

PORTLAND DOWNTOWN

# City of Portland & Portland Downtown's Downtown Police Cadet Program

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## Program Evaluation, 2018

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1/29/2019

The City of Portland, Maine and Portland Downtown, the city's downtown improvement district (DID), collaborate on the co-management of the Downtown Portland Police Cadet program. The cadet program exemplifies a community policing model that increases the community's perception of public safety while providing valuable training to the next generation of police officers. The partners use the program evaluation to make improvements to the program, support the management and development of other safety programs, and to advocate for policy change.

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## INTRODUCTION

Portland Downtown was established in 1992 in accordance with an act of the Maine State Legislature under the “Maine Municipal Development Districts” statute. It was incorporated as a 501(c)(4) non-profit, and is funded by a development district assessment on downtown district property. Portland Downtown qualifies for Internal Revenue Code (IRC) section 501(c)(4) as a social welfare organization, and its mission-driven services regarding safety, cleanliness, and management of the downtown that provide for social welfare, while funded by property owner constituents, must be available to the community as a whole to qualify for the IRC designation. Since its establishment, Portland Downtown has consistently supported community development to create value for its property owner constituents.

Portland Downtown’s Board of Directors consists of property owners and individuals who represent downtown residents, retail merchants, entertainment and night life venues, professional services, accommodations, cultural/nonprofit/educational organizations, restaurants, and the municipality itself. In addition, Portland Downtown hosts committee meetings that address a wide range of community issues, and forms ad hoc committees in support of policy advocacy as necessary. Through its advocacy work in particular, Portland Downtown seeks to partner with stakeholders in the implementation of its strategic planning initiatives, which includes expanding police and cadet presence in the downtown.

For many years the City of Portland, Maine and the City’s downtown improvement district (DID), Portland Downtown, have co-managed a Downtown Portland Police Cadet program in an effort to **improve perceptions of safety in the downtown district**. To provide safety services for its property and business owner constituents, as well as those who visit and use services downtown, Portland Downtown maintains the cadet program collaboration with the City of Portland’s Police Department during the summer months. Cadets are training for law enforcement or other safety, security, or military careers, and the program gives them valuable hands-on experience in the field of community policing to complement their career training. They are sworn in as constables with the City of Portland, and watch for and report on safety issues, educate the public on local ordinances, and have the authority to issue citations for ordinance violations. The program encompasses many aspects of community policing, as well as ordinance enforcement, community education, and assistance with wayfinding. As part of their duties, cadets make contact with business owners, identify persons in need of assistance, and enforce local municipal ordinances. **In 2016, the program received an *Award of Excellence* in the Leadership and Management category from the International Downtown Association.**

Like most thriving major cities, Portland struggles with common urban issues. Panhandling, vagrancy, loitering, and public substance use have been identified as top concerns among downtown businesses, fearing these behaviors will negatively affect Portland’s business and tourism economies. The cadet program is a partnership that provides for additional public safety in the district by adding security to Portland’s downtown, an area that sees an increase in the number of people in the pleasant summer months due to tourism and transient populations.

The cadet program epitomizes a community policing model, and is a long-standing program that has adapted with changes to law enforcement. In addition to patrolling the downtown area, cadet duties include talking with business owners, engaging with the public at events, and connecting with local homeless outreach teams to resolve issues of loitering, panhandling, and public substance use.

**Program benefits for the cadets include:**

- Paid internship and/or college credit;
- Hands-on experience in the community policing field;
- Police department training in self-defense, protocol, and report writing; and
- Mentoring from senior officers.

Their positions certainly focus on ordinance enforcement, but also address quality of life issues that a visitor or business owner sees, focusing as well on making perceptions of Portland a clean and safe destination in which to live, work, and visit.

## **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

Portland is generally a safe city and sees crime rate reductions annually<sup>1</sup>, but Portland Downtown must remain vigilant, as perception translates to reality for many. This requires continuous work to create a comfortable experience for visitors, business owners, employees, and residents. Additionally, the influx of tourism in downtown equates to many newcomers who are unfamiliar with the city's ordinances, such as where it is appropriate to use tobacco products, resulting in conflicts that are easily resolved through outreach and education rather than police intervention. Portland Downtown manages these conflicts through a close working relationship with the police and fire departments, and social service agencies, and financially supports the staffing of four full-time police cadets from May through September. With both **real and perceived safety** being the key concern for property and business owners, the cadet program bridges the gap between enforcing ordinances and supporting the visitor experience.

Cadets are part of the Police Department's community policing division, and begin each day at the central police department downtown. They meet with their supervisor at the start of each shift, are informed of assignments for the day, and check e-mail for communication from the department, Portland Downtown, and area businesses and organizations. For safety reasons, cadets, like foot beat officers, work in teams of at least two. With a staff of four, cadets are able to patrol in groups of two, which allows them to cover a larger area during their shifts. On a typical day, cadets walk nearly ten miles in the downtown, an area of approximately one square mile, pausing often to engage with business owners, visitors, or other members of the community. The cadets report ordinance violations and other crime statistics to the Police

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<sup>1</sup> The violent crime rate in Portland, Maine has gone down 77.7% over the past 30 years (1985 through 2014), including annual rate decreases for 19 of those years. (FBI UCR)

Department, and share data with Portland Downtown's program manager, who analyzes and shares data-informed reports with downtown constituents and committees.

The 2018 cadet program season began after Memorial Day and ended at the end of September. Cadets typically worked five days per week, patrolling in groups of two, with an overlap in their schedules to provide for a longer day's coverage. All of the cadets returned to the fall semester of college in late August, and three stayed on the job part-time while they attended classes locally.

The police department, trending below optimal staffing levels for several years<sup>2</sup>, began a focused effort on officer recruitment early in 2018<sup>3</sup>, and the cadet program benefited from the effort. As part of the focused recruitment effort, the department engaged newly hired officers to serve as cadets while they awaited basic law enforcement training at the state academy, offered twice annually. New recruits were paid their full salary while working in a cadet capacity, providing an opportunity for them to become familiar with the community, and interact with their new department co-workers, including mentoring the downtown cadets, all of which improved new-hire retention<sup>4</sup>. Their presence additionally provided extra coverage for the cadet role in downtown.

## **CADET ACTIVITY: 2018**

### **Community Engagement**

The cadets engaged with the public throughout the season, as an opportunity to improve community relations for the Police Department, and to meet with individuals face-to-face. Activities that the cadets engaged with included working at the midtown community policing center, providing special attention to public events, assisting with COP camp for local youth, and handing out backpacks to local youth during a *Fill A Backpack* event as the school season approached. The cadets were particularly popular with cruise ship passengers, who reached out to them as a source of information, and they frequently accommodated requests for directions to popular tourist destinations. This aspect of the job is largely expected; in fact, part of the cadets' training includes attending a hospitality industry training organized by Visit Portland early in the season so that they can learn about new and classic things for visitors to do.

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<sup>2</sup> During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the department was operating at 10% below the authorized strength of patrol officers. Factors contributing to low staffing over the past 20 years include retirement from the department, staff moving on from the job, and unforeseen circumstances. On average, the department typically hires as many officers as they lose in a year.

<sup>3</sup> Through the focused recruitment effort, the department reached their hiring goal for the August 2018 law enforcement academy class.

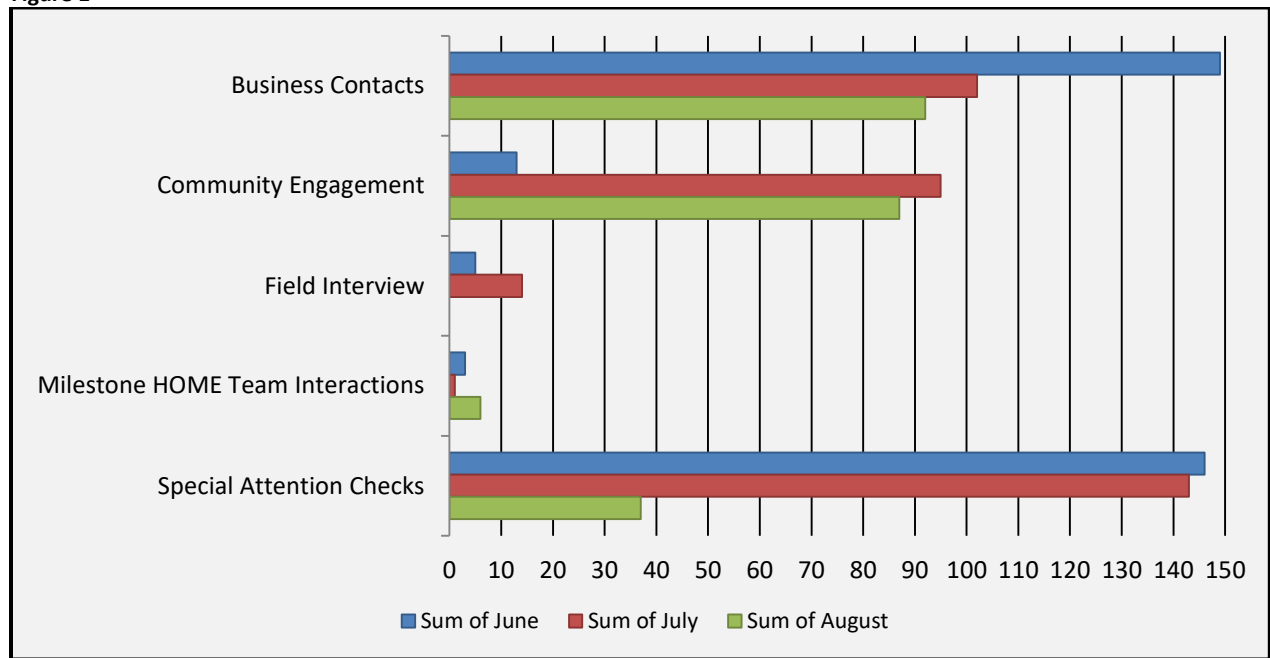
<sup>4</sup> The cadet program is a valuable experience for new-hires for several reasons. Developing strong communication skills and quickly picking up on basic "patrol instincts" is critical to their success. As well, cadets are exposed to the clientele and work environment that they would see as patrol officers, and it gives candidates first-hand experience in the field. Through these experiences, they are able to determine if this line of work is a good fit for them. Feedback from candidates who resigned upon hitting the streets post-graduation suggests that they simply did not know what the job entailed. The department combated this problem by exposing them to the job with the cadet program prior to investing in substantial officer training.

At the request of their supervisor, the cadets started spending a portion of one day each week at a nearby park that borders the downtown. The presence of the cadets in the park was impactful both for park utilizers and for the cadets, who enjoyed spending time mentoring youth.

### Daily Activity

The cadets track and report data on their daily activity, including business visits, special attention checks, and ordinance violation warnings and citations. Cadets also record community engagements, field interviews, and interactions with Milestone Recovery’s *Homeless Outreach Mobile Engagement (HOME) Team*. Figure 1 details activities, by month, for these categories.

Figure 1

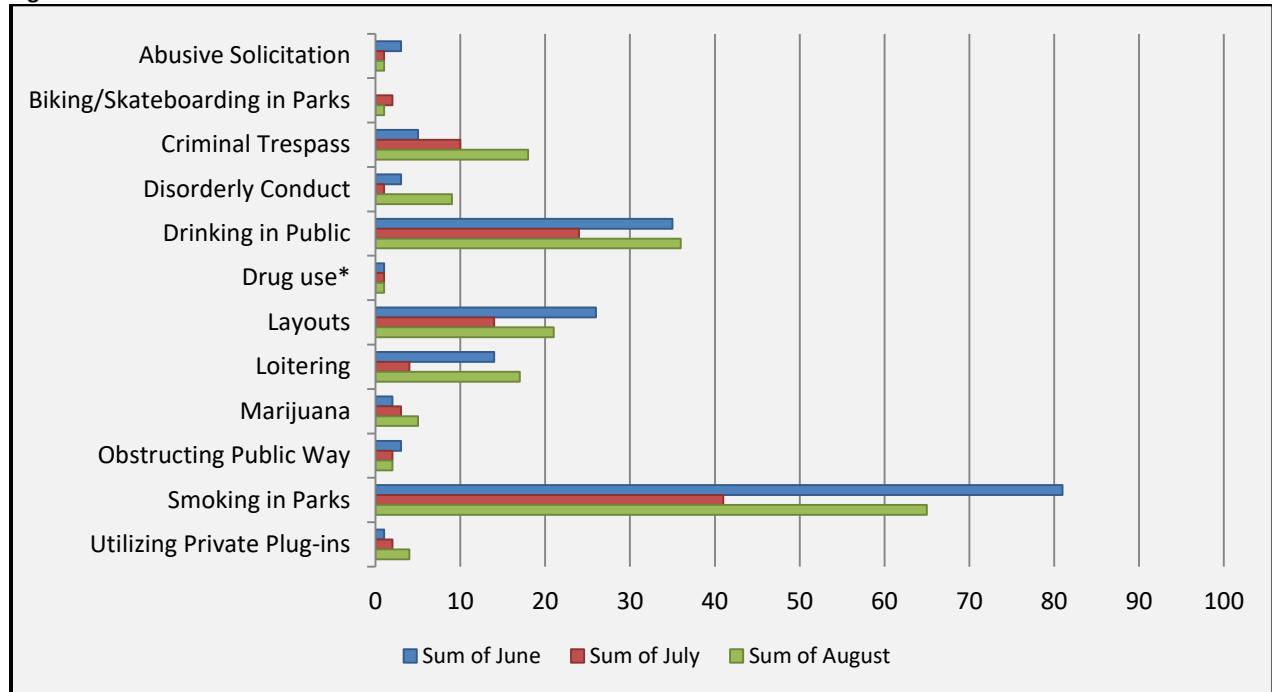


The cadets begin their season by getting to know area business and property owners through regular visits. Later in the season, they rely on Portland Downtown and the community policing supervisor to recommend visit locations based on expressions of concern from the community, and locations that have requested emergency service. New for 2018, Portland Downtown’s program manager developed and shared a document with the cadets where requests for visits were recorded and followed-up on.

### Ordinance Violation Warnings

Ordinance violation warnings (Figure 2) represent a significant point of contact that the cadets have with the public. In an effort to maintain a positive visitor and business experience, the cadets are encouraged to warn and educate rather than immediately cite for ordinance violations.

Figure 2



**Smoking in parks where the activity is prohibited** was again the highest ordinance violation warning by category for the third year in a row, with a total of 187 warnings for this violation reported during the 2018 season. **Drinking in public** followed smoking violations as the second highest violation warning, with a total of 95 incidents reported. Other high ordinance violations by order of frequency include layouts (61), loitering (35), criminal trespass (33), and obstructing the public way (13). Although the use of marijuana is now legal in the State of Maine, using it in public is still prohibited, and there were ten warnings for marijuana use downtown during the season. Other drug warnings, although minimal (three warnings), included spice and heroin.

To support the cadets in achieving compliance with smoking violation warnings, they reported sites to Portland Downtown’s program manager that they felt represented mixed-messaging. A formal request for removing cigarette waste receptacles in these places was submitted to the City’s social service department that managed the program. Receptacles were also removed from all of the parks where smoking is prohibited by ordinance, as well as from locations approximate to bus shelters where smoking is also restricted.

### Ordinance Violation Citations

The cadets issued a total of only eleven (11) citations during the season. All of the citations were follow-through on criminal trespass orders, and the majority, ten citations, occurred during the month of July, with six alone occurring on July 21<sup>st</sup>.

## QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES

At the end of the 2018 program season, Portland Downtown’s program manager held a focus group with the cadets and their supervising sergeant. An earlier meeting was arranged with one of the cadets who had to return to school early, so feedback was captured from all of those who participated in the 2018 program. Cadets were asked about (1.) their training experience, (2.) their overall experience with the program, (3.) how the program affected their perceptions and attitudes about community policing, and (4.) what they liked and disliked about the program. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for ample discussion.

### **Cadet Training and Management**

Cadets are typically very new to the role of community policing, and appreciate every training opportunity available to them. They prefer the hands-on, in-depth training experiences, and found role-playing with specific scenarios “fantastic.” An officer with the department provided training in self-defense, protocol, completing and filing paperwork, and communication, specifically with the use of radios between officers. One of the cadets began work after the core group started, and received her training from the new cadets directly, which proved to be a good opportunity for them to review all that they had learned. Two of the cadets took extensive Rape Aggression Defense (RAD)<sup>5</sup> training during the season, and they began leading the monthly low-cost trainings through the police department.

In general, the cadets would like even more in-depth training, especially more practice with **verbal encounters**. They felt having exposure to some of the **code violation issues** would be helpful, for example, by providing packets of information for them to review after training.

### **Daily Experience**

The general attitude of the cadets was that the experience was what they chose to make of it. Overall, the cadets enjoyed the experience in community policing, which several intended to pursue as a full-time career in the near future. They felt it was “fun” and “informative,” and helped them improve their basic knowledge of law enforcement. One of the cadets had a boyfriend working in a cadet capacity in a neighboring community, and particularly liked the synergy in their daily work-lives, and being able to communicate as peers about their work.

The cadets felt the experience especially helped their people skills. They came in contact with many different types of people throughout their workday, including those under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and experienced issues with anger and violence. Through these experiences, they learned the on-the-job skills needed to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations, including what to do and what not to do in these situations. They felt that these types of experiences improved their problem-solving and social skills, as well as their knowledge of the downtown district footprint. Throughout the season, they felt that they became more and more familiar with landmarks in the community, including street names and

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<sup>5</sup> RAD is a self-defense program geared toward realistic options for those experiencing potential violent threats. The training is offered to the community in partnership with the Amy St. Laurent Foundation, and course registration fees go to the Foundation: [www.amystlaurentfoundation.org](http://www.amystlaurentfoundation.org)



the locations of businesses and buildings. They also had the chance to meet property owners and residents in downtown, and got to know problem areas, as well as build relationships.

### **Perceptions and Attitudes about Community Policing**

One of the cadets expressed always loving community policing, and felt the same after the summer experience. All of the cadets were between college semesters, with one taking summer courses, and felt their exposure to the field as a supplement to their coursework created a more robust overview of the career.

Initial expectations about community policing included that they thought they would be a bit more heavy-handed with enforcing the law, and would be calling officers for assistance with criminal behavior. Instead they found that they gained the skills needed to offer assistance to those needing help in the community, and when they did need to call for help, it was most often for medical attention. As they become more involved in the role, their contacts grew and they found they were working synergistically within the community. In their experience, they felt people spending a lot of time on the streets, especially those who appeared to be struggling, appreciated their assistance and presence.

### **Positive Experiences**

The cadets liked both the freedom and the responsibility that came with the position, and appreciated being able to use discretion in assessing and handling issues in the community. Summers in coastal Maine are particularly pleasant, with temperatures cooler than in many parts of the country, and the cadets liked that their day was typically spent outside interacting with the community. All of the cadets were current college students, and appreciated being able to learn the trade while going to school, and felt the experience provided opportunities to learn problem solving skills, and **things that they could not learn in the classroom**. In fact, they cited learning a “ton of information” about the community as what they particularly liked about the program, such as stopping by businesses, meeting groups of people, and interacting with families with children. Three of the cadets were attending college locally, and noted that they wished the program operated year-round so that they could continue with the on-the-job training experience while in school.

The cadet program is a good opportunity for building communication skills, and the cadets enjoyed taking with the public during their shifts. Business owners typically expressed their appreciation of the program to the cadets directly during business visits, which helped to reinforce their attitude about the career choice. The cadets liked getting to know business owners, and sited several who were especially supportive.

### **Negative Experiences**

While the program itself left few negative experiences, and there was nothing in particular cited as a dislike about the job, the cadets noted the **correlation between mental health needs in the community and the strain on the criminal justice system**. They recalled, however, that there appeared to be fewer aggressive people on the streets each year.

The cadets felt they were initially disliked by some members of the community, and were often called derogatory names. After getting to know many of the locals, they felt their communication skills helped in changing some of these opinions.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

As much of their daily interactions with the community involve educating the public, there were many suggestions for resources that could help the cadets with their jobs. They suggested having access to a **comprehensive resource list** to share with business. As well, they thought it would help them with ordinance enforcement, as well as community engagement, if they had **printed rules and resources for members of the public**, such as where public parks are located, including the rules for the parks. They felt that **larger smoking prohibition signs** would help them enforce this park rule in particular. They noted, as well, that most smoking violators pointed to cigarette waste receptacles when asked to comply with the ordinance, and reported these “mixed-message” sites to Portland Downtown’s program manager.

The cadets also thought that their training could include a **comprehensive walk of the downtown district boundary**, as well as highlight popular locations in downtown, such as parks, public transportation hubs, event venues, etc.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Smoking Violations**

Smoking violations continued to represent the highest ordinance violation downtown for the 2018 program season. At the request of the City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program (TPP), cadets continued to carry smoking cessation information to make available as appropriate, although the cadets felt **more visible smoking prohibition signage** would be most helpful for ordinance enforcement. Continued conversations with the City’s TPP include using downtown as a test site for increased signage in high smoking violation areas, as well as looking at strategies to **curb cigarette and other smoking-related litter**.

### **Social Service Need**

As evidenced by the most frequently warned for ordinance violations, i.e., criminal trespass, drinking in public, loitering, and smoking in parks, as well as through feedback from the cadets, challenging behaviors indicate that **individuals are struggling with substance use and mental health disorders**, and have a need for social services. The cadets provided increased special attention checks (+18.5% over 2017) to areas that tended to see high incidents of challenging and criminal behavior; as well they called for assistance from a mobile outreach team more than in the previous year (+25%).

### **Staffing Capacity**

The program was fully staffed for the season, and **supported heavily by the influx of new officers serving in the cadet role** while awaiting entry to the state law enforcement academy. This capacity was ideal, and resulted in ample coverage, including in locations outside the downtown district boundary.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS ON 2017 RECOMMENDATIONS

It was recommended to **increase public outreach and improve park signage** as the most effective solution to the prevalence of smoking violations in downtown parks. Portland Downtown collaborated with the City of Portland's Parks, Recreation & Facilities Department, and a friends group, to update specific rules detailed on each sign and to create new signs for each park in downtown. The effort helped to reduce sign clutter, but smoking violations still led ordinance violation warnings for the season.

In addition, the cadets assisted in nearly **eliminating mixed-messaging sites** pertaining to smoking violations in parks confused by having cigarette litter receptacles located in parks.

Due to the high incidents of ordinance violations indicative of social service need, it was recommended that Portland Downtown explore opportunities to **create an outreach program** to complement the cadet program's safety provision in downtown. Portland Downtown submitted a grant application to support such a program, and was successfully awarded Community Development Block Grant funding from the City of Portland's annual allocation to begin a **Peer Outreach Worker (POW) program in partnership with a local social service organization, Amistad, Inc.** The partners have been collecting data from the outreach effort, and are sharing monthly and quarterly reports with stakeholders.

Portland Downtown's current five-year strategic plan calls for an increased cadet presence, so it was recommended that the organization **apply for grant funding to support an increase in program staffing for the season.** They did apply to a local funder, but were unsuccessful with the request due to the funder receiving requests for well beyond funding capacity. The program did benefit from the addition of department new-hires serving in the cadet capacity, although they did not report data to Portland Downtown as the downtown cadets do.

The Police Department has the goal of maintaining minority representation within the department, and it was recommended to **maintain racial, ethnic, and gender diversity** during the 2018 season. Cadet demographics for the 2018 season achieved this recommendation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2018 cadet program season saw few challenges, and continued to be a successful community policing training opportunity and additional downtown safety service for the partners. Increasing staff for the program with police department new-hires made the cadet presence particularly noticeable for the season. It is therefore recommended to continue to **research funding opportunities to support an increase in the cadet presence downtown.**

The police department fortunately receives high-quality candidates who apply for the summer position, making it a highly competitive job opportunity. The most impactful way to support this

pipeline is by **engaging young people interested in a career in law enforcement by introducing the opportunity at local secondary schools, colleges, and universities.**

Tobacco-use in the State of Maine is trending down among adults and youth<sup>6</sup>, but the use of vapor products is significantly higher than cigarette and noncombustible tobacco products among surveyed youth<sup>7</sup>. Electronic vapor products are currently unregulated by the U.S. FDA, so the amount of nicotine in these products is unknown, addictive in any form, and can be lethal in high doses. Exposure to second- and third-hand smoke, as well as the environmental impact of cigarette litter and waste from vapor products jeopardizes the health of the whole community. Policies that support **reducing public smoking and smoking-related litter** improve the safety, cleanliness, and vibrancy of the community, especially in the public realm where many people seek to enjoy the benefits of the natural environment. Therefore, it is recommended that Portland Downtown **continue to collaborate with the Tobacco Prevention Program and partners in public health** on messaging, and to support **smoking prohibitions at large community events.**

With Portland Downtown's new outreach program underway this year, the partners have better collaboration with social service organizations striving to solve some of the community's most challenging issues. Since the cadets routinely have encounters with individuals struggling on the streets downtown, they would likely benefit from additional training from social service partners serving this population. Therefore, it is recommended to **add a training component specific to mental health, substance use, and homelessness** that would improve the cadets' ability to respond to these issues in the community.

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<sup>6</sup> Maine's estimated prevalence of adults who smoke decreased 2.5% between 2017 and 2018. (BRFSS)

<sup>7</sup> Maine high school students report using a vapor product 6% more than smoking a cigarette or using a noncombustible tobacco product in 2017. (MIYHS)