

October 20, 2026

Portland City Council
1221 SW Fourth Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

cc: Director, Portland Bureau of Transportation; Director, Bureau of Environmental Services

Re: Make daylighting Portland's default, and let communities help

Dear Mayor and Councilors,

The undersigned organizations ask the City to make intersection daylighting standard practice. Daylighting means keeping parking back 20 feet from crosswalks so people can see each other. We ask the City to apply it citywide without case-by-case engineering studies, to build it into every project that touches the street, and to let trained community groups help install it.

Why now

On October 9, 2026, a Multnomah County jury found the City 70% responsible for the 2019 death of Elijah Coe at E Burnside and SE 17th Avenue. A car parked against an unmarked crosswalk left a driver stopped at the stop sign with 63 to 108 feet of visibility, where about 200 feet was needed. In 2010, a nearby daycare had warned the City of “virtually no visibility” for turning drivers there. In 2025, the Oregon Court of Appeals ruled that the City could not claim blanket discretionary immunity for its corner-parking decisions. At trial, the City’s attorney said the City lacks the money to install “No Parking” signs on every corner where parked cars block sightlines.

The jury’s award was \$5.1 million. Even with state liability caps, the City’s share is about \$1.45 million, after six years of litigation. That is roughly seven times what PBOT budgeted to daylight 200 intersections in 2025–26.

The process is the bottleneck

Oregon law already sets the standard. ORS 811.550(17) prohibits parking within 20 feet of a crosswalk at an intersection, and every Oregon intersection has a crosswalk, marked or not. Portland allows parking up to the corner unless the City acts to remove it. That leaves the safe default as the exception, and each exception takes a study.

PBOT’s vision clearance policy is sound: a 20-foot setback on pedestrian-priority streets. But it is applied mainly during capital and paving projects, and public requests wait in line. When the Sullivan’s Gulch Neighborhood Association asked for daylighting along two neighborhood greenways, NE 26th Avenue and NE Multnomah Street, PBOT replied:

“Currently, due to staffing and demand, investigations can take 12 months or more.”

Neighborhood greenways are already on PBOT's list of eligible streets. Restoring Oregon's default distance at an eligible location should not need a year-long investigation.

What it costs, and what it saves

- PBOT has reported about **\$700–800 per intersection** for materials and labor (BikePortland, March 2025).
- Hoboken, NJ daylighted corners for as little as **\$1,500** with paint and plastic posts. As of 2024 it had gone seven years without a traffic death.
- USDOT values each life lost in a crash at **\$14.2 million**. Preventing one death covers the cost of daylighting about 17,000 intersections at PBOT's unit cost.
- The City's capped share of one verdict would pay for about **1,800 intersections**.

What works

New York City DOT's 2025 study of 756 daylighted intersections found that **hardened** daylighting, using posts, planters, or bike corrals, significantly reduced pedestrian injuries. Daylighting with **signs alone** showed no significant benefit on average. Portland should make paint plus flexible delineators its standard treatment, beginning on the streets where the most people walk and bike. California made a 20-foot setback the statewide default in 2025. Most states have a similar rule.

Our requests

1. **Adopt the 20-foot setback as Portland's default** at all intersections, consistent with ORS 811.550. Standard setbacks should need no site-specific study. Reserve engineering review for proposals to *shorten or remove* a setback.
2. **Daylight with every street project.** Include paint and delineators at corners in the standard restoration spec for PBOT paving and maintenance, BES sewer and stormwater projects, franchise utility cuts, and private development. Portlanders begin paying the Transportation Utility Fee on their sewer and water bills in January 2027. Projects funded by those same ratepayers should leave the street safer than they found it.
3. **Harden corners, starting where it matters most.** Following NYC DOT's findings, make flexible delineators, bike corrals, or planters the standard treatment rather than signs alone. Install them first on neighborhood greenways, commercial corridors, school routes, and the High Crash Network, then extend them citywide through routine projects. Until then, paint-only setbacks are acceptable on local residential streets. Adopt this as a standard spec now, not after a multi-year pilot.
4. **Create a Community Daylighting Permit.** Model it on PBOT's free street-painting permit. Neighborhood associations, schools, and nonprofits that complete City training could install City-specified paint and delineators at eligible corners after neighbor notice, with City inspection afterward. Sullivan's Gulch neighbors already did similar work at NE 21st and Clackamas in 2019.

5. Fast-track requests and report progress. Resolve daylighting requests on greenways, near schools, and on the High Crash Network within 90 days. Publish a public count of daylight intersections and the request backlog.

These steps fit squarely within Vision Zero. Portland cut traffic deaths to 39 in 2025, down 38% from the prior four-year average, and 20 of those killed were walking. Clear corners help keep that trend going, at a fraction of the cost of the next lawsuit.

Sincerely,

Signed

Organizations will be listed here as they sign on.

This version is dated October 20, 2026. We publish a new dated version as each organization signs. Latest version: daylightpdx.org/daylight-portland-coalition-letter.pdf

Sources for every figure: daylightpdx.org/#sources. Contact: organizers@daylightpdx.org. Daylight Portland Now is an independent community coalition, not affiliated with the City of Portland.