leases or lease extensions in the 2023 or 2024 calendar year; extension of this credit to subsequent tax years has not been announced as of publication of this study.

⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, National Register #100007455.

⁸ This report recommended implementation of a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program as a complementary action.

Portland Permitting and Development

Portland Permitting and Development (PP&D) provides building permits, land use reviews, inspections, code enforcement, and public works permits. The bureau offers free 15-minute appointments to help prospective permit applicants plan their projects and learn about building codes, zoning rules, and permit requirements before they begin work.

In October 2025 the City of Portland implemented temporary suspensions of certain rules administered by PP&D that apply to projects that add to or alter existing developments, including requirements to plant street trees, improve building frontages, provide seismic evaluation reports, and upgrade pedestrian connections, landscaping, or other site features. Suspension of these requirements, which apply to projects meeting certain permit valuation thresholds, will remain in effect until Jan. 1, 2029. Impacts of these suspensions, including those to local businesses, will be evaluated, and permanent adoption considered.

PP&D also manages the Empowered Neighborhoods Program, which offers assistance to small businesses (50 or fewer employees) in select ZIP codes that have received a letter from the City requiring them to address a zoning or building violation.

5. How Do Other Cities Support Legacy Businesses?

As of early 2026, 24 legacy business programs are operated by local governments across the U.S. (Figure 17, end of this section), representing jurisdictions ranging in size from San Marcos, Texas (population 66,000) to Los Angeles, California (population 3.9 million). Some programs are administered within their cities' offices of economic development, others within planning departments, and a handful within offices of historic preservation. In its 2024 *State of the Portland Economy* report,⁹ Prosper Portland identified nine "peer cities" for comparative evaluation of Portland's economy. These nine cities were determined to be most comparable to Portland based on population, income, and education metrics. Among the nine peer cities identified, three (Atlanta, Boston, and Denver) have active legacy business programs.¹⁰



Figure 16: Examples of local government legacy business programs' insignias.

Program Goals and Objectives

Local government legacy business programs are typically designed to not only honor legacy businesses through official recognition, but also to directly support them via technical assistance, promotional support, access to grants or financial resources, and/or development of supportive policies. Legacy

⁹ Prosper Portland (2024). *State of the Portland Economy*. <https://prosperportland.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/State-of-the-Portland-Economy-2024-web.pdf>

¹⁰ An additional peer city, Austin, TX, offered a temporary legacy business grant program and a related "iconic venues" grant fund as part of its COVID relief and recovery efforts.

business initiatives are often framed as components of or complements to broader economic and community development strategies.

Stated program goals often center around preservation of unique local character, prevention of displacement of vulnerable longstanding businesses, and enhancing tourism appeal. San Francisco's program (Appendix B) emphasizes preventing displacement, preserving cultural identity, and supporting legacy business stability and growth through promotional assistance; Boston's program connects legacy business designation with efforts to boost employment and enrich neighborhood vitality; and Long Beach prioritizes supporting successful ownership transitions and driving legacy business exposure to the tourism industry.

Program Eligibility

Local government legacy business programs generally set a high bar for inclusion by establishing eligibility criteria that limit legacy business designation to those longstanding businesses that have made demonstrable and enduring contributions to community history, identity, and character. These programs are not designed to recognize all older businesses, but rather to identify a community's most significant longstanding enterprises—those valued cultural assets whose contributions cannot be measured strictly in economic terms.

Legacy business programs almost universally require participating businesses to meet a minimum age threshold for inclusion. Age thresholds range from as few as 10 years (Denver) to as many as 100 years (Missoula). While Denver employs the lowest minimum age criterion among programs surveyed for this study, it employs a candidate evaluation rubric that awards points for longevity, thereby favoring longer-tenured businesses and reinforcing the program's emphasis on sustained presence and impact.

Beyond age, most programs require that businesses demonstrate clear and substantive contributions to local history, identity, or neighborhood character. In some jurisdictions, this requirement is operationalized through formal nomination processes or letters of support from elected officials, business district associations, community-based organizations, or other civic entities. In others, program staff are granted discretion to evaluate and approve candidates based on established guidelines.

Participating businesses are typically required to be independent (i.e., not owned or franchised by a non-local corporate entity) and locally owned. Some programs restrict eligibility to primarily public-facing, business-to-consumer enterprises—requiring businesses to maintain a physical commercial location. Several explicitly exclude nonprofit organizations. While some programs encourage applications from businesses that may not meet all eligibility criteria, these exceptions are intended to prove the rule: legacy business designation is reserved for a special segment of businesses that have played an outsized role in shaping the cultural and economic fabric of their communities.

Services and Benefits

While program scopes vary widely, most legacy business programs offer services and benefits to participating businesses. These offerings generally fall into one or more of the following categories:

Official Recognition and Promotional Support

- **Directories and maps:** Many programs, including San Antonio, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, feature online directories and maps to recognize legacy businesses and drive public interest.
- **Plaques and decals:** Denver and San Francisco are among the many programs providing participating businesses with plaques, window decals, or other promotional collateral to signify their legacy status.
- **Social and earned¹¹ media:** Many programs leverage their own and partners' communication channels and engage local media outlets to publicize and promote participating businesses; some offer promotional toolkits including program style guides and logos, press release templates, etc.
- **Events:** Some programs host or sponsor promotional events including business mixers, passport programs, or business crawls.

Technical Assistance

- **Concierge service:** The linchpin of many programs' offerings is the concierge role—with program staff serving as a dedicated resource helping business owners understand and effectively navigate complex government systems, access relevant internal and external resources, and maintain a unified line of communication with the jurisdiction.
- **Historic resource education and technical assistance:** Some programs offer expertise in historic resource code compliance, documentation, designation, and associated resources, including existing financial incentives available to owners of designated historic properties.
- **Commercial lease education:** San Francisco provides a toolkit to help businesses negotiate and understand their legal rights regarding leases; Seattle's program, ultimately sidelined by the COVID pandemic just prior to its planned launch, also developed a lease toolkit; and other jurisdictions provide individual business guidance and educational workshops addressing lease issues.

¹¹ "Earned media" refers to uncompensated mentions or features via a third party platform— i.e., newspapers, magazines, journals, industry blogs, tv news, etc.

- **Business coaching and peer mentorship:** Some jurisdictions facilitate mentorship between participating businesses and/or connect members with external business capacity-building resources.
- **Succession planning:** Programs including those in Boston, San Francisco, Lansing, and Long Beach offer guidance and resources to help businesses plan for ownership transitions as owners approach retirement age.

Financial Assistance

- **Grants:** Some programs offer grant funding aimed at offsetting cost burdens associated with rising rents or stabilizing or growing the businesses; San Francisco, Atlanta, and Detroit are among the programs currently offering dedicated grant funds. Several others have used temporary funding (including COVID relief funding during the pandemic) to support legacy businesses; in some cases, grant funding has been restricted to designated districts, as was the case for San Antonio's 2018-19 World Heritage Area Legacy Business Pilot Grant program.
- **Loans:** Some jurisdictions partner with non-traditional lenders to facilitate loans to participating businesses. For example, the program in San Antonio partners with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to offer low-interest loans for interior improvements.
- **Tax abatements and fee waivers:** While no jurisdictions identified in this study are known to offer fee waivers or tax abatements exclusively to legacy businesses, some programs, including Tucson, AZ and San Marcos, TX, offer legacy businesses preferred status for existing financial incentives as a potential program benefit.

Supportive Policies and Regulations

- **Permit and planning flexibility:** Some jurisdictions allow legacy businesses variances and use exemptions in commercial spaces; in San Francisco, this includes allowances to merge commercial spaces and exceed size restrictions in certain circumstances.
- **Preferred vendor status:** Some programs assist participating businesses in becoming vendors to the municipality and encourage departments within their jurisdictions to prioritize contracting with legacy business vendors.
- **Commercial tenant protections:** San Francisco's Board of Supervisors temporarily implemented regulatory tenant protections for legacy businesses, imposing conditional use reviews of plans to evict or replace a legacy business. These protections were not renewed as of late 2025.

Figure 17: Location, Department, Age Criteria, Benefits, and Services of Legacy Business Programs Across the US

Location	Bureau / Department	Age Criterion	Honorific Recognition?	Technical Assistance?	Financial Assistance?
Atlanta, GA	Economic Development	30 years	Y	Y	Y
Bartlett, IL	Economic Development	25 years	Y		
Birmingham, AL	Economic Development	25 years	Y	Y	
Boston, MA	Economic Development	10 years	Y	Y	
Cambridge, MA	Economic Development	25 years	Y	Y	
Delray Beach, FL	Economic Development	15 years	Y	Y	
Denver, CO	Economic Development	10 years	Y	Y	
Detroit, MI	Economic Development	30 years	Y	Y	Y
Durham, NC	Economic Development	15 years		Y	
Evanston, IL	Economic Development	20 years	Y	Y	Y
Lansing, MI	Economic Development	NA		Y	
Long Beach, CA	Economic Development	25 years	Y	Y	
Los Angeles, CA	Economic Development	20 years	Y	Y	Y
Missoula, MT	Planning / Historic	100 years	Y		
Pasadena, CA	Economic Development	50 years	Y		
Phoenix, AZ	Mayor's Office	25 years	Y		
Reno, NV	Historic Preservation	50 years	Y		
San Antonio, TX	Historic Preservation	20 years	Y	Y	
San Francisco, CA	Economic Development	30 years	Y	Y	Y
San Marcos, TX	Economic Development	20 years	Y	Y	Y
Sarasota, FL	Planning	20 years	Y		
Steamboat Springs, CO	Planning / Historic	25 years	Y		Y
Tucson, AZ	Economic Development	25 years	Y	Y	
Worcester, MA	City Manager	10 years	Y		

6. Purpose and Value of a Legacy Business Program for Portland

This chapter articulates the purpose, goals, and public value of establishing a legacy business program for Portland, detailing why targeted intervention is warranted and how a dedicated program would address existing gaps in service and advance positive economic, cultural, and placemaking outcomes.



Figure 18: Independent grocer Sheridan Fruit Company served Portlanders and local businesses for 110 years before its closure in February 2026. The business occupied a prominent location in the historic Produce Row area of Portland's Central Eastside.

Purpose of a Legacy Business Program for Portland

Portland's legacy businesses are economically significant, culturally irreplaceable, and increasingly vulnerable. The list of beloved, longstanding Portland businesses closing their doors since 2020 includes Sheridan Fruit Company, Bridges Café, The Roxy, Hobo's, Paley's Place, Landmark Saloon, Liberty Glass, Le Bistro Montage, Stanich's, Wong's King, Jaciva's Bakery, Pix Patisserie, Caffe Mingo, Muu-Muu's, Bijou Café, Andy and Bax, Scandals, and Crush.

Each of these closures has left a void for those who gathered and found convenience, comfort, and connection there. This list is far from comprehensive,¹² and not representative of the long history of displacement and disruption that has disproportionately impacted businesses owned by and serving underrepresented groups in Portland, nor the untold stories of longstanding businesses currently struggling to remain viable. It does point to a trend of significant loss, however—for those who gathered in and around these businesses, the neighborhoods and commercial corridors they anchored, and for the city as a whole.

The COVID pandemic cast both the importance and vulnerability of legacy businesses in stark relief, as many faced uncertain futures or closed their doors for good. The lingering effects of the pandemic continue to burden legacy businesses in Portland, which has seen negative employment growth relative to pre-pandemic levels (January 2020 – January 2025), lagging significantly behind the national average.¹³ Threats to legacy businesses are hardly limited to the effects of the pandemic or related policy choices, however. Displacement pressure, lack of access to capital, internal capacity challenges, and shifting market trends all disproportionately affect independently owned businesses.¹⁴ Legacy businesses often struggle mightily against these headwinds, facing limited access to the resources needed to keep pace with changing technology and industry standards, and, owing to their longevity, can be particularly susceptible to challenges such as lack of succession planning, costly maintenance backlogs, and equipment obsolescence.¹⁵

While the City offers a range of general assistance programs to Portland’s 40,000+ registered businesses, none are designed to respond to the unique, compounded challenges faced by legacy businesses. As a result—despite their outsized contributions to neighborhood stability, cultural continuity, and the local economy—legacy businesses remain acutely exposed to displacement, ownership transition challenges, and permanent closure. Without targeted intervention, Portland risks continued erosion of the very institutions that give its neighborhoods meaning, continuity, and resilience. The loss of legacy businesses represents not only economic disruption, but the

¹² Comprehensive data on recent closures of longstanding Portland businesses is not currently available, due in part to privacy restrictions associated with Oregon Employment Department’s Quarterly Census of Earnings and Wages (QCEW), noted in Appendix A: Methodology.

¹³ Rogoway, M., & Bach, J. (2025, March 23). *5 years later, Portland lags other cities as it nurses pandemic-era wounds*. Oregonlive. <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2025/03/5-years-later-portland-lags-other-cities-as-it-nurses-pandemic-era-wounds.html>

¹⁴ Goodling, E., Green, J., & McClintock, N. (2015). *Uneven development of the sustainable city: shifting capital in Portland, Oregon*.

¹⁵ Swicegood, E. (2020). *Celebrating Mom and Pop Shops: The Importance of Legacy Business Programs for Conserving Living Heritage*.

disappearance of shared spaces, cultural knowledge and traditions, and community identity that cannot be readily replaced.

The purpose of a legacy business program for Portland would not be simply to honor the past, but to actively invest in the future of the city's most important community-facing businesses. It would acknowledge legacy businesses as a distinct class of community asset whose longevity, cultural significance, and economic contributions warrant dedicated public support. Such a program would fill critical gaps in the City's current business support ecosystem, complementing existing City offerings and delivering a coordinated set of services and benefits designed specifically to meet the needs of legacy businesses.

Gaps in Service and the Need for Targeted Intervention

Legacy businesses are a small but crucial category of Portland business, representing approximately 3–4% of the city's total.¹⁶ Currently these longstanding, independently owned community anchors receive no dedicated support from the City of Portland, competing for limited resources with over 40,000 other businesses (97% of the city's registered businesses fall under a shared definition of small business, making for a very crowded and competitive landscape for limited support resources). Services and financial assistance tailored to the particular needs of legacy businesses, such as succession planning assistance and support for restoration of character-defining physical features, are not currently offered by the City. Business-focused grant funding opportunities currently offered by the City are limited and awarded on a competitive and/or "first come, first served" basis. Some of these are available exclusively in tax increment financing (TIF) districts—wherein only 24% of longstanding local businesses operate—making most legacy businesses ineligible for these valuable geographically-restricted resources.

Historic designation is sometimes looked to as a path to unlocking financial incentives that can aid business owners in improving older properties or addressing deferred maintenance. While historic designation offers important honorific recognition and valuable financial and regulatory incentives for rehabilitation, it cannot be assumed to be appropriate or financially useful to most legacy businesses. Of longstanding business owners that responded to BPS's questionnaire seeking input for this study, 52% reported that they did not own the building their business occupies, making the prospective financial benefits of historic designation potentially inaccessible to a majority of legacy businesses.¹⁷ For those legacy businesses that do own their buildings, most cannot be assumed to be eligible for

¹⁶ Based on recommended eligibility criteria, detailed in Section 7 of this study, applied to ECONorthwest's inventory of 20+ year independent businesses in Portland.

¹⁷ Oregon Law and Portland's zoning code require property owner consent for historic designation.

individual landmark designation, which is reserved for buildings and sites meeting high standards of historic significance and architectural integrity.

Even in the scenario wherein a business owner also owns their building and has the interest and financial resources to pursue historic designation, a successful nomination is not guaranteed, and utilizing the 20% federal rehabilitation tax credit requires investment in qualified expenses equal to the owner's adjusted cost basis¹⁸ in the property (i.e., rehabilitation costs must equal or exceed the net value of the building). Importantly, the federal and state incentives for historic preservation are intended for rehabilitation of historically significant *buildings*, without regard for their commercial *use*.

In short, while the City of Portland offers a diverse assortment of support offerings to its 40,000+ registered businesses (detailed in Section 4 of this study), they do not individually, nor in sum, provide the targeted support that would be most impactful in ensuring the continued contributions of Portland's legacy businesses.

Program Goals and Intended Outcomes

A Portland legacy business program would be designed to advance the following goals and outcomes:

- **Recognize and celebrate deserving places, people, and communities.**

Official recognition is an impactful tool for enhancing business visibility and celebrating the important contributions of businesses, their owners and employees, and the communities they serve. This recognition could be particularly meaningful for businesses and communities whose contributions have historically been overlooked or undervalued.

- **Prevent legacy business closures.**

A Portland legacy business program would prioritize stabilization of legacy businesses at the highest risk of displacement or closure. Preventing the loss of these businesses preserves irreplaceable cultural and economic assets and avoids the cascading impacts that closures can have on employees, suppliers, and surrounding commercial areas.

- **Support community continuity.**

Legacy businesses often function as cultural and economic anchors for neighborhoods and commercial areas. Retaining these establishments supports social cohesion, reinforces neighborhood identity, and contributes to the resilience of local economies amid demographic and market change.

¹⁸ Eligibility Requirements - Historic Preservation Tax Incentives (U.S. National Park Service). (n.d.). [www.nps.gov. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/eligibility-requirements.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/eligibility-requirements.htm)

- **Support entrepreneurs building on established legacies.**

Over time, most legacy businesses face ownership transitions as founders and long-time owners approach retirement. A dedicated program would support intergenerational transfers of ownership, enabling family members, longtime employees, and community entrepreneurs to successfully take ownership of established businesses, retain valuable knowledge and relationships, and build long-term wealth.

- **Retain and restore character-defining features.**

Character-defining elements of legacy businesses—such as historic signs, storefronts, interiors, and longstanding traditions—contribute to Portland’s distinctive sense of place. Investment in the retention and restoration of these features enhances the public realm and reinforces the distinct identities of neighborhoods and commercial areas.

Defining Success and Public Value

Success for a Portland legacy business program would be measured not solely by the number of businesses recognized, but by its ability to produce durable outcomes. These include retention of recognized legacy businesses, successful ownership transitions, investment in preservation and restoration of character-defining business features, and sustained local business presence in changing neighborhoods. A dedicated legacy business program would not only address the unmet needs of a crucial category of Portland business, it would also reinforce the social, cultural, and economic ecosystems these vital enterprises support.



Figure 19: Ota Tofu is a Japanese American owned family business founded in 1911 and the oldest producer of tofu in the United States.

7. Recommendations to Implement a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program

Portland is at a critical juncture. Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the city has witnessed the rapid loss of longstanding independent businesses—establishments that have defined neighborhoods, anchored communities, and contributed to the city’s economic and cultural fabric for generations. Although the City offers general business assistance programs, it does not provide recognition, coordinated support, or policy advocacy designed specifically for legacy businesses. This gap leaves Portland’s most historically and culturally significant businesses uniquely exposed to threats that can lead to permanent closure.

The seven recommendations outlined in this section are envisioned to fill gaps in support for legacy businesses while leveraging and complementing relevant City programs and services. They are organized in two related categories:

- Establish and Maintain a Legacy Business Register, and
- Provide Services and Benefits

The recommendations offer a comprehensive approach to honor, preserve, and sustain Portland’s legacy businesses. Taken together—or applied selectively or in phases—they provide a practical framework for establishment of a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program, meaningfully supporting the city’s economic vitality, preserving its unique character, and ensuring that the businesses shaping the city’s past continue to enrich its future.

Each of these recommendations is informed by review of other jurisdictions’ program models; review of academic and professional literature; consultation with longstanding local business owners, the broader Portland business community, and general public; collaboration with City staff working in relevant program areas; and ECONorthwest’s inventory and analysis of 20+ year old independent Portland businesses.

Establish and Maintain a Legacy Business Register

This report demonstrates that many longstanding Portland businesses fall into gaps in the City’s business support and historic preservation ecosystems. Establishing a Legacy Business Register offers a mechanism to address these limitations by providing an alternative means of recognition and support.

This approach mirrors and complements Portland’s existing historic preservation framework: just as the City does not designate every older building as a historic landmark—instead identifying and protecting those of exceptional significance—the Legacy Business Register would be designed as an honorific and functional designation for a special subset of businesses whose loss would represent a significant negative impact on community character and continuity. Selective eligibility would ensure the credibility

of the designation, focus limited resources where they would have the greatest public benefit, and reinforce that “legacy” status reflects exceptional and sustained community value—not longevity alone.

1. Establish an Induction Process

- **Self-nomination:** Business owners or their authorized representatives would submit an application to program staff detailing the history and significance of the business—nominations from any other source would not be considered. Applicants would be permitted to submit letters of recommendation in support of their candidacy.
- **Historic Landmarks Commission recommendation:** The City's Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) would review all complete applications from eligible candidates (vetted and processed for consideration by program staff) and make a recommendation on each applicant. Only candidates recommended for induction by HLC would be forwarded to the Mayor.
- **Mayor inducts businesses via proclamation:** Legacy Businesses would be inducted into the program (added to the Legacy Business Register) via Mayoral proclamation.¹⁹

Program staff would deliver application materials of HLC-recommended candidates to the Mayor's office with staff and HLC commentary and supporting materials (optional letters of support, news articles, etc.) in advance of semi-annual proclamations.

2. Define Eligibility Criteria²⁰

- **Business owner consent:** Applications would be required to include a signed affirmation from the current owner(s) of a candidate business that ownership consents to inclusion in the program and all associated terms and conditions.

Explicit objection from any owner would disqualify the business, unless the applicant demonstrated that objectors do not have a controlling stake in the business. In instances where

¹⁹ *Mayor Wilson's Proclamations*. (2025, September 17). Portland.gov. <https://www.portland.gov/mayor/keith-wilson/proclamations>

²⁰ While ECONorthwest's research in support of this study established an initial inventory of potential legacy businesses in Portland, the definition of legacy business embodied in these recommendations differs from ECONorthwest's in two key ways:

1. ECONorthwest compiled its inventory with no specific exclusions based on business sector, aside from Public Administration; in keeping with the prevailing emphasis among legacy business programs of supporting businesses that meaningfully contribute to local character and serve as community hubs, these recommendations limit eligibility to public-facing businesses engaged in business-to-consumer activity.

2. ECONorthwest limited its inventory to businesses of 0–50 employees (97% of Portland businesses fall into this category); the recommendations below exclude businesses with zero employees, and do not exclude businesses with more than 50 employees.

the candidate business does not own the property it occupies, consent of the property owner / landlord would not be required.

- **20 years or older:** Candidate businesses would need to have operated in the city for 20 or more years with no lapses in operation exceeding 36 months (businesses that have moved locations within the city would not be disqualified). Businesses of lesser tenure could be eligible for listing if their application materials demonstrated exceptional community significance as described by the relevant criterion below.

This 20 year age criterion broadly aligns with national program norms, represents sustained impact, and maintains a manageable, select pool of eligible businesses (3–4% of the Portland's registered businesses are estimated to meet recommended eligibility criteria).

- **Independent and locally owned:** Chain or branch locations, franchises, or subsidiaries of corporate entities not headquartered in Portland would *not* be eligible.

Chain or franchise businesses headquartered and operating in Portland could be eligible so long as other criteria are met; individual locations of such Portland-based entities would be required to apply individually (i.e., Legacy Business status would apply only to inducted locations, not to the entire chain or corporate structure).

- **Public-facing:** Candidate businesses would be required to maintain a physical location open to the public and substantially engage in business-to-consumer activity (rather than exclusively engaging in business-to-business activity). Membership organizations could be eligible so long as membership and/or visitation is open to the public and other criteria are met.
- **Select business sectors:** Eligible businesses would specialize in food or beverage service, retail trade, hospitality, arts, entertainment, recreation, personal services such as barber or beauty shops, or on-premises repair or maintenance services such as automotive mechanics. Wholesalers and manufacturers meeting the public-facing criteria above could also be eligible.

- **Maintain payroll:** Businesses would be required to maintain one or more paid employees.

No eligibility restrictions would be imposed with regard to a business's maximum number of employees, annual revenue, or number of locations, so long as other criteria are met.

- **"Good neighbor" attributes:** Candidate businesses would be required to attest that they are engaged in legal commercial activity under state and local laws; have resolved or are in the process of resolving any City of Portland code compliance cases; are current or in a payment

plan with state and local taxing jurisdictions; and are not defendants in any active lawsuits nor had previous legal judgments against the business or its legal representatives.²¹

- **Community significance:** Candidate businesses would be required to demonstrate meaningful contributions to the history, character, and/or identity of a Portland neighborhood or culturally specific community. For businesses less than 20 years old, the business would be required to demonstrate exceptional community or citywide significance, supported by media mentions, letters of support, and/or official documentation.

As part of the nomination process, the applicant would be required to detail the history of their business and characterize its cultural contributions to the neighborhood, city, and/or community(ies) of shared identity or interest. Any defining physical features and/or traditions of the business would be required to be detailed in the application form, along with descriptions of the business's current role in the community(ies) it serves.

3. Maintain the Legacy Business Register

- **Program staff would be authorized to maintain and update the Legacy Business Register:** Although not regulated, participating businesses would be expected to maintain their character-defining physical features, such as historic signage or storefronts, as well as traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary or art forms, and to adhere to initial eligibility criteria to maintain Legacy Business status. Objection to inclusion on the Register from a controlling owner of a participating business at any time would result in loss of Legacy Business status.

Provide Services and Benefits

Portland's legacy businesses face similar financial and capacity challenges as other independently owned local businesses, but often face compounding issues like deferred property maintenance, aging equipment and mechanical systems, obsolescent technology, and succession planning needs. The following recommendations are designed to fill gaps and complement existing City services, providing impactful support for legacy businesses seeking to celebrate their longevity and community contributions, grow and engage customer bases, efficiently navigate and access City resources, and address immediate and long term threats to viability. These resources would be available only to businesses listed in the Legacy Business Register.

²¹ Prior criminal convictions or legal judgments unrelated to the business or its operations would not be considered under this criterion.

4. Provide Promotional Opportunities and Support

- **City-led promotion:** The City would announce new program inductees to local media (print, broadcast, and relevant blogs / web-based outlets, etc.), and partner with local and regional organizations promoting travel, local dining and shopping, etc. to spotlight legacy businesses.

The City would maintain a public-facing interactive GIS map with embedded profiles for each business, including a description of each business (history, geography, significant contributions, and current offerings) and links to its website and primary social media account(s).

- **Marketing kit:** Participating businesses would receive a marketing kit consisting of digital assets for use in online promotion and printing, social media and blog post templates, a messaging matrix, a promotional calendar identifying seasonal and cross-promotional opportunities, and physical promotional materials including placards, window clings, and QR code stickers linking to the legacy business's program profile.
- **Marketing and promotional capacity building:** The City would offer professionally developed marketing and promotional guidance focused on helping participating businesses grow and effectively engage their customer bases. Contractor-developed guidance documents on search engine optimization, email marketing, social / earned / paid media strategy, and a messaging matrix template would be offered, along with periodic contractor-led workshops focused on promotional topics chosen with input from participating businesses.

This assistance would complement the marketing kit but would be aimed at developing internal promotional capacity rather than simply leveraging legacy business status and marketing assets.

5. Offer Contracted Professional Services

- **Succession planning assistance:** The City would offer professionally developed information on succession planning and ownership transition options, as well as retain a qualified contractor to provide direct consultation services to business approaching ownership transitions.
- **Commercial lease tool kit and mediation service:** The program would provide a contractor-developed commercial lease tool kit including definitions of key terms, a guide to managing common challenges, model lease agreements, summaries and full text of applicable statutes, and a directory of external resources including information on average local rents by space and lease type.

The program would also provide mediation services to landlords and legacy business tenants involved in disputes related to the property or lease agreement. Modeled after the Portland Housing Bureau's Landlord-Tenant Mediation Pilot Program, this service would contract with a neutral third party expert in lease dispute resolution to aide legacy businesses and their

landlords in resolving lease issues outside of court. This service would be delivered at no cost to participating businesses or their landlords, potentially resulting in cost savings and preventing adverse outcomes, including displacement of legacy business tenants.

6. Deliver Dedicated Staff Support

- **Concierge service:** Program staff would serve as a responsive resource for participating businesses—leveraging institutional knowledge and understanding of issues commonly faced by legacy businesses to help participants effectively navigate City bureaucracy and access relevant resources.
- **Policy liaison role:** Program staff would solicit input from participating businesses on regulatory challenges and opportunities to revise code and/or develop supportive policies or program frameworks that remove pervasive barriers and meaningfully benefit legacy businesses.

Potential examples include exploring and/or advocating for permitting fee or business license tax reductions, informing BPS' recurring Regulatory Improvement Code Amendment Packages , or supporting City advocacy for changes to state law and programs that benefit legacy businesses.

7. Offer Financial Assistance

- **Preferred grantee status:** Program staff would work with City entities with relevant grant offerings to adopt a scoring rubric that awards points for legacy business status, advantaging legacy businesses in competitive grant processes (provided they are otherwise eligible for those grants). Entities with potentially relevant grants include Prosper Portland (citywide Repair/Restore grants; TIF district Affordable Commercial Tenanting and Prosperity Investment Program grants) and PCEF (Building Energy Efficiency [BEE] Grant).
- **Legacy Business Grant program:** As funding allows, the City would offer a Legacy Business Grant available exclusively to participating businesses and their landlords. Grant funds would be directed toward property improvements or repairs, including restoration of character-defining features like storefronts or neon signage, or investments in essential equipment, technology, or professional services aimed at improving the business's competitiveness and long term viability.
- **Grant writing assistance.** As capacity allows, the City would support grant applications for physical restoration activities that may be eligible for historic preservation grants. Rehabilitation grant offerings include those offered by the Kinsman Foundation and the State of Oregon's Preserving Oregon Grant and Diamonds in the Rough Grant.

Conclusion

Establishment of a City of Portland Legacy Business Preservation Program would be far more than an honorific gesture—it would be a strategic investment in Portland’s economic resilience, cultural vitality, and community continuity. Implementing these recommended measures would demonstrate the City’s commitment to sustaining the institutions that have defined Portland for generations, safeguarding the social and cultural fabric of the city’s neighborhoods, strengthening the local economy, and preserving the places where we gather, connect, and find belonging.

As one questionnaire respondent put it, legacy businesses “are the heart of the community they serve. Every other business feeds off their success.”

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Appendix A: Methodology

The methodology for this study was broad and employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to inform the findings and recommendations included herein. However, this study was subject to several limitations. The reliance on secondary data sources, particularly publicly available information on municipal programs (augmented to a limited extent with interviews of program staff), constrained the depth of analysis by the level of detail offered by programs or interviewees themselves. Program outcomes and impacts, if detailed at all, are often reported anecdotally or through limited evaluations, limiting opportunities for rigorous comparative analysis. Additionally, the literature review supporting this study was limited in part by the availability of published research on the specific topic of legacy businesses, which is an evolving field.

The following methods were employed for this study: 1) Literature Review and Program Review, 2) Reconnaissance-level Interviews, 3) Questionnaires of Portland Businesses and General Public, 4) Inventory of Portland's Longstanding Local Businesses, 5) Economic Impact Analysis, 6) Community Change Characterization, and 7) Work Group Deliberation. Each method is described below.

Literature Review and Program Review

A review of available literature was undertaken to support the theoretical foundation for the value of legacy businesses to the communities they serve and the rationale for legacy business support programs. News articles from reputable local and national media outlets covering the closure of legacy businesses, the impacts of gentrification on commercial corridors, and the establishment or operation of legacy business programs were consulted.

Scholarly articles were identified in academic databases using keyword searches such as "legacy business," "longstanding business," "small business preservation," "gentrification + small business," "community economic development," "intangible heritage," and "third spaces." This background research identified theoretical frameworks and case studies highlighting the values and challenges facing small and legacy businesses. Key sources are cited in footnotes.

The program review examined existing legacy business-focused programs around the country and included an evaluation of program descriptions, eligibility criteria, application processes, mission statements and other associated project components to provide practical examples of how municipalities are addressing issues facing legacy businesses. Information on existing municipal legacy business programs were primarily sourced from publicly available information including official municipal websites, reports of city agencies and economic development organizations, and websites and publications from nonprofit organizations, business improvement districts, and advocacy groups involved in small business support, historic preservation, or community development.

This background research was augmented by semi-structured phone interviews of staff from select legacy business programs, including those of the cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Denver, and electronic survey responses from staff representing local government legacy business programs.

Reconnaissance-level Interviews

Reconnaissance-level interviews with owners and managers of longstanding local businesses, as well as representatives of local community-based organizations (CBOs) with direct knowledge of issues relevant to such businesses, were conducted in the early stages of this study. These semi-structured, primarily in-person interviews identified key local themes of significance and helped to inform the design of subsequent research.

CBO interviewees were selected based on the organization's relevance to longstanding local businesses and the communities they serve. Business interviewees were selected based on business age (primarily businesses operating for 20 years or more), sector (businesses in food and beverage service, retail, and personal services were prioritized), demographics of ownership and community served (ensuring representation among BIPOC-owned and serving businesses), and location (owners and managers of businesses located in each of Portland's four City Council districts were interviewed).

Questionnaires of Portland Businesses and General Public

Online questionnaires were developed for two distinct audiences: owners and representatives of Portland businesses and the general public. In October 2025, invitations to participate were distributed via City email distribution lists, partner communication channels, direct email, and in-person invitations to representatives of over 200 businesses known to have operated in Portland for 20 or more years. Announcement of the questionnaires was accompanied by a blog post providing contextual information on the project and the purpose of this information gathering. A total of 238 responses were collected and analyzed.

The business questionnaire asked respondents to provide information on their business's age, geography, and number of employees; it characterized known issues facing Portland businesses and potential service offerings of a City legacy business program, prompting respondents to indicate which issues posed challenges to their business, and which potential service offerings would be most valued by their business. Business respondents were then asked whether they supported implementation of a legacy business program, and were invited to provide open-ended feedback on the concept.

The general public questionnaire asked respondents to choose and rank from a list of business sectors an order of preference for inclusion in a City legacy business program. This questionnaire also asked respondents whether they supported implementation of a legacy business support program and invited open-ended feedback on the concept.

Inventory of Portland’s Longstanding Local Businesses

In support of this study BPS hired Portland-based economic research firm ECONorthwest to produce a report including an inventory of longstanding local businesses operating in Portland (Appendix F, under separate cover). For the purposes of ECONorthwest’s inventory, businesses were identified that were independently owned, have operated continuously in Portland since at least 2004, and have 50 or fewer employees. This inventory served as the foundation for understanding the scale, distribution, and characteristics of longstanding local businesses in Portland.

ECONorthwest used administrative business data from the Oregon Employment Department’s (OED) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) which contains confidential employer information. Due to confidentiality agreements required by OED, ECONorthwest could not release individual business-level information such as names or addresses; however, a replicable methodology was provided to BPS allowing for independent development and analysis of the dataset (subject to the same confidentiality requirements).

The approach to building a reliable longstanding local business inventory utilized the unique Business Identification Number (BIN) in the QCEW dataset. Each BIN combines a firm’s unemployment insurance number and location, enabling consistent tracking over time. ECONorthwest used this identifier as the initial method of matching businesses between 2004 and 2023. To verify the reliability of BINs as a longitudinal identifier, ECONorthwest conducted separate sensitivity testing by comparing records from 2004 and 2023, matching businesses based on business name (full match), and the first 10 characters of the street address (to allow for format differences).

For businesses with matching BINs but unmatched sensitivity testing matching, ECONorthwest conducted spot checks to confirm whether discrepancies were due to business name changes or relocations, rather than changes in ownership.

Economic Impact Analysis

ECONorthwest’s report includes an Economic Impact Analysis summarizing the economic contributions of longstanding local businesses in Portland. This analysis utilized the IMPLAN economic impact modeling system, a regional input-output model which divides the economy into 528 sectors such as governments, households, and industries, to analyze the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts to the local economy from longstanding local businesses in Portland.

Community Change Characterization

ECONorthwest’s report includes an examination of trends such as neighborhood and demographic shifts and business closures, integrating findings from past research to analyze community-level changes and their impacts on longstanding local businesses. The findings provide data-driven insights around how legacy businesses interact with and are affected by community change.

Work Group Deliberation

A City of Portland work group consisting of staff engaged in relevant programmatic work within the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability (BPS), Portland Permitting & Development (PP&D), and Prosper Portland met on ten occasions in 2025 and early 2026 in support of this project. The group informed research design, facilitated project staff connection with external contributors, and contributed to the development of this study's findings and recommendations through collaborative discussion and review of draft work products.

Appendix B: Legacy Business Program Case Study: City and County of San Francisco



Photo: San Francisco's Legacy Business Program provides branded promotional materials, including window clings and point-of-sale signage, to participating businesses. Photo credit: Osaki Creative Group.

In March 2015, the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco adopted an ordinance establishing a Legacy Business Registry, the purpose of which is to “recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City.” The ordinance further stated that the City intended for the Registry to serve as a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to legacy businesses to encourage their continued viability and success. In November of that year San Francisco voters approved Measure J, establishing the Legacy Business Historic Preservation Fund and establishing a formal definition of legacy business. The program inducted its 500th participating business in early 2026, and is widely viewed as the most robust in the nation for its breadth of service offerings.

Participating businesses must be at least 30 years old, have no gaps in operation longer than 2 years, “contribute to San Francisco’s history or identity,” and commit to maintaining the physical features or

traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Businesses are nominated by the Board of Supervisors or the Mayor and evaluated by the Small Business Commission (with advisory recommendations from the Historic Preservation Commission). The Small Business Commission then formally approves successful candidates for inclusion in the Legacy Business Registry.

Once listed, participating businesses are eligible to receive promotional support including press announcements upon induction, promotional materials, opportunities to host “heritage happy hours” and be featured in neighborhood-specific “legacy walks”—curated neighborhood guides centered around legacy businesses. An annual mixer event for participating businesses provides opportunities to network and replenish their stocks of branded legacy business promotional materials.

San Francisco offers technical assistance centered around commercial lease education, succession planning, and marketing and promotion, offering toolkits and planning templates for each. The program’s website emphasizes its concierge role, encouraging participating businesses to utilize program staff for questions or assistance regarding finances, grant applications, legal, marketing, real estate, zoning, succession planning, or other business challenges, stating “We’ll guide you to the right people who can help you.”²²

San Francisco is one of three active programs (along with nascent programs in Atlanta and Detroit) known to offer dedicated grants as a core benefit to participation. Other programs, including Los Angeles and San Antonio, have intermittently offered grants funded through discretionary or temporary allocations. San Francisco’s primary grant, the Rent Stabilization Grant, is aimed at incentivizing landlords to enter into new long-term (10 year or longer) leases with legacy business tenants. The grant fund has been allocated at \$772,000 - \$1 million each year since 2016.

Grantees are eligible to receive \$4.50 per square foot of space leased per year, capped at 5,000 square feet per recipient (maximum \$22,500 annually); the maximum award is adjusted biannually based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) movement. Grant awards consist of multiple annual grant payments, usually for 10 or more years (aligning with the length of the lease). The program has provided over \$4.2 million in grants via 250+ disbursements through FY 2023-24, including over \$740,000 disbursed to 44 recipients in FY 2023-24.

San Francisco’s legacy businesses are afforded use flexibility in some circumstances, allowing mergers of commercial space and storefronts in the Mission, Polk Street, and Chinatown commercial districts

²² *Benefits of being a Legacy Business* | SF.gov. (2025). <https://www.sf.gov/information--benefits-being-legacy-business>

(with restrictions).²³ In keeping with its emphasis on helping participating businesses avoid displacement, in 2024, San Francisco took the further step of becoming the first jurisdiction in the nation to enact commercial tenant protections for legacy businesses, placing interim controls on new non-residential use of property hosting a recognized legacy business (currently or immediately prior to the proposed new use). Under this temporary policy, conditional use authorization was required from the City and County Board of Supervisors prior to a change in use or demolition of a legacy business-occupied property in San Francisco's Neighborhood Commercial Districts.²⁴

San Francisco's program is staffed by one dedicated full-time employee and occasionally supported by additional staff within the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. The program receives \$1.2 million in general fund dollars annually, with approximately \$210,000 providing for staff and program expenses, and the remainder funding the program's Rent Stabilization Grant.

Having successfully leveraged a concept broadly popular with elected leaders and the public into a stable funding stream directed primarily toward innovative, effective, and measurable program offerings, San Francisco's Legacy Business Program is a model for emerging programs around the country. By combining financial incentives, technical assistance, promotional opportunities, and (previously) legal protections, the program not only helps legacy businesses to survive, but to thrive and attract new customers, offering a template for other cities seeking to safeguard their own legacy businesses and the cultural wealth they embody.

²³ *Legislation that supports Legacy Businesses* | SF.gov. (2024). <https://www.sf.gov/information--legislation-supports-legacy-businesses>

²⁴ Waxmann, L. (2024, October 22). *S.F. supes agree to protect city's legacy businesses from evictions*. San Francisco Chronicle. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/realestate/article/sf-legacy-business-evictions-19854935.php>

Appendix C: Legacy Business Profile: Huber's Café



Photo: Huber's Café under the historic stained-glass skylight of the Railway Exchange Building.

Industry: Food and Beverage Service

Year Founded: 1879

Number of employees: Up to 80 (varies seasonally)

Ownership: Louie Family (fourth generation)

Address: 411 SW Third Ave, Portland, OR 97204

Business District: Downtown Portland / Old Town-Chinatown

City Council District: 4

Zoning / Comp Plan / Plan District: Central Commercial (CX) / Central City Plan District

Other: National Register of Historic Places Landmark (1979)

Founded as the Bureau Saloon in 1879, Huber's is the oldest continuously operating restaurant in Portland. Located in the historic Railway Exchange Building (also known as the Oregon Pioneer Building) on SW Third Avenue, Huber's occupies a prominent place in the city's culinary and cultural history, serving as a gathering place for Portlanders and a destination for visitors for nearly 150 years.

In 1895, the business was renamed after Frank Huber, a Bureau Saloon bartender who later became its owner. The restaurant moved to its current location in 1910, where many of its defining architectural features—including its mahogany paneling and iconic stained-glass ceiling—remain intact today. The building and restaurant were jointly added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.²⁵

Huber's legacy is closely tied to the Louie family, whose stewardship of the business spans more than a century. Jim Louie, who emigrated from China as a child in the late nineteenth century, worked the restaurant's lunch counter, preparing and serving the roast turkey that remains a staple of Huber's menu today. After Frank Huber's death in 1911, Jim assumed a management role in the business. In 1940, Frank Huber's son John, who had inherited ownership of the business, sold a one-half ownership share of Huber's to Jim for \$1. Upon his death in 1946, Jim left his ownership stake to his nephew Andrew Louie, who had worked at the restaurant since high school. In 1952 Andrew bought out John Huber, bringing the restaurant fully under Louie family ownership, where it remains today.

Since the mid-1970s, Huber's Spanish Coffee has been a Portland cultural staple. It was James Kai Louie, Andrew Louie's son, who developed Huber's own version of the recipe and the iconic flaming tableside preparation, a signature Portland experience for locals and visitors alike. James began working at the restaurant as a teenager and later assumed ownership with his brother David and sister Lucille after their parents' passing. Mr. Louie managed Huber's with his brother David for decades, humbly stewarding the business and its traditions. He was recognized by the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association as Restaurateur of the Year in 1998. Upon his passing in 2025, his son James Christopher Louie stepped into a co-ownership role, representing the fourth generation of Louie family ownership.

Prior to his passing, Mr. Louie sat down with BPS staff to share insights into Huber's operations and his observations on doing business in downtown Portland. He noted that in recent years Huber's has faced mounting challenges tied to broader economic and social shifts downtown. As the COVID pandemic brought extended closures, capacity restrictions, and a sharp decline in downtown foot traffic, Huber's, like many full-service restaurants operating under significant restrictions, struggled to cover costs, leveraging federal COVID relief funds administered by the City of Portland to meet expenses.

While the business stabilized post-COVID according to Mr. Louie, downtown's recovery has been uneven. Visitor numbers have gradually improved, but remote and hybrid work arrangements have reduced weekday lunch and dinner traffic, and ongoing concerns related to public safety and street and sidewalk cleanliness have affected customer perceptions of the area. High labor, food, and insurance

²⁵ National Register of Historic Places, Railway Exchange Building and Huber's Restaurant, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, National Register #79002132.

costs have created further pressure in an already low-margin industry. Despite these headwinds, Huber's remains a downtown Portland fixture, upholding time-honored traditions while navigating challenging public realm and economic conditions. As Portland continues to grapple with uncertainty around the future of its central city, Huber's stands as a case study in resilience.

Appendix D: Legacy Business Profile: W.C. Winks Hardware



Photo: W.C. Winks Hardware in Portland's Central Eastside Industrial District has been serving Portland since 1909.

Industry: Retail Trade

Year Founded: 1909

Number of employees: 15

Ownership: Jon Hearron

Address: 200 SE Stark St, Portland, OR 97214

Business District Association: Central Eastside Industrial Council

City Council District: 3

Zoning / Comp Plan / Plan District: IG1 - General Industrial 1 / Industrial Sanctuary / Central City Plan District

TIF District: Central Eastside

Other: East Portland Enterprise Zone, Low-Moderate Income Neighborhood

Located in Portland's Central Eastside Industrial District, W.C. Winks Hardware is not your typical hardware store. The 116-year-old business prides itself on its extensive inventory of hard-to-find items, from builder's hardware to obscure specialty tools. Winks also carries a wide range of standard home

improvement store offerings like plumbing, painting, and electrical supplies, making it a lifeline for Portland doers and makers of all stripes, from exacting tradespeople to in-over-their-heads DIYers.

Winks' staff is led by professionals with years—in some cases, decades—of experience. Just pull a number from the red dispenser mounted in front of the hardware counter, and in a matter of moments you'll be paired with an expert committed to ensuring that you leave with exactly what you need to get the job done. "We're focused on the projects, not just the products," says Jon Hearron, owner of Winks. That commitment to service, regardless of the scale of a project, has allowed Winks to build a diverse and loyal customer base beyond the commercial and industrial clients that have always been a focus of the business (reflected in its Monday–Friday hours of operation).

Winks was founded in Portland in 1909 by William Caldwell Winks, who got his start in the tool and hardware trade outfitting prospectors on their way to the Yukon Gold Rush. The original store stood at Southwest 14th Avenue and SW Washington Street from its founding until the building was taken via eminent domain in 1962 to make way for construction of the Interstate 405 freeway. Winks then moved to NW 9th Avenue & Davis Street in what would later become the Pearl District. It remained there until 2001, when, with the Pearl rapidly transitioning away from its industrial roots, Winks relocated to its current location at 200 SE Stark Street.

Upon William Winks' death in 1945, his daughter, Jane Kilkenny, assumed control of the business. She guided Winks until 1985, when her daughter Anne Kilkenny took over, representing the third generation of family ownership. Hearron, a longtime Winks employee prior to taking ownership, began a phased buyout of the business from Kilkenny in 2004. He views himself as a steward of the business's legacy and reputation, and says he has a responsibility to "keep the business alive and keep my people working and insured." It's his intent to ultimately transfer ownership to another member of the Winks team.

Hearron says the business is healthy but has faced persistent challenges in recent years. Difficult neighborhood conditions—including recurrent theft and vandalism of both the business and employees' vehicles, and regular instances of people in mental health and substance abuse crises—have negatively impacted the perception of the area and the safety and quality of life of those who work and do business there. This is particularly impactful to Winks and similar businesses in the context of competition from online retailers and suburban big box stores.

Winks owns its building and has directly borne the costs of remediating graffiti and other vandalism of the property, which Hearron says has occurred roughly on a weekly basis in recent years. Hearron also points to the confluence of new and rapidly increasing state and local taxes and fees, timed with the onset of the COVID pandemic, as a significant burden for Winks and businesses like it. This perspective is supported by a 2024 Oregon Business & Industry report finding that the total amount of City, County and Metro taxes paid by businesses in Portland is estimated to have grown by 82% from 2019 to

2023.²⁶ This steep increase in local taxes coincides with introduction of the State of Oregon’s Corporate Activities Tax (CAT), a tax amounting to \$250 plus 0.57% of revenue over \$1 million—structured not as a tax on net revenue, but as a gross receipts tax assessed regardless of a business’s profitability. Gross receipts taxes like the CAT have been critiqued as regressive and punitive to businesses in low-margin industries or stages of growth²⁷—a perspective not lost on Hearn. “It hurts our ability to make donations to our community or provide wage increases to our staff.”

When asked for his opinion on a potential City program providing services and benefits for businesses like Winks, Hearn expressed the view that businesses are ultimately responsible for their own success or failure, but that “the City has an opportunity to show (legacy businesses) how much it really values them.”

²⁶ *Oregon State and Local Business Taxes Analysis of tax collection trends due to policy changes since 2019*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://oregonbusinessindustry.com/wp-content/uploads/Oregon-Business-Industry-FY24-FINAL.pdf>

²⁷ Watson, G. (2019). *Gross Receipts Taxes: An Assessment of Their Costs and Consequences*. Tax Foundation. Retrieved January 30, 2026, from <https://taxfoundation.org/research/all/federal/gross-receipts-tax/>

Appendix E: Legacy Business Profile: Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop



Photo: Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop on NE Hancock Street has been family owned since 1956.

Industry: Personal Services

Year founded: 1956

Number of employees: 3

Owner: Kimberly Brown

Address: 215 NE Hancock St, Portland, OR 97212

Business District Association: Soul District Business Association

City Council District: 2

Zoning / Comp Plan / Plan District: RM1 - Residential Multi-Dwelling 1

TIF District: Interstate Corridor

Other: National Register of Historic Places Landmark (2022); Eliot Conservation District (contributing); Albina Community Plan District; Low-Moderate Income Neighborhood

Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop, located in Portland's Eliot neighborhood at 215 NE Hancock Street, was established by husband and wife Benjamin and Mary Rose Dean in 1956. In its early years it was among the many barber shops and beauty parlors serving Lower Albina, the heart of Portland's Black community during the postwar era.

The property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2022, earning Landmark status for its connection to African American business in Portland in the years following the Second World War.²⁸ It is one of the last extant Black-owned barber shops or salons established in Lower Albina during the postwar period and is believed to be the oldest continuously operating Black-owned barber shop or salon in Portland. According to Architectural Resources Group, which prepared the National Register nomination for Dean's, "the business established itself as a cornerstone of the Black community in Northeast Portland. Far beyond its role in barbering and salon services, the Deans' shop has served as a place for socialization, celebration, and civic discourse among African American Portlanders."

Benjamin and Mary Rose Dean owned and operated the business together until Mary Rose's death in 1979, at which time operation of the salon was transferred to the couple's daughter, Gloria Ella Tims. Kimberly Brown, Gloria Ella's daughter, now runs the shop, proudly representing the third generation of family ownership.

Dean's has weathered epochal changes during its decades of service to its community. Urban renewal projects in the 1960s and '70s resulted in dramatic alteration of the fabric of Lower Albina, and the arrival of the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area and light rail line in the early 2000s brought about sweeping demographic and economic changes. According to Brown, "from the 1960s to now, there has been a drastic change ... there are no more Black people really walking around. Foot traffic is not us anymore." In spite of these headwinds, Dean's has managed to stay busy. Some clients have been coming to the shop for more than 30 years, and its customer base remains strong via word of mouth.

As Ms. Brown approaches retirement, she is concerned about her Landmark property's costly maintenance and modernization needs—including needed roof replacement, upgrading the building's outdated oil heating system with an energy efficient replacement, and potential renovation of its historic neon sign—and the need to attract younger clientele to sustain and grow the business. Her intent is to pass Dean's forward to a new generation, continuing its legacy as a Northeast Portland community anchor.

²⁸ National Register of Historic Places, Dean's Beauty Salon and Barber Shop, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, National Register #100007455.

**Appendix F: EConorthwest report Portland Legacy Business
Economic Analysis (under separate cover)**

About City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) develops creative and practical solutions to enhance Portland's livability, preserve distinctive places, and plan for a resilient future.



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