

EDITORIAL

City should vote no - again
- on JTTF membership

Next month City Council will vote on deputizing several Portland Police officers to becoming Federal agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) through the Joint Terrorism Task (JTTF).

The FBI does do good work on numerous fronts ranging from human trafficking to combating violence against Portlanders. Saying that, SR still believes that members of local law enforcement agencies have no business operating as federal agents.

There's no question that terrorism, or what we are calling terrorism today, is unacceptable. But the word terrorism,

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and the beliefs behind it, can be easily manipulated to accomplish any number of political ideologies. All words and actions can be.

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Let's take immigration. We know that immigration is a

challenge we all face - one that Portland can't solve on its own. But that doesn't mean we jump to volunteer our police officers to become deputies of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Why? Because we know that many of our citizens are immigrants, and come from all walks of life and different experiences, some good and some bad. The police serve all the people, and are sworn to protect us equally. It is a matter of public safety for an entire community.

The FBI has said that it has changed its culture. We're not so sure.

In September, the FBI and the JTTF dispatched SWAT teams to the homes of anti-war activists in Minneapolis and Chicago and arrested people connected to the peace movement. Thinking that these peace activists might be dangerous, SR did a simple Google search and found that they looked more like grandparents, old hippies and corn-fed college kids than importers of terrorism.

It has since been reported that an undercover agent had infiltrated the groups, and supplied materials directly to the FBI, none of which amounted to a bowl of beans in the legal world.

The Chicago Teachers Union (in solidarity with the fact that several of those arrested were union members) passed a resolution condemning the raids, calling them a "witch hunt." Because it is a witch hunt, and Portland should no more take part in these kinds of actions than it should take part in actions by ICE when they deport our neighbors.

As a city, we are proud to know that our local law enforcement represents the people, all people. We know that when working with the Portland Police Bureau that we have rights: Immigrants, refugees, peace activists, homeless folks, the gay and lesbian community, normal everyday folk and yes, even criminals.

By voting yes, the city will be saying to Portland peace activists, and others who dissent (and we are many) that we could be next - not based on local laws or policy, but on federal agendas that shift with the sands of politics. Some of us have already been targeted in the recent past.

The Portland City Council should vote no to rejoining the JTTF, or deputizing any of its officers as federal agents in any capacity, plain and simple. It may not be the popular thing to do, but the Portland we love will be better for it, and so will the diverse citizens its elected officials proudly represent.

Join us for exciting work in 2011

Street Roots has put together its 2011 Advocacy Agenda. We have several things on the docket, including working to secure a public restroom in the inner Southeast corridor near St. Francis. The City of Portland has done an amazing



DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer

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job at creating new restrooms downtown - we're hoping to be able to push that vision forward in one capacity or another to create restrooms for a diverse group of neighbors,

businesses and people

experiencing homelessness on the eastside.

We hope to work with the city to make structural changes to Portland's relocation policy. Currently, state and federal law requires any housing project that will relocate individuals from one low-income building to another to include securing a location for individuals or families and to help pay first and last months rent. We hope to work with the Portland Housing Bureau to, at the very least, require basic levels of support on the front end for residents.

We hope to work with partners to move sleeping guidelines forward that would allow for a harm-reduction approach in dealing with homeless campers, including allowing for people to sleep in church parking lots and in certain areas of the city undisturbed

during certain hours of the night.

We also hope to begin the first stages of a conversation between local government, hospitals and social service providers to better understand emergency room visits and discharges for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Right now, we know that many individuals are discharged directly into shelters and the streets from emergency rooms. We would love to better understand this problem, and how we can create some practical solutions system-wide.

Last, but not least, Street Roots continues to believe that our region deserves a housing levy, or another form of major revenue for housing. We will continue to report and push for our region to be better prepared to make this happen and to advocate for housing as a major priority right alongside things like transportation, the environment and growth. You can't have smart urban planning without adequate affordable housing.

We hope you will join us in 2011 and support the work of Street Roots, like you did in 2010 when we were able to move several major policy changes forward. Street Roots can't drive lengthy processes that gain little traction over time. We can help create real change for larger institutions to own and maintain. Through investigative journalism, working with individuals on the streets and community partners, creating real change is exactly what we plan to continue.

LETTERS

Reader urges community to not give up on those in trouble

In response to the Street Roots editorial, "Housing, not bullets," Jan 7. Too often so many people give up on others just as that person is about to break through and make a critical change. The ones who don't give up on themselves have the best chance to move beyond, but some just don't have that will. That's where community comes in. Thank you for acknowledging the police having a hard job to do, and the stress for all involved. That's true. We're all just trying to do the best we can with what we have. It doesn't always look that way, but I do believe that's how it works.

BECKY BLANTON
Portland

Relocation journal
misses new units

I'd like to commend Martha Gies on her recent article "Every time we say goodbye" (Nov. 26, Street Roots) about the challenges of relocating low income tenants, particularly seniors, and the state of affordable housing in downtown Portland. As always, Martha raises some important issues around this topic.

However she refers to "10 Central City Concern housing units" previously used by homeless people that were dedicated to the chronically homeless under the 10-Year Plan. One might get the impression that only a few units were funded and only replaces one set of homeless people with another. Actually, under the federally funded chronic homeless initiatives in 2003, Central City Concern in partnership with HAP and Worksystem Inc., acquired Shelter Plus Care Vouchers, funding about 176 units of supportive housing. People were placed in some 19 different zip codes, allowing people to access housing not typically available to homeless individuals. Furthermore, funding for these vouchers has continued and has enabled Portland area agencies to house several hundred people over the last seven

years.

During this time, CCC developed 270 new units of very low income housing and entered into a partnership to manage and provide services on 108 new units developed by HAP.

ED BLACKBURN
Executive Director, Central City Concern

The author responds:

Though the purpose of my article ("Every Time We Say Goodbye") was to give a history of relocation in downtown Portland, my remarks about the 10-Year Plan evidently upset some people, to judge by the two letters I saw.

In December 2004, the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness Action Plan pledged to increase the supply of permanent supportive housing for the homeless in Portland and Multnomah County. The goal was to create 2,200 additional apartments in 10 years for extremely low income households. Of these, 1,200 units were to be new construction and 1,000 units were to be created by renovation, conversion or leasing in the private sector. The Action Plan stated: "These additional housing units will be added to the homeless system's permanent units."

We have just finished year 6 of the 10-Year Plan. How many new apartments have been constructed? Overall, how are we doing with our housing production goals?

Unfortunately, press releases typically speak of housing "developed," without specifying whether that means new construction or existing rental housing co-opted for the Plan. And to be co-opted by the Plan means that whole buildings otherwise affordable to the poor are unavailable because they are attached to special-needs programs.

As a writer, I stumble over the word "developed." As a sometime relocation specialist, I am frustrated by affordable units essentially taken off the open market because they have been co-opted for supportive

housing.

Central City Concern (CCC) has done huge and important work in both preserving and constructing rental housing for the poor. Yet today most of the 1,400 units they control are not for public access, but rather for special groups of people already enrolled in designated programs. Under the Plan, that special group, the intended recipients of housing, are the chronically homeless, that is, those who have been homeless for a year or more.

In his letter to the editor, Ed Blackburn mentions 176 vouchers acquired for supportive housing without clarifying whether these were new vouchers, or vouchers redirected to the Plan. Likewise, he cites 220 new units "developed" by CCC and "108 new units developed by HAP." But there's that tricky word again: does develop, in this instance, mean constructed or retooled? If he means constructed, then right here we have evidence of 328 newly built rental units that we can count against the original 1,200-unit goal.

We need the Portland Housing Bureau to track and regularly report these numbers, eliminating from the count the ambiguous word "develop." Until then, most of us can only go by what we see in front of our eyes: city streets full of shopping carts piled with soggy sleeping bags, and people camped in doorways and freeway gullies or hiding out in forest camps.

Portland needs a huge amount of new construction affordable to the very poor, more than ever envisioned in the Plan, which was articulated before the current recession and rash of foreclosures. Meanwhile, those of us in the social services all want the same thing, and our compassion, hope and idealism should make us allies: With a common language and readily available data, we can work together toward seeing that everyone in our city has a decent place to live.

MARTHA GIES
Portland

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