

Portland, Maine and the Affordable Housing Crisis

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THE HOUSING CRISIS AND ZONING I sought to investigate the relationship between single-family zoning and affordable housing as a potential solution to the current housing crisis. In 2020, Maine ranked third for the highest number of in-bound moves in the country, only worsening the pre-pandemic housing shortage. With 1,593 individuals on the waitlist for public housing and 4,398 families waiting for Section-8 vouchers, as well as numerous Portland locals being forced out of the city into surrounding areas, the demand for affordable housing has become desperate. While Portland has made efforts to alleviate need, such as legalizing ADUs and implementing inclusionary zoning, there are still not enough units being created. One solution, that has been implemented in a few other US cities, is to abolish single-family zoning. A study published in January 2021 found that there are limitations that keep multi-family structures from occurring in practice on 88 percent of Portland's land. Furthermore, I found that much of the land Portland has zoned for multi-family structures is in historic preservation zones. Many of the housing non-profits interviewed for this project commented on lack of available land and a frequent need for zoning adjustments. While abolishing single-family zoning is not a perfect solution, allowance for higher density should be an aspect of Portland's housing solution. As stated by Emily Mancini-Fitch from Portland Housing Authority, "when you're trying to add more affordable housing, all you can do is go up."

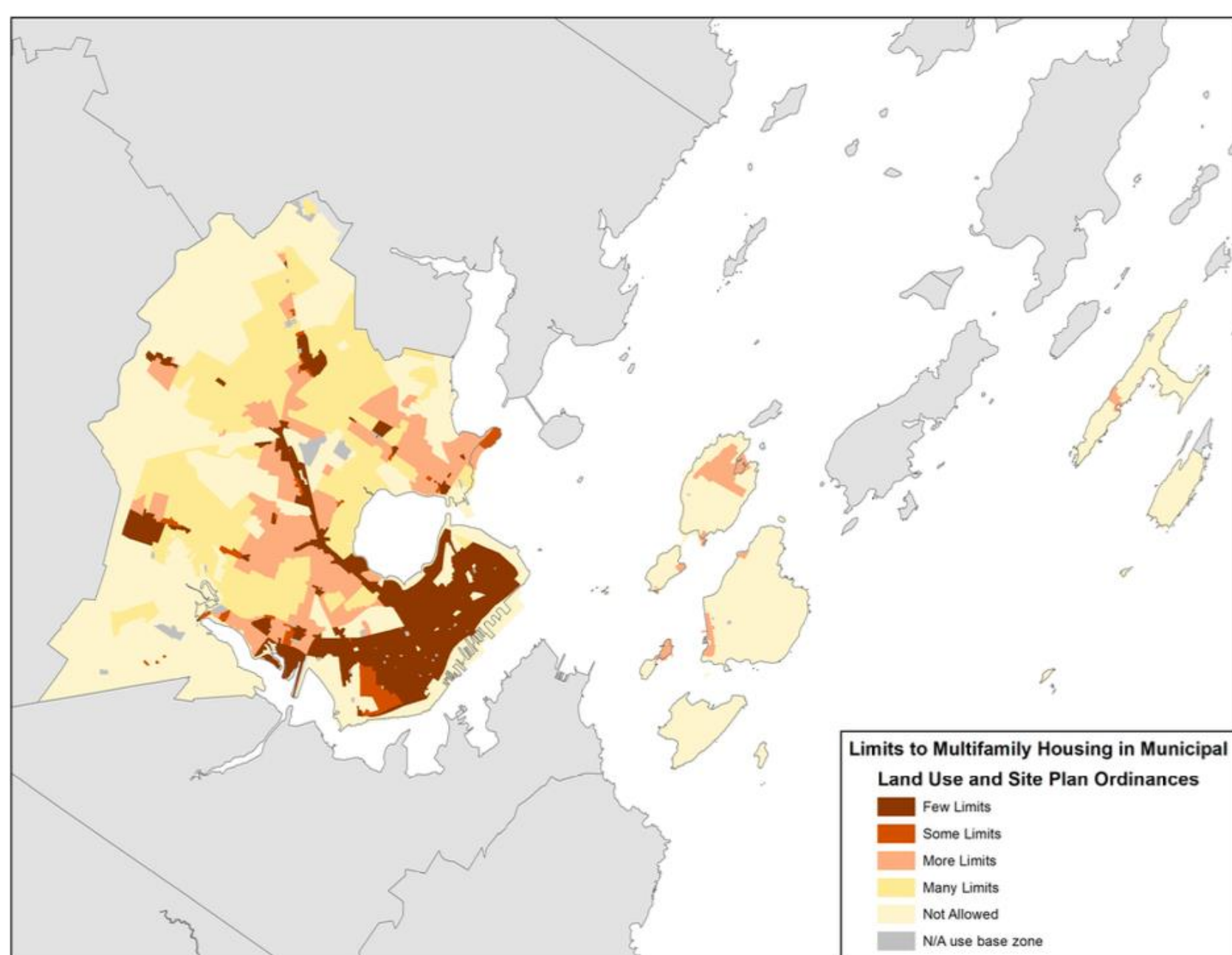
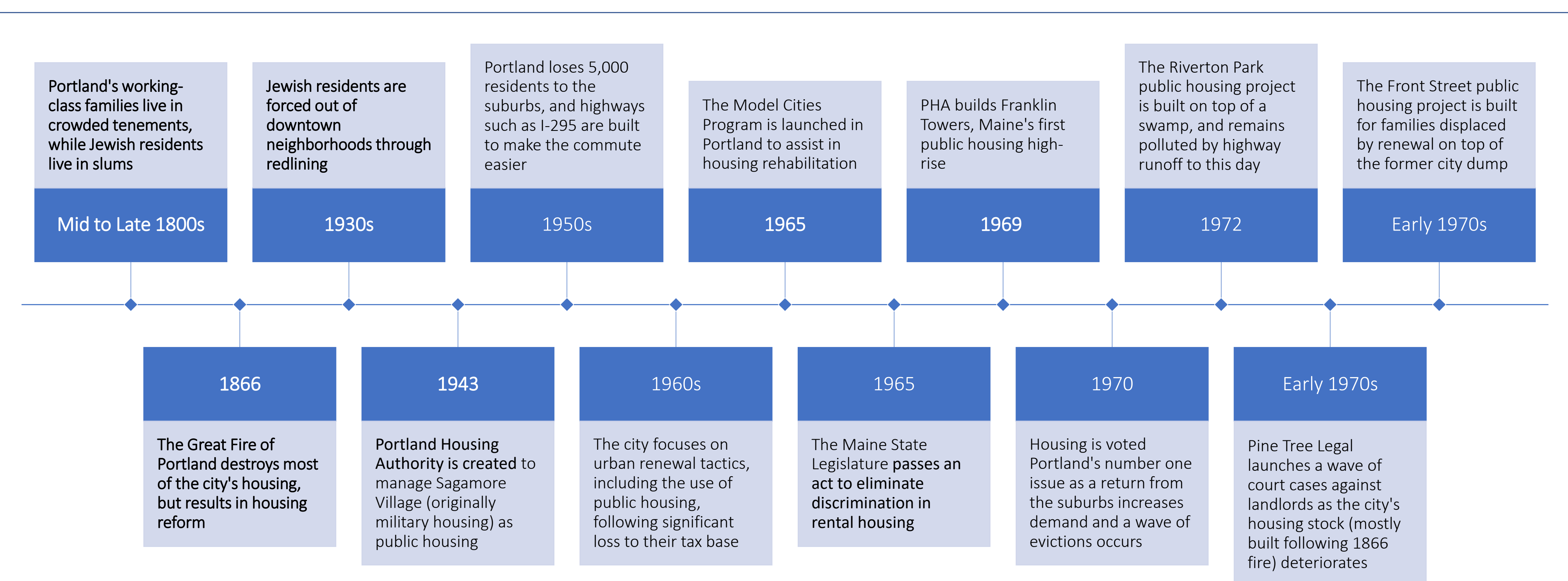


Image from "Multifamily Housing and Land Use Regulation," published by the Greater Portland Council in January 2021.

PORTLAND'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING HISTORY My study involved creating a written history of Portland's affordable and public housing, using Bowdoin databases and the Maine Historic Society archives. While I had not originally intended to dive so far into Portland's history, it quickly became clear to me that this had never been consolidated and reported. I discovered a historic lack of sufficient affordable housing, especially for marginalized communities. Furthermore, housing decisions that were made decades ago are still affecting the quality of life for these communities to this day.



A shortened timeline of Portland's affordable and public housing struggles, gathered from archival research.

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