

EDITORIAL

We're losing ground; Time to charge

In Portland the housing options for the poorest in our town has declined by 23 percent, while the same options for the more affluent gained nearly 12 percent. Statewide we have the dubious distinction of being, per capita, No. 1 in the nation for homelessness, No. 2 in unemployment, and No. 3 in hunger. As the largest metropolitan area in Oregon, Portland has a responsibility to push beyond and say this is not acceptable.

The city and the county have both more or less accepted the stimulus dollars for homelessness and housing as pet projects, like weatherization and building improvements for affordable housing, without thinking creatively. Street Roots gets the sense that the Portland region took what it could get from the Federal Government, and the idea that there was capacity to build or an alternative strategy for stimulus dollars was never on the table.

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The decision to merge the Bureau of Housing and Community Development and portions of the Portland Development Commission into the Portland Housing Bureau was done in a rush. The merger has taken place more or less without a housing director after the former director resigned and months lapsed without any real leadership.

There's been very little community input into the merger and there's a growing sense among homeless and housing advocates that, more times than not these days, we find ourselves on the outside looking in when it comes to crafting real strategies to combating homelessness and poverty. In a rush toward superficial improvements, long-term strategic thinking is being lost – like creating a bond or levy for affordable housing.

Last week, Street Roots received a two-page report highlighting the mid-year accomplishments of the 10-year plan to end homelessness. On paper, the report looks great. Unfortunately, we don't live in an environment where reports dictate reality. What the report didn't note is the fact that homelessness is increasing and the inventory of affordable housing units is decreasing rapidly citywide. And the economy under which this plan and goals were created has disappeared.

We don't speak these truths without thinking about what we saying. We realize both the city and county have gone to the wall to create smart and effective budgets for 2009-10 that holds the levies on these issues. We're just know that the crest in the river is a long way off, and in order to maintain a sustainable revenue stream that thrusts us ahead of the curve it's going to take more than the status quo.

As a city, we've become very skilled at our own PR. But just below the surface are some very disturbing realities - and no, it isn't that we don't have a new minor league baseball stadium, or consensus on the new look for the Made in Oregon sign. And it certainly isn't that there are young people hanging out downtown. It's that we seem to be in denial that we can simply ride out the tough times and plan for the good. Efforts to stem this tide years ago, such as the set aside in urban renewal districts, are being squandered. Piecemeal, these efforts will always be vulnerable. It's time for the city to make a serious commitment to affordable housing. Make the charge, Portland, and invest in this city's future for all.

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.

Tough times demand tougher papers

Having a successful street newspaper in our town is a privilege. Not every city has the ability to reach out and build relationships with folks on the streets and

become engaged with issues the public might otherwise be aloof too. Next issue I will cover why supporting Street Roots from the vendor perspective is important, but this week I want to talk about the newspaper.

While many other newspapers in town are surviving on "gotcha" journalism, publishing the same stories as their counterparts and reproducing what has already been reported the night before online – Street Roots delivers Portlanders something tangible and real.

In the past six months, Street Roots has covered the complexities of the affordable housing business – including indepth reporting on how and why Portland and so many other cities find themselves on the short end of the stick when it comes to building and maintaining housing for poor and working class families.

We've reported and helped create a campaign to save 300 families in Northwest Oregon that morphed into a nationwide effort to save thousands of Section 8 housing units in five states. (See "Feds extend \$30 million" on page 3)

We've worked hard to engage readers on the growing immigrant and refugee community, or as our friend Polo at the Asian Reporter puts it, the new Portland. Feature stories on new Portlanders – including the Cambodian, Mexican, Indonesian and multi-national African communities, including the feature story in this issue, have been at the heart of Street Roots editorial coverage this past year. We won't stop there. Street Roots will continue to cover the many different cultural communities that make up our interesting and unique city.

We also won't shy away from reporting the facts even when it may be uncomfortable for a small non-profit that is trying to survive in a world where everyone knows someone and telling the truth sometimes means putting journalism before profit margins. From the coverage on the sit-lie and anti-camping ordinances to in-depth looks at addiction, sex workers and how our local government is dealing with the current recession, we refuse to shy away from reporting the truth – even if it means we won't become a fan favorite in many circles.

We also publish the voice of the people on the ground. From the controversial Addict's Almanac about life on the streets as a heroin addict, to the popular and heart wrenching Urban Gypsy column, written by a woman who recently became homeless, there's a story behind every story and we're working with artists, poets and writers on Portland's

streets to better craft their message and publish their works.

Street Roots welcomes two new columns into the paper this issue. The first of which is from vendor and homeless activist Leo Rhodes, who sells the newspaper in the Hollywood neighborhood, the other from the Mental Health Association of Portland. They bring us a new perspective, and spur dialogue and action.

Much of the newspapers success is due to the hard work of Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl, and a team of hungry and willing (mostly volunteer) reporters, copyeditors and writers who have set out to prove that a small street newspaper in Portland, Oregon, does have a seat at the table and its voice is every bit as valuable as other for-profit newspapers in town who shape the way we view politics and culture.

Saying all of this, we need your support. Street Roots raised nearly 10,000 of its 15,000 goal in the first two weeks of our annual summer drive. Thank you. But times are tough and just getting tougher. Without your support we will not be able to maintain at the level we have over the past year. We simply can't do it without you. While your support of your neighborhood vendor means that you give at least \$26 a year to Street Roots, the organization itself needs your help as well. It takes money to produce a newspaper and to maintain an office – 365 days out of the year for vendors to have access and a place to take a load off.

We aren't asking you to throw money at an organization that is in decline. We are asking you to give money to an organization that operates on a small budget and offers a multi-faceted (Rose City Resource Guide, newspaper, vendor program, drop-in center) approach to solving homelessness and poverty. We are asking you to give to an organization that will put your money to work – for you, the reader and for the hundreds of people who rely on us day in and day out for a hand up, and not a hand out. We're looking to you to help us continue on.

Your donation this summer will help Street Roots to:

- Get the news out to 10,000 readers every other week – covering the issues that affect real people every day
- Provide an income for 80 men and women experiencing homelessness and poverty in Portland
- Lead strategic campaigns that improve the quality of life for residents with the fewest resources
- Connect thousands of low-income residents with vital services through the Rose City Resource

Street Roots always relies on community support. This summer it's more important than ever. Thanks for giving what you can.

You can make a check or money order out to Street Roots, 211 NW Davis, Portland, Oregon 97209 or donate online at www.streetroots.org.



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

An open letter to vendor John Alden

I read Elizabeth Schwartz's depiction of your hospital story in Street Roots (July 10, Vendor Profile: John Alden). I'm grateful one of your patrons had the time and kindness to look at your finger and help you get treatment.

The reason I'm writing to you is because I relate. From a distant end of the spectrum of our small city, I understand what it feels like to be alone in a hospital, and it is a soul-sucking experience.

Last year I developed blood clots in my leg after I broke it in three places a few months before. I hadn't been to a hospital since the day I was born, and in a year's time, I've been to eight. I'm sure you're no stranger to the healthcare system, as you struggle with vein issues of your own. Illness and pain are manageable, but it's that feeling of being utterly alone that's

scary, under harsh fluorescent lights, with strange beeping and clicking noises in hospital corridors, and your only friends are the polite staff whose kind but distant demeanor are as sterile and clinical as the needles they're holding.

I don't know you and I don't know your whole story, but I feel your pain. My story is completely different. I am 23 years old and I still have family and friends who call. But on the day I learned I had blood clots I was alone. I was alone for eight hours in a hospital, waiting, rushed in from a doctor's office who told me I might die that day. I will never forget that feeling. I was angry, very angry, for a long time because it doesn't seem fair that these things happen to us.

Maybe you should be able to get a job that won't hurt or kill you after your years of experience as a chef, or

as a culinary student in New York. Maybe I should be able to get a job as a young, motivated recent college graduate. Maybe you shouldn't have to be alone when you're hurt or sick because your life has taken an unexpected turn.

I don't doubt if you had co-workers or neighbors, they would have been right by your side. Maybe my young body shouldn't have the ailments of a sickly 80-year-old. All the shoulds and should nots take me right back to the ER and that's a place I don't want to be anymore. I'm sorry you were lonely that day, but I hope you now realize you aren't alone. Elizabeth Schwartz wrote your story for the world to see, and I listened. And I wrote back.

GENEVIEVE KRAUSE
Portland