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QuickPoint! – Portland’s Next Step to Thriving Is a Trusted Police Force

By Mia Tiwana

If we want to continue seeing downtown Portland improve, maybe it’s time to refund the police.

City leaders reopened Portland this weekend, hosting a flurry of festivities meant to attract people back into downtown. The reopening, called “Welcome Back to the Heart of Portland,” included concerts, musical performances, and pop-up vaccination centers.

Portland does seem to be slowly getting back on its feet. Mayor Ted Wheeler reported that a committee found fewer plywood boards on buildings. The city is cleaning more homeless campsites and has identified 70 potential spots to locate what the city calls “Safe Rest Villages” for homeless people.

With these modest improvements, downtowners report an increase in visible foot traffic.

A major missing link to Portland’s recovery is a police presence.

The equation is simple: Downtown attractions plus visible safety measures equals people making their way back to the city.

Portland Police Bureau teamed up with the FBI to cover their bases during last weekend’s festivities, in an effort to make Portlanders feel a sense of safety amid rising gun violence. But without the FBI, Portland police currently cannot manage patrolling streets on their own. Traffic safety is down to only one full-time traffic enforcement officer for the whole city. Defunding the police may have drawn focus to scrutinizing police practices, but it created an ongoing wave of unsafe situations.

The way forward for Portland to reopen is to create a trusted police presence, not to continue without any safety measures.

Mia Tiwana is a Research Associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

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