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The Portland Observer



'City of Roses'

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Committed to Cultural Diversity

Ribbon Cutting Marks 75 New Affordable Homes Helping Families Return to North and Northeast Portland

At the prominent intersection of North Alberta St. and Williams Ave. in Portland's Humboldt neighborhood, The Luther Strong Jr. and Dr. Jackie Strong Empowerment Village is opening its doors. It's the fourth addition to the Alberta Alive series of affordable housing developments that have brought 190 new homes to the area.

These communities are subject to Portland's N/NE Preference Policy, which aims to address the harmful impacts of urban renewal, eminent domain and historical inequitable housing practices in North and Northeast Portland. Preference will be given to applicants with historical ties to the neighborhood and those who are at risk of displacement or who have already been displaced from the area. Incomes are limited to up to 30% and 60% of the area median income.

Local elected leaders from Metro and the City of Portland joined the Strong family, as well as the co-owners and developers Self Enhancement, Inc. and Community Development Partners, in cutting the ribbon on the property. The Strong Empowerment Village was named for and the land was purchased from the Strong family, longtime residents of the area.

Self Enhancement, Inc. will provide culturally responsive resident services at the building.

This 75-apartment complex was paid for through a mix of public and private funding. The Portland Housing Bureau has awarded to the project \$3.15 million in funds from the voter-approved Metro Affordable Housing Bond, as well as \$8.25 million in Interstate Tax Increment Financing funds and \$2 million in Short-term Rental Registration Fees. There are more than



Left to right, Steven Holt, Chair of the N/NE Oversight Committee, and Strong Family members: Rekah Strong, Dr. Jackie Strong, Catherine Rhodes, and Jessie Bea Strong

2,000 new, Metro bond-funded affordable homes either open or in production across the city, and a total of 5,300 homes built or underway across the greater Portland region.

"The Strong Empowerment Village now stands tall; a physical representation of housing

justice on this landscape," Metro Councilor Mary Nolan said. "Thanks to voters, the Metro Affordable Housing Bond supported this project. We humbly join Community Development Partners and Self Enhancement, Inc. in combatting the harmful impacts of gentrification by en-

abling families with deep roots in this historically Black neighborhood to stay, or to return home. I'm proud to live in a region where housing justice is a value we have chosen to collectively invest in."

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Honoring the Remarkable Career of Corrections Chief Deputy Vera Pool



Corrections Chief Deputy Vera Pool is honored for her decades of service during her retirement ceremony. Her career began in 1970. (Photo courtesy of Antonio Harris Photography)

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office proudly celebrated the retirement of Corrections Chief Deputy Vera Pool, whose extraordinary 56-year career leaves an enduring legacy of leadership, service, and dedication.

Chief Deputy Pool began her career with the Sheriff's Office in 1970 as a corrections officer. Through hard work, determination, and an unwavering commitment to public service, she rose through the ranks to become a lieutenant, division commander, and ultimately Chief Deputy. Along the way, she broke barriers for women of color in corrections and became one of Oregon's most respected public safety leaders.

Throughout her career, Vera led critical corrections programs, championed innovation, and mentored and inspired generations of public safety profession-

als. Her influence reached far beyond Multnomah County, as evidenced by the colleagues from across the country who gathered to celebrate her remarkable career at her retirement ceremony.

Chief Deputy Pool's retirement marks the conclusion of an extraordinary 56 years of service to Multnomah County and the people of Oregon. Her leadership, resilience, and commitment to excellence have left a lasting impact on the Sheriff's Office and the countless individuals whose careers she helped shape.

Congratulations, Chief Deputy Vera Pool, on your well-earned retirement. Thank you for your exemplary service, visionary leadership, and for paving the way for future generations. Your legacy will continue to inspire the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and the public safety profession for years to come.

Attorney Accused of Scamming Thousands of Immigrants

Clients at Risk of Deportation and Financial Loss

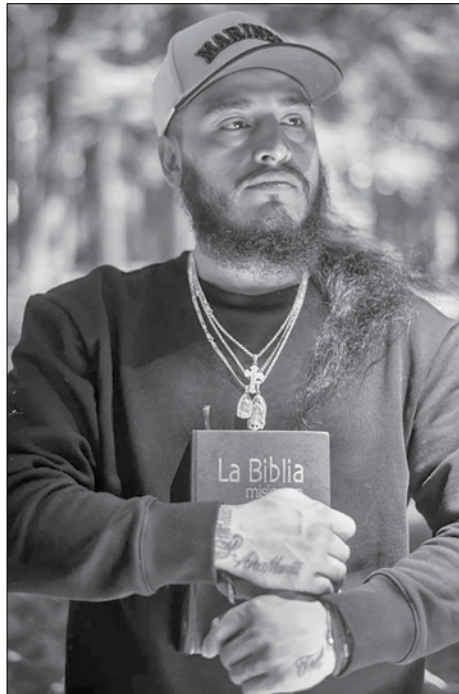
AP – An attorney in Washington state promised “miracles” to tens of thousands of immigrants seeking legal status in the United States.

Instead, Alexandra Lozano created fake stories of domestic abuse and human trafficking to apply for humanitarian visas without her clients’ knowledge, according to several lawsuits and a legal ethics investigation. They say she preyed on immigrants’ desperation to drain their bank accounts while leaving them at risk of deportation.

She is accused of hiring workers who didn’t have proper legal credentials and building an assembly-line system to rush through applications, even copying clients’ signatures onto documents they never saw.

“I put the trust of my family with her,” 30-year-old Gabriel Martinez Garcia said. After they paid \$30,000, he said Lozano duped his family and got his mother placed in removal proceedings despite her marriage to a naturalized U.S. citizen. “We believed in her and then she just let us down.”

Lozano’s firm, Luz del Camino Legal, closed this month amid a barrage of allegations. She permanently surrendered her law license rather than face discipline from the bar association, and denies wrongdoing. While federal data shows immigration



Gabriel Martinez Garcia, 30 holds a Bible close to his chest. (AP Photo/Akash Pamarthy)

service scams are rising sharply, Lozano’s alleged scheme stands out for its scale. The bar says her signature is on more than 53,000 pending cases.

It’s unclear how many cases were fraudulent or to what extent her clients were complicit. The ones suing her say they had no idea.

The consequences of her downfall are hitting the immigration system “like a tidal wave,” said Erika Gonzalez, an attorney with the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking.

The Trump administration last year started overhauling the humanitarian

programs Lozano allegedly exploited, claiming a surge in applications since 2020 was a sign of widespread fraud. The administration tightened the programs’ restrictions and slowed processing rates, which advocacy groups say will hurt legitimate victims.

Lozano specialized in getting visas through the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, which covers all genders.

These programs seek to protect victims from having their immigration status weaponized by abusers. Evidence standards are more flexible, making the system more accessible to victims. But it’s also easier for an unscrupulous firm to exploit, immigration attorneys say.

Lozano’s firm probed clients for issues at home or work, then spun them as abuse cases that didn’t meet the threshold for these humanitarian programs, according to attorneys representing dozens of her old clients.

Although clients quickly secured work permits, they often faced trouble years later when seeking permanent residency and their claims faced greater scrutiny. Angelo Calfo, an attorney representing Lozano, said clients were expected to review their applications before signing and blamed them for any false statements.

“Alexandra’s practice has always been to fight for her clients, zealously pursue every lawful option available to them, and support their efforts to build lives in this country,” his statement said.

The bar accused Lozano of fraud in May and her firm shut down June 10. She’s been

investigated by the fraud unit of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, according to emails obtained by The Associated Press. The Department of Homeland Security, which runs the immigration agency, declined to comment.

At least 920 immigration service scams were reported in 2025, which is more than the first three years of the Biden administration combined, according to Federal Trade Commission data analyzed by the AP. Experts say that’s probably an undercount, given immigrants’ reluctance to come forward.

Former clients are now scrambling to get their case files from the defunct firm. Hundreds showed up for recent consultations with volunteer attorneys in Washington and Oregon.

Many applied to join a lawsuit seeking financial compensation for legal malpractice. Another class action lawsuit aims to recoup their attorney fees. On Friday, a statement from the federal immigration agency told ex-clients how to withdraw their cases or update their addresses so processing could continue.

Vicente Omar Barraza, an attorney behind the malpractice lawsuit, said hundreds of former clients told him they still don’t know what Lozano’s firm wrote in their applications. He’s worried many people lost viable pathways to legal status.

Garcia Martinez, who says his mother is in removal proceedings because Lozano mishandled her case, lives every day in fear that she will be deported.

“I’m just praying really, really, really hard for her,” Garcia Martinez said. “None of this should have happened.”

PDX Terminal Project Reaches the Finish Line

Airport’s Largest Expansion Project Complete

The Port of Portland recently celebrated the completion of Portland International Airport’s (PDX) main terminal reconstruction project, the largest public infrastructure project in Oregon history. Over 11-years, this \$2.15 billion-dollar effort modernized PDX, strengthened its seismic resilience, and cut its carbon footprint while welcoming more travelers through the airport. And remarkably, the entire project finished on-time and on-budget – without a single day of closure, so our region could keep moving.

Now, travelers are experiencing the newly complete PDX as it was always intended, with improved flow and even more local character. It reflects our commitment to celebrating PDX’s homegrown roots while creating space for local ingenuity and businesses to thrive. Together, we built the new PDX to be an even better reflection of our region in a way that welcomes every community it serves.

“From the beginning, our North Star was a new PDX that reflects our values and the people and places that make this region special,” said Curtis Robinhold,



Updated PDX - Main Terminal (Photo Credit: Ema Peter Photography)

Executive Director of the Port of Portland. “The final result is a world-class airport unlike any other, shaped by local hands, local ideas, and local pride. It’s a space that belongs to all of us, and a process that we can all learn from.”

As PDX doubled the airport’s capacity, the project also doubled down on making the journey smoother and more welcoming

for everyone. Every detail is a love letter to the Pacific Northwest, written by the folks who live and work here. It’s all about the local brands, the local character and the local culture that make PDX feel like home.

New exit lanes on the north and south sides mean shorter, more direct routes from gates, to bags, to greeting loved ones.

More terrazzo floor throughout the main terminal makes it easier to move through the airport with strollers, wheelchairs, and rolling suitcases. More restrooms, including four new banks of all-user restrooms pre- and post-secu-

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Photo courtesy of PortlandFruit.org

Blackberry Harvest Event Aims to Restore Ross Island

The Portland Fruit Tree Project is inviting the community to help remove invasive Himalayan blackberries while supporting efforts to restore Ross Island during its second annual "If You Can't Beat 'Em, Eat 'Em!" harvest and eradication campaign on July 25.

The event combines blackberry harvesting, paddling and environmental stewardship, encouraging participants to safely forage the invasive plants while learning about the ecological challenges facing Ross Island and the Willamette River.

The campaign is a collaboration between the Portland Fruit Tree Project, the Human Access Project, the Mosquito Fleet and the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership. Organizers say the event is designed to raise awareness about the need for long-term restoration of Ross Island, including improving water qual-

ity, removing debris and expanding public access to the river.

The Human Access Project has been advocating for city and state investment to address toxic algae blooms and deteriorating shoreline conditions. The organization is also raising funds for a multi-phase restoration effort that would include ecological rehabilitation and ongoing water quality monitoring.

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership will provide two 29-foot Big Canoes capable of transporting up to 22 paddlers to the island. Participants may also bring their own nonmotorized watercraft, including kayaks and stand-up paddleboards. The Mosquito Fleet will provide safety support and loaner paddlecraft for registered participants.

"Ross Island is a forgotten gem with incredible potential," said Scott Fogarty. "Through this collaboration with the Estuary Partnership and Portland Fruit Tree Project, we're showing what it looks like when grassroots environmental justice meets joyful action. We want the public to see the island up close and understand what's at stake — and how we can all take action to enjoy our city and take back the Willamette."

Heather Keisler Fornes, executive director of the Portland Fruit Tree Project, said the campaign offers Portlanders a practical way to address an environmental problem while making use of a plentiful local resource.

"Blackberries may be invasive, but they're also a symbol of resilience, and they are delicious to boot," Fornes said. "This campaign gives Portlanders a tangible way to confront land mismanagement, use what we have abundantly all around us, and support ongoing advocacy to restore access to our river and hold responsible parties accountable for cleaning up after themselves."

The Ross Island Harvest & Action Day begins at 10:30 a.m. July 25 at Willamette Park, located at South Macadam Avenue and Nebraska Street. The group will paddle to Ross Island at 11 a.m.

Participants must register in advance through the Portland Fruit Tree Project. Those bringing their own kayaks or paddleboards are required to wear personal flotation devices. Oregon also requires nonmotorized boat users to carry a Waterway Access Permit, though loaner boats provided by the Mosquito Fleet already have the required permits.

Ribbon Cutting Marks 75 New Affordable Homes



Mural of Strong family business that once stood where the Strong Empowerment Village now stands



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CONTINUED FROM FRONT

“The Portland Housing Bureau’s N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy represents a historic, reparative investment – over \$120 million – to support a community that was out of their homes and neighborhoods,” said PHB Equity & Business Manager Leslie Goodlow. “We are so grateful to the Strong Family and to our partner organizations for helping to create critically needed affordable housing on this meaningful site.”

“This development is powerful because it reflects generations of presence, resilience and contribution to this community and what we are building here honors that

legacy. We’re creating a place where residents are connected to culture, grounded in history, and anchored in a sense of belonging,” Self Enhancement, Inc. CEO Trent Aldridge said.

“By combining long-term public investment, strong local partnerships, and Portland’s N/NE Preference Policy, this community demonstrates how intentional, community-centered affordable housing can expand opportunity and strengthen neighborhood stability. We’re proud to join SEI, the Strong family, and our many partners in celebrating the completion of this important project,” CDP Director of Development Sarah Schubert said.





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PP&R Unveils 2026 Summer Free For All Lineup

Concerts, Movies and More Return to Portland Parks

Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) is rolling out another season of its Summer Free For All events for 2026, including the return of the East Portland Summer Arts Festival. The two-day festival and all the popular free summer programs are made possible by the voter-approved Parks Local Option Levy (2025 Parks Levy) as well as support from community partners and volunteers. The East Portland Summer Arts Festival will take place July 11 and 12 at Ventura Park, with performances beginning at 6 p.m. each night at 460 SE 113th Avenue in Portland. This year's headliners include LaRhonda Steele and Conjunto Alegre performing Latin and soul on the first night, followed by the Portland Cello Project's tribute to Stevie Wonder on the second night. The event is free and open to all.

The Free Lunch + Play program began June 22 at parks across Portland and continues to help fill the summertime gap by providing free meals to anyone 18 and younger while schools are out of session.

More than half of Portland's school-age children qualify for free or reduced-price meals during the school year. PP&R's Free Lunch + Play program offers nutritious meals and fun activities for kids and families when school is out. There are sports,



2025 Movies in the Park (Photo courtesy of Portland Parks & Recreation)

games, arts, crafts, music, and other activities led by trained staff and community partners. Free Lunch + Play began in late June and runs Monday through Friday, 10am to 2pm with lunch at noon.

This program is delivered in partnership with four local public school districts including Portland, Centennial, David Douglas, and Parkrose at about two dozen parks across the city.

Free live music, movies, and cultural events start July 8 citywide with a Bollywood dance party at Gateway Discovery Park. This year's program features nearly 50 free outdoor events for all ages, including multicultural festivals such as Somali Heritage Day (Friday, August 21 at Luuwit

View Park), free outdoor movies and park concerts all over town, and more ways to experience community across the city.

With the support of some new program partners, Portland Parks & Recreation is excited to promote even more activities for children, youth, and families and welcome everyone back for another season of great performances and community connection.

Movies of note include Wicked, The Princess Bride, A Minecraft Move, Elio (con subtítulos en español), and Zootopia 2. Concert highlights feature Soul Vaccination, Ache Son and many more dazzling performers. The East Portland Summer Arts Festival, and Washington Park Summer Festival return.

The Summer Free For All programs would not be possible without the 2025 Parks Levy, a critical community investment in Portland Parks & Recreation. As promised to Portland voters, the Parks Levy is delivering for the city, providing recreational programs including family-friendly movies and concerts, fitness and art classes, teen- and older adult-focused programs, life-saving swim lessons, and more. The Parks Levy also allows PP&R to eliminate cost as a barrier to participation.

Portland Parks & Recreation is offering free weekly open swim sessions at several outdoor pools this summer. Free swims are available at Creston Pool on Mondays from 6:30 to 8 p.m., Peninsula Pool on Tuesdays from 1 to 3:45 p.m., Montavilla Pool on Tuesdays from 6 to 8 p.m., Grant Pool on Wednesdays from 1 to 3 p.m., Sellwood Pool on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 8 p.m., and Pier Pool on Thursdays from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Outdoor pools opened June 18 and will remain open through Aug. 23, 2026, with the exception of Peninsula Pool. Peninsula Pool will remain open through Monday, September 7, 2026.

Portland Parks & Recreation's Fitness in the Park returns at 10 parks across the city, including the South Park Blocks, starting June 22! Fun for everyone ages 14 and older, these are free outdoor group fitness classes taught by some of your favorite PP&R instructors. Fitness in the Park is now active at Irving Park, and expands elsewhere June 22 through August 28. No sign-up is necessary, all classes are drop-in.

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SPORTS



Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant (12) plays in second half of NBA basketball game against the Atlanta Hawks Jan. 21, 2026, in Memphis, Tenn. (AP Photo/Brandon Dill, File)

Blazers Make a Blockbuster Move

Ja Morant Headed to Portland in Trade

AP — Ja Morant is headed to Portland, after the Trail Blazers and Memphis completed a trade Monday night that sees the Grizzlies starting anew and gives the two-time All-Star a chance to revive his career.

Portland sent forwards Jerami Grant and Kris Murray to the Grizzlies as part of the deal.

It's a big swing by the Trail Blazers and could suggest Portland — with new owner Tom Dundon, whose Carolina Hurricanes just won the Stanley Cup — might not be done making moves. Morant adds to a logjam at point guard right now for Portland, with Jrue Holiday, Damian Lillard and Scoot Henderson also on the current roster.

Morant has averaged 22.4 points for his career but has played only 79 games over the last three seasons because of injuries and suspensions — including a 25-game banishment after he was seen on a livestream holding a gun while he was in the passenger seat of a vehicle. That came not long after an eight-game suspension for flashing a gun in a Denver-area nightclub, also captured on social media.

The suspensions, combined, cost Morant — who was Rookie of the Year after being the No. 2 selection in the 2019 draft, as well as the league's Most Improved Player in 2021-22 when he appeared to be on a path toward superstardom — about \$9 million in lost salary. He said in April 2025 that he's made his peace with being a lightning rod for constant criticism. "I'm kind of used to it," Morant said at that time. "I was pretty much a villain for two years now. Every little thing, if somebody can say something negative about me, it's going to be out there. So, yeah. I don't care no more."

Grant averaged 18.6 points last season for Portland and will be joining his sixth team by going to Memphis. Murray averaged 5.8 points this past season for the Trail Blazers.

Morant's MIP-award year in 2021-22 saw Memphis win 56 games, tying a franchise record. That team was built around a young core four of Morant, Dillon Brooks, Jaren Jackson Jr. and Desmond Bane. And now, they're all gone. Brooks played only one more season with the Grizzlies after that and has changed teams twice since, Bane went to Orlando last summer and Jackson was traded to Utah in February.

From NBA Intern to Head Coach



PDX Terminal Project Reaches the Finish Line

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

...rity, ensure quicker access and far less searching. Inside, travelers will discover a private and peaceful experience designed with a wide range of mobilities in mind, from individual stalls with floor-to-ceiling doors and walls to natural light streaming from skylights.

Local options to eat, drink, and shop set PDX apart. Oregon icons like Powell's Books, Columbia Sportswear, and Portland Gear are operating in newly built spaces alongside fresh food options like Kure Superfoods and Lola's Cafe, rounding out the 27 additional local brands now at home in the new PDX.

When people land at PDX, they know exactly where they are. A total of 21 new permanent and rotating art pieces rooted in the region's culture, history, and community welcome travelers to the terminal. New permanent installations include large-scale sculptures by Indigenous artists in the entry areas, glass and ceramic tile walls near the exit lanes, and the return of legendary Portland artist Louis Bunce's iconic 1958 Airport Mural.

The new PDX wouldn't have felt complete without the locally beloved retro carpet. The dye colors were adjusted seven times to get the 80s teal carpet fiber just right before installation in several prime locations throughout the new terminal.



PDX – Garden Area (Photo Credit: Ema Peter Photography)

The new PDX is more than an elevated airport experience. It's a testament to the unparalleled level of regional collaboration that brought it to life – an effort that became a blueprint for executing big ideas while putting local communities front and center. The results can be seen throughout the terminal, but the impact

reaches far beyond its walls.

The completion of PDX's main terminal expansion marks the end of an 11-year-long chapter – from first sketches to final touches – and the beginning of another. It also marks the culmination of PDX Next, the Port of Portland's suite of five major construction projects that

reshaped PDX, including the new rental car facility, revamped concourses, new parking structure, and more. Now, with the building phase complete, work shifts to ongoing improvements like baggage claim upgrades to make the travel experience smoother, brighter, and a little more PDX-y.

Dr. Rashida Willard Joins Mt. Hood CC Leadership

New Vice President Will Oversee Equity and Student Services

Mt. Hood Community College is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Rashida Willard as MHCC Vice President for Equity and Student Services, effective July 1, 2026.

Dr. Willard brings a deep commitment to student success, equity, and inclusivity. Throughout the search process, she demonstrated thoughtful leadership, a strong understanding of the diverse needs of MHCC students, and a clear vision for advancing equitable opportunities and support services across the college.

Her professional experience spans both private and public sectors, providing her with a broad perspective and unique skill-set that will help strengthen student-centered initiatives at MHCC. Her higher education leadership experience includes administrative roles at Clark College and Ball State University.

Most recently, Dr. Willard has served as MHCC's interim Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In this role, she has collaborated closely with Dr. Tina Redd and instructional administrators to advance student success efforts through the college's Achieving the Dream initiative, a national framework focused on improving outcomes and increasing opportunities for all students.



Dr. Rashida Willard (Photo courtesy of Mt. Hood Community College)

"Her thoughtful leadership and dedication to our students make her exceptionally well-suited to lead this important work and help move our college forward," said MHCC President Lisa Skari.

Dr. Willard holds an associate degree in organizational dynamics, bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration, and a doctorate in education with a concentration in leadership, inquiry, and continuous improvement. As Vice President for Equity and Student Services, Dr. Willard will oversee programs and services that support student engagement, belonging, and achievement, helping ensure all students have the resources and opportunities they need to succeed at MHCC.

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Photos courtesy of Multnomah County

Spanning a Century: Burnside Bridge Celebrates 100 Years

Centennial Event Honors Portland Landmark

On Saturday, May 30, 2026, Multnomah County hosted a once in a lifetime celebration for the 100th birthday of the Burnside Bridge. The family friendly Burnside Bridge Centennial Celebration featured kid focused activities, interactive exhibits and storytelling highlighting key mo-

ments, from the bridge's opening in 1926 to the Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge Project.

There were no cars or trucks passing over the bridge as on a typical day. Instead, thousands of Portlanders were dancing, crafting, learning and building community to celebrate and honor the

history of the Burnside Bridge as it turned 100 years old.

During the celebration, a dedicated section of the bridge invited people to share their Burnside Bridge stories. Attendees could record a short story on camera, write a birthday card message or leave a birthday voicemail, a

love letter of sorts to a crossing that holds immense meaning for the community.

Multnomah County maintains five Willamette River bridges: the Sellwood, Hawthorne, Morrison, Burnside and Broadway bridges, as well as the Wapato Bridge over the Multnomah Channel.

BIG FIELDS. BIG VIEWS. BIG ENERGY IN GRESHAM

Gradin Community Sports Park virtually pulses with activity. With Mt. Hood rising in the distance, the newly updated park in Gresham blends big views with everyday community life – team practices, kids at play, neighbors lingering longer than planned.

Recent improvements complete a vision decades in the making. Work included the addition of new softball and soccer fields along with a central amenity plaza, upgrades to parking areas and walking paths, and much more. Together, they make the park easier to use and more welcoming for the entire community.

These upgrades were made possible through a mix of funding, including Oregon Lottery-backed bonds and grants. The project is a tangible reminder that your lottery play helps create shared spaces right here in the Portland metro area – places where community shows up and stays awhile.



LEARN MORE

oregonlottery.org/parks



OREGON LOTTERY

LOTTERY GAMES ARE BASED ON CHANCE AND SHOULD BE PLAYED FOR ENTERTAINMENT ONLY.

