

NEWSBRIEFS

Roots With a View a new discussion group for readers

Come discuss some of the latest Street Roots articles with other vendors and friends in the neighborhood. Expose yourself to new angles and ideas, and share some of your own perspectives, insights, and experiences related to the many issues affecting our communities. Poverty is complex and requires creativity. When we come together to understand our diverse lives, common interests, and unique gifts in relationship to the difficult times we are in, we take the first steps towards the strategic and collective work of challenging broken systems and replacing them with beautiful solutions.

Roots With A View meets every Tuesday following publication, at Street Roots, 211 NW Davis in Portland's Old Town. 6:30pm doors open, 7pm discussion. Coffee & snacks will be provided. For more information or questions please contact Stoop at 503-774-3128.

Our first discussion will be Tuesday, Jan. 27. Hope to see you there.

City, county conduct one-night count of people on the street

Outreach workers and a host of volunteers are gearing up for the biannual one-night street and shelter count. The count is used to gauge how many Portland and Multnomah County residents are experiencing homelessness.

Volunteers will be asking people where they slept on the night of Jan. 28, including people who stayed in shelters, slept outside, in vehicles, abandoned buildings or other places not intended for human habitation. The count is a requirement of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and is mandated for the last week of January to capture peak shelter usage. Neither the shelter count nor the street count include people who are doubled up with friends or couch surfing.

The results of the count allow Portland and local agencies to qualify for federal funding sources for shelter and other needs. In the past, the count has tallied between 1,700 and 2,300 people sleeping outdoors.

Homeless camping area swept into park and private security oversight

BY MARA GRUNBAUM
STAFF WRITER

On Jan. 7, Portland City Council voted to give park security officers who patrol Tom McCall Waterfront Park jurisdiction over a small triangle of land under the Steel Bridge's eastbound onramps. That will mean that people who sleep under that bridge may be subject to park exclusions, which bar individuals who receive citations from the park for at least 30 days.

City officials call the resolution, which passed unanimously and without discussion as part of the council's consent agenda, a simple housekeeping measure meant to clarify park boundaries. Advocates for the homeless say it may increase the burden on people forced to sleep outside, and that it represents a larger problem in the city's attitude toward homelessness.

The resolution specifies that the area under the car and MAX onramps will be part of the park for law enforcement purposes. The Office of Transportation, which controls the land, will retain maintenance and improvement responsibilities.

For years, the site has been used as shelter by people experiencing homelessness. On the morning of Jan. 21, several piles of bedding sat on the ground under the onramps, suggesting that people had slept there the night before. A line of people still lay along the sidewalk just outside the area the resolution covers.

People who slept in that area were already subject to the city's anti-camping

ordinance, which prohibits setting up bedding on public land. The resolution makes them subject to park exclusions as well. Only police officers can enforce the camping ban, but park exclusions can be issued by park security and officers from the private security firm, Portland Patrol Inc.

Monica Goracke, an attorney with the Oregon Law Center, said the change may make it easier for law enforcement to chase out people sleeping under the ramps.

"I wish there had been more public discussion of it, because I think it does impact people who have traditionally taken refuge in that area," Goracke said.

Though he confirmed that the resolution extends park exclusions into the specified area, Parks Public Safety Manager Mark Warrington said it was intended only to clarify park boundaries, not to pave the way for specific law enforcement.

"It's just a housekeeping thing," Warrington said. The area "looks like a park; people use it as a park ... it'll be part of the park for enforcement."

City Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees parks and housing, introduced the resolution to city council. Carmen Rubio, Fish's senior policy advisor, said

that "there was no other reason than to clarify and streamline."

Rubio did not think the resolution would change how park rules and city codes are enforced under the ramps.

Advocates at nonprofit Sisters of the Road considered arguing against the resolution, because expanding the coverage of park exclusions "has the impact of further making it a burden on people experiencing homelessness," said

Varner Seaman, Sisters' associate director of systemic change.

Seaman said Sisters decided not to protest the measure because they had not been able to meet with Fish about it, and they would rather focus on larger law enforcement issues, of which this particular piece of land is only a small part.

"We have concern about that proposal," Seaman said. "(But) the overall problem is that we have a citywide camping ban that's 24/7, and we think that's unconstitutional."

The Oregon Law Center is spearheading a class action lawsuit that challenges the constitutionality of the camping ban. The suit, filed Dec. 12, asserts that criminalizing sleeping outdoors when there is a shortage of shelter space in Portland is cruel and unusual punishment.

"We have concern about that proposal. (But) the overall problem is that we have a citywide camping ban that's 24/7, and we think that's unconstitutional."

— VARNER SEAMAN
SISTERS OF THE ROAD CAFE

VENDOR WORK ADS

Bruce Heino: Available for yard work, general assistance, four-hour minimum, wage negotiable. Please call the Street Roots office or contact New Seasons at 33rd and Killingsworth.

Bill Atkinson: Yard work, moving, misc. Four-hour minimum, \$10 an hour. Call Street Roots office at 503-228-5657.

Small Business Consultant: A/R, A/P, money management, etc. \$30 an hour. Call John Thompson at Street Roots at 503-228-5657

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