

EDITORIAL

Revenue decline calls for a new movement forward

The City of Portland is facing a steep revenue decline to the tune of \$16 million this year due to the shortcomings of the tax-increment finance (TIF) system that funds affordable housing. That's just the tip of the iceberg — with revenue from TIF set to continue to decline through 2016.

During the past five years, the City of Portland has done an amazing job at allocating resources for affordable housing projects and homeless services through Portland's general fund, using the federal government and other resources such as TIF to barely maintain the safety net.

We can't really think about an innovative transportation system, jobs, a clean environment and healthy schools without having an adequate plan in place for housing. One effort can't thrive without the others in concert. And when it works, it benefits all.

All of this has come during a time of economic decline around the country, while county and state budgets for poor, working Oregonians and others have been slashed and maxed out to their absolute capacity. In short, human lives are being lost and the safety net needs replacing and overhauled.

Adding gasoline to the fire, the federal government is talking about sweeping cuts to core programs, including education, housing

and women's health — all of which will have major consequences for people experiencing poverty and middle-class folks.

Some might say the chickens have come home to roost for a system and society that has been complacent and self-serving for most of our lifetimes.

Unless something is done to fill the gap over declining revenues in the next five years, Portland will face monumental challenges to maintaining a safety net for poor people. An army of nonprofit housing developers serving people of color, people experiencing homelessness and people with disabilities will be caught up a stream without a paddle, and will be forced to reinvent themselves or die. Homeless service providers will have to learn how to downsize and centralize their services or they may find themselves without a lifeline. This includes Street Roots.

What to do?

First, the world of homeless and housing services must look outside its own circles for partnerships and collaborations to build a real movement. We can't even begin to talk about a housing levy or bond to fill crucial budget gaps when we are fractured to the point of competing with one another for resources and support, instead of working together in a galvanized movement. That means working with labor, the business community, law enforcement, hospitals and foundations, not only on specific projects, but to build a larger vision where housing has a seat at the table — much in the way that labor, transportation, environment, schools and others have. After all, we can't really think about an innovative transportation system, jobs, a clean environment and healthy schools without having an adequate plan in place for housing. One effort can't thrive without the others in concert. And when it works, it benefits all.

Beyond this, we need bold leadership and actions at all levels of government, in the private sector and in the non-profit world. The trip to Seattle led by Commissioner Nick Fish was one step in the right direction. But leadership cannot be a top-down effort. There needs to be many voices heard in this discussion, many leaders in all sectors to chart a new course, because while it's easy to envision the solution, it is quite another thing to create the sea change necessary to take us there.

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.

Customers, cookies and microeconomics, vendor style

It's that time of year when vendors and the city are anxiously awaiting warmer weather and a chance to bask in the sun and leave these rainy blues behind. In the meantime, vendors have been hard at work



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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

and more people than ever are out selling Street Roots.

We want to thank many of the customers that support our vendors. In the past month, we've heard stories and worked

with people who have gone above and beyond for people selling the newspaper.

One vendor was given a brand new coat and backpack, while another was being helped by a customer to go to the dental school and have his teeth worked on. Another vendor was given a full-time job south of Portland driving a tractor for a local farm this summer, and another is getting the support needed to kick heroin for the first time in 12 years. He's been clean for six weeks, and SR and other community members are helping him navigate the system. We hope he's in housing by the spring.

Really, it's the small things — a hello and a smile and purchasing and reading the paper week in and week out that makes your relationship with vendors special.

Of course, we don't always get it right. We'll be the first to admit it. But SR does its best to respond to readers and businesses that report any problems.

For example, we had a vendor that was making life difficult for a local Girl Scout and her mother selling cookies. When I got the call from a troop leader — I thought, God Almighty, how could one of our vendors be messing with the Girl Scouts? But, in this position you would be surprised by some of the calls we get. I could write a book.

After tracking down the vendor, and sitting with him for an hour and explaining that we do, in fact, share the sidewalk with others, and that crowding out the Girl Scouts was no way to represent himself or Street Roots, he was told he would have one more chance to work with others, but it would be up to him.

SR ended up buying eight boxes of cookies from the woman and having a larger conversation with vendors (while eating cookies) about how vendors could actually capitalize on working with others. One vendor said, "Come on. Do the math. Girl Scout cookies are \$4 a box. If a person has a five-dollar bill and they buy a box of Thin Mints, then that leaves a dollar to buy Street Roots. We should all be getting along." Beautiful.

LETTERS

TriMet transfer policy needs better oversight

Re: "Trying to cut a fare deal with TriMet," March 4.

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.

What needs to be done is more watchdog oversight over how TriMet currently enforces its transfer policy.

First of all, MAX and bus transfers are not identical. MAX transfers are always two hours. Bus transfers are not. We all pay the same fare, so why are bus riders only allowed a one-hour transfer during weekdays?

Secondly, TriMet doesn't even know how to interpret its own transfer policy. Per TriMet Code 19.25(G), Bus transfers shall be issued to be valid for one hour past the scheduled end of the trip time for the bus on weekdays, two hours on weekends. The end of the trip is generally the mall in downtown Portland, a transit center, or the end of the line.

Historically, TriMet has interpreted the transfer rule as simply "one hour", from the time of issuing the transfer. (I must say, it appears TriMet has finally updated the language on their website to reflect its own law. But are all TriMet Operators doing it?)

In general, you should never, ever see a TriMet bus operator adjust their transfers mid-route. If someone in Gresham boards a 12-Barbur/Sandy bus at 7:27 p.m., that bus runs all the way to Sherwood and ends its run at 9:32 PM. That transfer, whether you get on the bus at Gresham, Parkrose, downtown Portland, or Tigard, must be valid until no earlier than 10:32 p.m. In other words, that transfer should be good for three hours on a weekday if you board at Gresham TC.

ERIK H. Portland

Vendor's story of thanks resonates with readers

Responses to Sam Al-Jondi's column, "In my darkest hours, there were many who shined a light," March 4:

This article is just what I need when I feel that helping is thought to be enabling. I have many homeless community members who welcome being picked up by the cops for a warm place to sleep. I would like to offer more to my homeless community, we are all having a hard time and just being together keeps us warm. Words from those who need help. I am grateful because they are usually silent and don't ask for help. Your paper encourages me to keep helping the homeless as best I can.

M. KALAMA Portland

Northwest Pilot Project is the best! I was lucky to have worked along side of them for a year and was amazed at the work they do! I learned so much from them and was continually renewed by how hard they work and the spirit they bring to their jobs! We are lucky to have them in our community!

CHANI GEIGLE-TELLER Portland

I am a huge believer in papers like Street Roots that encourage people to write, read, and make an honest living! I am proud to have supported this paper, as well as others in other cities. Keep publishing!

ADAM DOUGLAS Austin, Texas

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