

EDITORIAL

**Monsters and men,
 right here in River City!**

It's hard to tell fact from fiction in downtown Portland these days. The police and business community have outdone themselves with a public relations ploy that aims to make our city seem more like a zoo than a healthy downtown feeling the repercussions of an unforgiving recession — all because of a sidewalk ordinance.

Where to start? In late June, a Multnomah County judge ruled the sit-lie ordinance unconstitutional (the second time in a seven-year period a judge has made such a ruling). Two weeks later the police bring *The Oregonian* on an all-day stakeout on homeless individuals round Pioneer Square. From a second story window, the police

kept watch on targeted individuals, waiting for them to commit low-level crimes such as littering or jaywalking. Arrests were made.

One week later, another stakeout operation. More arrests.

The police say that without the sit-lie ordinance, a violation coming with a possible fine and community service, they

The police don't get to drive policy decisions and public relations about homelessness in Portland, but they're sending out the alarm that without sit-lie, downtown has become Gotham City.

are forced to continue conducting surveillance on people downtown — making petty arrests that come with possible jail time and a record that could disqualify individuals from accessing housing.

Down the street, elected officials sit on the sidelines, forgetting that they actually supervise the police, and that the police don't get to drive policy decisions and public relations about homelessness in Portland; in essence, sending out the alarm that without sit-lie, downtown has become Gotham City.

We're all tired of wasting time with petty ordinances about sidewalks when we could be using our collective energy to push for poor folks to have access to health care and housing. Let's just state for the record that, despite the lip service from City Hall, it really doesn't matter what Street Roots or any other homeless advocacy organization or newspaper in town says or reports. And it apparently doesn't matter what the judicial system thinks either. And now the Portland Mercury is reporting that the city is working on crafting another sidewalk ordinance. Fantastic. Real progress, City Hall.

This, in the metropolitan hub of a state that's now No. 1 in the nation for homelessness, No. 2 in unemployment and No. 3 in hunger. Big businesses are laying off workers and small businesses are simply failing. High school drop-out rates are alarming and the resources designed to help those in need are choking in this financial drought. And as all this pressure was building, the city was building high-income housing, while low-income housing decreased nearly 23 percent in the past three years.

And still, homeless people are being blamed and punished for the economic woes downtown. It's that instinctual scapegoat mentality that pits people against each other rather than encourages common goals and solutions. But we go on chasing our tail, which is usually where people at the grassroots level alienate themselves by saying something out of turn, like who's crazy now? But that's where it's at: punishing homeless people, right now, in the press and on the ground, is crazy.

The police stings downtown and the PR spin making monsters out of men and women who are homeless, blaming them for realities bigger than any one person can grasp, is an embarrassment. If the same fever was put into asking the public to be patient and to educate people on why people are homeless and how to get involved and interact with people on the streets — we would be talking about truly becoming that extraordinary city on the hill.

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.

Giving a hand up, not a hand out

Street Roots is grateful to the many individuals who have given to the summer fund drive this year. With your support we've raised nearly \$12,000. Thank you!



**DIRECTOR'S
 DESK**

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots and the chairman of the North American Street Newspaper Association. You can reach him at streetroots@hotmail.com.

The organization still needs to raise an additional \$3,000 this summer to maintain the vendor program and newspaper this fall. We're hoping you can take the time to give today.

Your donation goes to support people experiencing homelessness and poverty who sell the newspaper and access resources throughout the Portland region.

George Mayes, who sells at the Multnomah County Courthouse, says, "Street Roots gives me a chance to dialogue with people and is a model of self-sufficiency."

"Street Roots gave us a spark of hope," says Donna Bacon, who became housed while with the organization. "They are there for their vendors and homeless people who want to change their lives for something better."

Kevin Bynum became homeless nearly a year ago, and Street Roots has helped him gain access to housing and stability. "I'm grateful to Street Roots because it keeps a roof over my head. I also get to meet hundreds of new people each day. We listen

to each other's stories."

Vance Schweigart sells the newspaper downtown and in the Irvington neighborhood. Schweigart says that selling Street Roots allows him to pay for a room each night. "Street Roots customers are kind to me. They treat me like a real person and not like a bum."

Street Roots is a hand up, not a hand out. Selling Street Roots allows for individuals to gain access to a supplemental income. It also allows for individuals to rebuild their lives in dignity — without having to beg.

It also allows individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty to give something back to the community. With each purchase of a newspaper, you are helping people improve their quality of life — whether that's helping them access a roof over their heads or allowing them to eat healthy foods not readily available to many poor folk. The reader also gets something in return with a quality community newspaper. When you purchase Street Roots you are helping rebuild a person's life.

Saying that, we can't provide the newspaper to individuals on the streets without the broader community support. It takes money to run the vendor program and to publish a quality newspaper. We are asking for your help.

You can give online at www.streetroots.org, or the old fashioned way to Street Roots, 211 New Davis St., Portland, OR, 97209.

LETTERS

Housing Bureau chief: New strategic plan needed in these times

Regarding "We're losing ground; Time to charge" (Editorial in Aug. 10 Street Roots):

I have long admired Street Roots for its straightforward approach to covering the issues that most affect Portland's homeless community. And as the new director of the Portland Housing Bureau, I was naturally very interested in your recent editorial inviting the City to "make the charge," by tackling our current housing crisis.

I could not agree more. The time for bold, new approaches is upon us, and we must set about our work with creativity and an honest, strategic look at what is working and what is not. I have a personal sense of urgency around trying to get ahead of the economic mess that is wreaking havoc on our old housing strategies. What's more, I am convinced that my colleagues in city government — including our elected leaders — absolutely share that sense of urgency. Indeed, these factors are what led me to accept Housing Commissioner Fish's offer of the top job at the new bureau.

While it's true that we face greater challenges than ever before, I have great hope. I am hopeful because in spite of the recession, tremendous progress is being made in helping those who need it the most: Portland will soon break ground on the landmark Resource Access Center that will help hundreds of homeless and

formerly homeless individuals each day.

People who use a Section 8 voucher to pay their rent will have a much easier time finding a good apartment thanks to a unique collaboration between the City, the Housing Authority of Portland, and area property owners. One hundred five homeless veterans will soon have permanent homes, because housing and VA leaders here have made it a priority to change the way they do business.

And with the support of our partners, we are investing our share of stimulus funds into worthy and "shovel-ready" projects, allowing us to stretch our local dollars even further.

Can we do more? Absolutely. Do we need a comprehensive new strategic plan that reflects today's economic realities, yet leaves room for flexibility? Of course. And can we do more to engage members of our community who most need a voice on issues of poverty? Certainly.

I am counting on Street Roots to continue to watch Portland's housing system closely and offer insightful and challenging commentary as we move into a new era.

In the meantime, let there be no doubt: we have taken up the charge.

MARGARET VAN VLIET
 Director, Portland Housing Bureau

Addict's Almanac's unpleasant honesty prompts call for disclaimer

Regarding Addict's Almanac (Street Roots, Aug. 7)

I guess addicts have a right to be heard from, same as anyone else, but I just wanted to point out something ironic.

Based on the demographics of the city, and based on where I see a lot of Street Roots vendors, the people whose bikes were stolen probably supported you. Maybe now that they have to save up for two bikes they won't be buying anymore Street Roots for a while.

Maybe you should think about adding some neutral disclaimer at the end of articles like this, you know, like "Street

Roots knows too well how bad and dangerous life on the street is, but we just want our readers to know we don't approve of theft, murder and other illegal activities."

NAT LASKER
 Portland

Editor's note: Thank you for the letter, Nat, and yes, it's true, we don't condone theft, murder or similar criminal acts. Tye Doudy doesn't mince words about his past, certainly not the cold realities of surviving addiction and homelessness. As he has written before, Tye hopes his experiences can be a lesson to others as much for what not to do as anything else.