

EDITORIAL

**Round and round we go,
where it ends ...**

In May, the City Council voted 4-1 to extend the term of the sit-lie ordinance until October 23. Both Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Nick Fish proposed prolonging the term of the ordinance, which was scheduled to sunset in June, so that the city could spearhead a community-wide discussion before deciding what to do with the law in the long term.

The ruling handed down last month from a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge making the law unconstitutional has thrown the law itself into disarray. Shortly after the ruling, the Portland Police Bureau issued a memo suspending enforcement of the law and

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asking officers to use the "disorderly conduct" to against individuals impeding a sidewalk.

The sit-lie law was a violation and wasn't punishable by jail time. The disorderly conduct law comes with a misdemeanor charge and the maximum of a one-year sentence.

Both the business community and homeless

advocates have gone straight to work on their messaging and goals.

On one side, the business community, fuming mad at advocates (even though a judge made the ruling), are banking on the sit-lie law being rewritten and pressuring City Hall to get things right.

Advocates and people experiencing homelessness, on the other hand, are turning to the process laid out by Fish and Fritz and asking City Hall to find an alternative that's not criminalizing people on the streets.

In the middle is City Hall — who from what we can tell doesn't want to touch this issue with a 10-foot pole, but has been forced to out of special interests. It appears that both the business community and advocates are organized and on message. The city wants more process and discussion. It's been a decade-long discussion that feels more like the movie "Groundhogs Day" than working on solutions for homelessness — which the process was intended for.

In a time of a recession and in the midst of a rising homeless population, we are relegated as a community to come together to talk about a sidewalk law. Really?

What about building a coalition for a housing levy or bond measure for affordable housing? What about creating a space for more discussion around economic development and poverty? What about leading a measure to change legislation in Salem to allow for a real-estate transfer tax to create and preserve affordable housing and prevent homelessness? All of this is lost when we spend countless hours — years — talking about criminalization, forcing people to take sides, accomplishing nothing but a cycle of hostility between the police and the poor.

Street Roots believes it is time for a third party to do a cost analysis and review the effectiveness of laws that tend to target people on the streets at a disproportionate rate. Yeah, yeah, yeah, another report right? But until we have a study commissioned by an outside party — it just leads to a "he said, she said" environment and continues to drive a wedge in the community. Until someone takes the bulls by the horn, we will continue to find ourselves strategically working against one another instead of working together for the change our community really needs.

STREET ROOTS' EDITORIAL BOARD

The views expressed in the editorials in Street Roots are the consensus of members of the editorial board and contributing volunteers.

Column on addiction draws discussion

In my last Director's Desk ("A frank discussion about addiction and the streets," June 26 Street Roots) I stirred up a lot of emotions, both from readers and vendors. The article focused on addiction and homelessness and how it relates to Street Roots vendors, specifically the organization's harm-reduction model.

I want to reassure readers that the vast majority of SR vendors are clean and sober and are working to better themselves through the sale of the newspaper. It wasn't my intent to create an environment in which vendors or readers felt they had to defend themselves from stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness and poverty, such as that all street people are drunks and drug addicts.

Street Roots has worked for more than 10 years to dispel these stereotypes, and we continue today. They are not only false and insulting to the people who are trying to survive a crisis, they allow people who are not in crisis to scapegoat a growing population of our friends and neighbors. As long as the person on the street can be blamed, the responsibility for the nationwide failure that is homelessness is taken off all of our shoulders.

We know better.

There is personal responsibility involved. If a vendor is caught using or drinking while selling the newspaper, he or she is suspended for up to two weeks. If they are caught again we ask the vendor not to come back for a month. If the behavior continues, we ask them to no longer sell the newspaper for SR. We do not police people's behavior once they stop selling the newspaper. It would be impossible to do so.

The piece also drew praise from both vendors and readers alike. One vendor in particular gave Street Roots a \$5 donation, saying, "Thank you for defending us."

We received more than a dozen positive responses from readers and many more from vendors.

One reader wrote, "Thanks for your column this month. I realize that depriving myself of the stories in Street Roots (and of the courteous smiles from the vast majority of vendors) would be detrimental to me more than anyone else." (Read the entire letter below.)

The article spurred a conversation both internally and externally on the best way to deal with addiction on the streets. A Willamette Week reporter even called, inquiring about the piece and vendor concerns.

Like the article stated, the conversation must continue. And it will.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Street Roots encourages readers to submit letters and columns for publication. Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mailed to streetroots@email.com.

LETTERS

Issue of drug use raises a mirror to us all

Thank you for your column (June 26, A frank discussion") and e-mail from a reader. It helped hold up a mirror for me of the society in which I live.

I'll probably still buy clothing and appliances despite reports of corporate fraud and CEO abuses; I'll probably still contribute to church collections, despite the falls-from-grace of pastors named Jimmy & Ted, et al; and I'll probably still expect to be paid for services rendered and to receive respect as a citizen, despite innumerable personal failures as the "perfect human

being" and child-of-God. As I am reminded, "Can we look ourselves in the mirror, and do we keep up trying."

I'll donate to make up for one well-intentioned reader's refusal to purchase Street Roots.

Thanks for your column this month. I realize that depriving myself of the stories in Street Roots (and of the courteous smiles from the vast majority of vendors) would be detrimental to me more than anyone else.

D.F. FORISTER
Portland

Misperceptions leave homeless out in the cold

I just read "A frank discussion about addiction and the streets," by Israel Bayer (June 26, Street Roots). This always comes up in our Street Roots meetings. The vendors always express their feelings on how they don't like it. Not only does it disrupt the vendors, it also disrupts customers or potential customers, business owners and people passing by.

We're reminded to call the Street Roots office to report a vendor either drunk or on drugs. Depending on the severity of the situation, the vendor is suspended or removed permanently from the site. Programs may be suggested also.

Now the damage is done, at what cost? Loss of space to sell Street Roots, and the perception that all Street Roots vendors are

drunks and druggies even though that's not true. Now the vendors, the ones trying to make a difference, are left out in the cold to pick up the pieces — which is very difficult.

For this reason I try to encourage the homeless to keep speaking out. But the decision makers say, "bad homeless person, bad" for speaking for yourself. "We know what you want, and we know what you need. So bad for speaking up for yourself."

Then it's like they think about it and say, "Oh, but we still want to hear from you." This is the reason many homeless people don't speak out, and why should they, who listens anyway?

LEO RHODES
Vendor, Hollywood Trader Joe's

CONTACT YOUR CITY COUNCIL

Sam Adams
Mayor
1221 SW 4th Ave,
Room 340, 97204
(503) 823-4120

Amanda Fritz
1221 SW 4th Ave,
Room 220, 97204
(503)823-3008
amanda@
ci.portland.or.us

Dan Saltzman
1221 SW 4th Ave,
Room 230, 97204
(503)823-4151
dsaltzman@
ci.portland.or.us

Nick Fish
1221 SW 4th Ave,
Room 240, 97204
(503)823-3589
nick@
ci.portland.or.us

Randy Leonard
1221 SW 4th Ave,
Room 210, 97204
(503)823-4682
randy@
ci.portland.or.us