

EDITORIAL

Old Town needs a larger vision to reclaim its streets

In some ways, the Old Town Chinatown neighborhood embodies the changes Portland has undergone over the past decade. It is the home to both new and familiar residents. It is an enterprising business network, gaining steam. It is the community of social service organizations that work to alleviate poverty and homelessness, to fill the gaps in addiction treatment and health care. And it is the broad shoulders for the people these organizations serve. The neighborhood also has a history and culture of open drug dealing.

The Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association, its business and community partners are calling for renewing the Drug Free Zone ordinance, which would give police greater authority to stop, question and search individuals on the street, and allow the courts to exclude selected street offenders from the neighborhood. It was dropped from the city books three years ago under former mayor Tom Potter following accounts of racial disparity and civil rights violations.

We believe, and neighborhoods have proven, that there are more constructive solutions to turning this environment around and taking back our streets. We need leaders in the neighborhood who have vision and can think outside the box.

We offer a few examples that could be used drive out drug dealing during the early morning rush hour, and throughout the day in Old Town Chinatown. We can do so supporting local businesses and promoting a healthy living environment for our neighborhood and the City of Portland.

On the economic front, we need to make our sidewalks vibrant with opportunity, much as it is on many otherwise discarded city blocks at breakfast, lunch and after work.

We should work to create a small number of food carts and other street-side attractions in Old Town Chinatown that would serve neighborhood workers, tenants and tourists. The options are almost endless, including an extension of local establishments, Asian and Latino enterprises, and social-service projects such as Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream employment program through New Avenues for Youth.

These endeavors rely on the neighborhood's support and vision, including incentives to foster a marketplace for workers, friends and patrons.

As an entry point to many bus and train visitors to the city, Old Town is a ripe location for tourist information and business vendors to set up shop and welcome the stream of people to the city.

The resources could be generated from the Portland Development Commission, and working with the Portland Business Alliance, the City of Portland, local businesses and non-profits, could set a foundation to launch the projects. In the end, it means celebrating this community, drawing people to, not away from, a destination. We've seen it happen in neighborhoods throughout the city, and it should happen here, in downtown's backyard.

Public safety is equally in the mix. We need officers walking the beat. Not on horses, not in cars, but on the sidewalks, knowing the people who come and go at all hours. It is a presence that has paid off in the past, and can once again, to create a safe environment.

On a simpler note, put in more streetlights. There are stretches of sidewalks in Old Town that suffer from the lack of fundamental illumination. Light the streets.

None of this will change things overnight. But nothing happens if nothing is pursued.

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.

Vendors, readers make winter brighter

Street Roots wants to take the time to give special thanks to all of our hard working vendors. It's this time of the year that we call the "February freak out" at SR. We're months into



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at streetroots@hotmail.com.

the rainy season and tensions are high, people are cranky and the city is in a bad mood. For someone experiencing homelessness, all of these elements are compounded, and living on the streets becomes a living hell.

The health and wellbeing of individuals can become life and death in a matter of hours. Things like walking pneumonia and the flu are commonplace, and being able to prepare for the temperature changes can be a real challenge. It's the pits for many.

That's why it's important to call out the vendors, and to thank them for staying upbeat and maintaining paper sales and for being involved in neighborhoods around the city.

Saying that, we can't thank the vendors without thanking the readers. We so appreciate the relationships being built and maintained every day throughout the city. It's these relationships that make SR special. The newspaper is just an added bonus.

We've have a lot of great things coming up over the horizon, including our popular April First edition and the first ever SR awards that will be presented in the paper this spring. Having a street paper in our community is not a given and we all work hard to deliver you something that is professional and engaging. Enjoy the read.

LETTERS

Vendor's reflections on Egypt draws support

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 streetrootsnews@gmail.com.

Egyptians are providing us a lesson in democracy. I also love my country, but love is not blind acquiescence to empire. It is hardly surprising that a nation whose psyche evolved through westward expansion and pioneer mentality would seek global expansion and empire eventually. As you noted at the beginning of your article through the telling of the story of Irish immigrants enslaved for trying to be free, American history is full of nightmares. It would be nice if American exceptionalism meant that our country would be a shinning example if justice, stop supporting dictators, and put people above corporate profit.

I stand in solidarity with Egyptians seeking justice and peace. And at the same time I wonder what we can learn from the Egyptians about standing up against the bullies.

I try to do my part every day with limited resources to live free, to resist forces of tyranny and oppression, to elect leaders and sign petitions, to be informed and organic community. It hardly seems enough.

When do we collectively get fed up enough to take to the streets, without guns and violence, without hate and bigotry, and demand that each and every one of us, across the globe, have a fair shake at life? No more to protecting war criminals while imprisoning and torturing the whistleblowers. No more to corporate welfare, tax cuts for the wealthiest and entitlement cuts for the poor. When do we get as fed up as the Egyptians?

ERIC KURTZ
Portland

ICE, police crossover has real consequences

Re: "Under their thumbs," Street Roots, Jan. 21:

I was undocumented and homeless, I was sleeping on a back porch of a church in northeast of Portland in the summer of 2008. I was one night raped by a drunk man

who wandered out of a tavern in the neighborhood. He also stole my cellular telephone so I could not call the police. I did not call the police anyway, because I knew the police will question me why I was homeless, and will blame me for being in a wrong place. It would be my word against the police or even against the words of the rapist, who is white and American.

MIRANDA

Come back soon, Art!

I will surely miss Art Garcia's column — his sense of humor and unique writing style. But, hey, he has to take advantage of the opportunity that has come his way! I can hardly wait for his return and reading about his latest adventures (or misadventures). And, Art, as you travel about this country be sure to check out the Badlands of North and South Dakota.

MARY PACIOS
Portland

Police commentary reflects concerns on resources

Another amazing piece from Officer Pickett. Thank you for bringing some sense to the conversation. We need real solutions, and relying on the police to solve our much larger, systemic problems is unsustainable.

STEVE
Portland

Thank you Officer Pickett for writing this and giving us your perspective. I have a question for you. While I was helping with the homeless street count the week before last I heard about another homeless bashing and the search for a yellow truck spotted at the scene. Last week one of my disabled homeless clients told me about another incident. From someone who is a little more in the know than we generally are how prevalent is violence against people experiencing homelessness?

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