

EDITORIAL

Region must work for housing levy

Ever wonder why so many people are experiencing homelessness in Portland, or why the panhandling debate never seems to die? It most certainly has something to do with the economy, but it also has something to do with the lack of ongoing revenue and affordable housing units available to low-income working people.

Our sister city to the north in Seattle, just overwhelmingly passed (63 percent) a housing levy for \$145 million dollars over a seven year period. Most of the levy, \$104 million, will go toward producing and preserving 1,670 apartments for low-income individuals, while another \$4 million will go to more than 3,000 individuals and

families in need of rent assistance.

It doesn't stop there. More than \$6 million will go towards purchasing land for affordable housing, with \$14 million going toward operations and maintenance for affordable rental units and another \$9 million going for homebuyer's assistance.

The levy not only provides homes for people experiencing homelessness and poverty, it also goes to create an ongoing revenue stream for jobs and construction projects in the region.

All for \$17 per \$100,000 of assessed property value

annually. That means for most Portland homeowners, they would be contributing \$34 to \$68. That might be the same amount you find yourself donating to a local non-profit to help feed, cloth or house an individual. Why not put that money toward something that will house thousands of people?

Street Roots realizes there are barriers both locally and at a state level concerning the tax structures and how money will be allocated. We also realize there are many competing interests, ranging from the schools to human services and the arts. At the end of the day, all of these things - schools, human services and the arts would benefit from a revenue stream dedicated to improving the quality of life by providing a warm and safe place for individuals and families to call home.

The region has excellent leadership at a government level when it comes to helping secure funding for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. In the past year, both city and county government have been engaged at one level or another in helping maintain our fragile safety net for the area's poor. They've done more with less and should be commended for their efforts.

In a time when unemployment rates, hunger and homelessness are at an all-time high both locally and throughout Oregon - we have a responsibility to help maintain the basic needs of our citizens - not just this year, but for many years to come.

The recent passing of the housing levy in Seattle gives us hope. Hope that even in hard times people can pull together and find a way to do the right thing - even if that means paying \$17 to \$100 a year for the areas most vulnerable citizens.

Street Roots believes the political will exists to pass a levy or a tax locally for affordable housing. We're hoping that together as a community, we can make that happen in 2010.

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.

Help SR stay alive during hard times

A big thanks to everyone who participated in the Street Roots online auction - we hope you enjoyed the format. It was a way for us to use low overhead while partnering with local businesses to raise money for our important

cause. It's vital, with little resources, to work smarter. We hope this was the case.

This was our first time doing such a thing, and a big shout out goes to all the volunteers who made

it happen, specifically Sarah Beecroft, our Drupal guru who continues to help Street Roots climb into the 21st Century. She also spearheaded the Rose City Resource Website at www.rosecityresource.org.

Our goal was to raise \$3-4,000 with the auction, and you helped us raise more than \$5,000, so thank you. We are already looking at ways to improve next year's auction.

We've also received nearly \$2,000 in individual donations in the first two weeks of the Winter Fund Drive. We're hoping to raise \$25,000 to help us maintain immediate income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty, while bringing you some of the Pacific Northwest's best social-justice media. We can't do it without you.

It's no secret that Street Roots is struggling to stay upright in these hard economic times. We're hurting, you're hurting; we're all hurting in this downed economy.

Street Roots has relied on the public at

large, money generated by Street Roots (vendor, sponsorships, advertising sales) that accounts for about 50 percent of our budget. For the other 50 percent we rely on foundations to support us. But the reality is, like many non-profits, much of the foundation world is hurting too.

We're working hard to remove the obstacles of remaining dependent on foundations for our survival and trying to create alternative measures to become self-sustainable (like the SR online auction).

We hope you see the value in the organization that we see day in and day out on the streets. If you do, we are asking for your help.

This year we have spearheaded campaigns to help preserve millions of dollars in city funding for homeless and housing services, saved 300 families from Section 8 eviction, and delivered you in-depth journalism in 26 issues on Portland's changing demographics, the war on drugs, the affordable housing business and policies that affect not just people on the streets, but everyday Portlanders just like you.

We also helped house 50 individuals and boosted the quality of life for more than 300 people on the streets or at risk of becoming homeless, while helping thousands upon thousands of people connect with resources through the resource guide. Not bad for a humbling budget of 200k.

We need to raise \$18,000 more by January to stay upright. Please help us by giving at www.streetroots.org or by supporting us through the Willamette Week Give! Guide at www.wweek.com/giveguide/ or by sending a check to 211 NW Davis, PDX, OR. 97209. Your donation matters!



DIRECTOR'S DESK

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