

Forum raises candidates views on housing, homeless policy

BY JOANNE ZUHL
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Mayoral candidates squared off over issues of the street Dec. 6 in the Mayoral Candidates' Forum on Housing. The forum featured frontrunners Eileen Brady, Charlie Hales and Jefferson Smith, along with Joshua Nuttall, Loren Charles Brown and Shonda Colleen Kelley in what has become a crowded race for the city's top post.

The event was sponsored by Oregon Opportunity Network, Street Roots, JOIN and 211Info, and featured questions drilling down on the candidate's plans for addressing homelessness and affordable housing in Portland during tough economic times.

Common threads in the discussion were streamlining city government, creating more public-private partnerships, focusing on finding dedicated funding sources for low-income housing, and praise for the success of the 30 percent set aside from urban renewal districts.

Questions focused on finding new revenue sources to replace declining funding streams, job creation, gentrification, and balancing civil rights against the homeless condition.

Jefferson Smith pushed one option by reflecting on a nationwide lawsuit brought by states, including Oregon, against mortgage companies and banks that, if successful, could bring a windfall of between \$15 million and \$50 million into the state. Smith proposed that money should be applied as seed money to buy foreclosed homes from banks and reissue them back to families at affordable prices to preserve their housing.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Mayoral candidates Jefferson Smith, Charlie Hales, Shonda Colleen Kelley, Loren Charles Brown, Joshua Nuttall and Eileen Brady answer questions during the Mayoral Candidates Forum on Housing Dec. 6 at the First Unitarian Church in Portland.

"The federal government has abdicated its responsibility. But as a city, we can't," Smith said.

Charlie Hales emphasized greater partnership with surrounding governments, and said he wanted to see the entire metropolitan region dedicating its share to the housing crisis.

"We need to call the rest of the region to do their part as well as we do ours in Portland," Hales said.

Along with support for the 30 percent set-aside and incentivized public-private partnerships, Eileen Brady said she would push to have greater lobbying efforts to

secure more federal dollars. She also emphasized a commitment to job creation, which creates a more substantial tax base, and referred several times to the Portland Plan and its stated pledge to increase and maintain the city's supply of low-income housing.

Brady's message on gentrification issues was to stress revitalization in a form that doesn't create displacement.

"Revitalization is good. Displacement isn't," she said. "We want to increase our tax base, but not at the expense of destroying communities and displacing people."

Smith stressed the need to incorporate housing investment with infrastructure investment, including public transportation, employment opportunities and other community amenities.

All of the candidates expressed support for loosening restraints on anti-camping laws to allow for legalized camping in small measures. Such a plan, involving the faith-based community, is under consideration in City Hall.

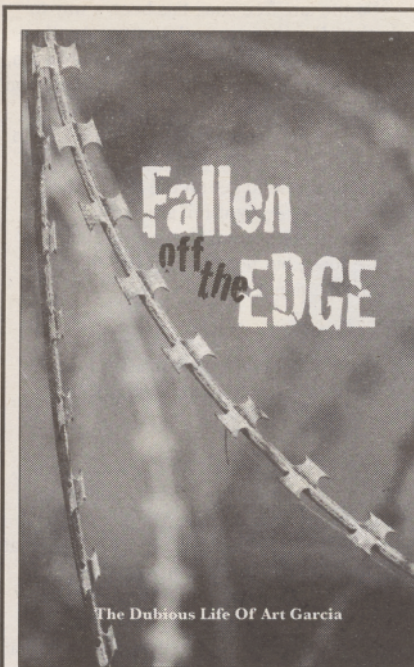
"Fourth and Burnside is a good example that it doesn't take \$100,000 to create a safe place for people to sleep at night," said Joshua Nuttall.

With the opportunity to speak in general about their intentions as mayor, Loren Charles Brown said he would be the "people's mayor," and the face and voice of the people, especially those experiencing homelessness. "Your voice has been suppressed long enough," Brown said.

Brown also proposed that as mayor, he would join stakeholders in sleeping on the streets to, "have everybody go out and feel what it's like to be homeless."

Nuttall embraced his underdog status, expressing support for the Occupy Portland movement, the reduction of city bureaucracy, and called for the creation of a professional skills library for the creation of self-employment enterprises.

The 90-minute forum included set questions from organizers and several submitted by members of the audience. In addition to the discussion held during the event, questions were submitted in advance to the candidates, and their responses are available at the candidate's answers link through the post on the event at www.streetroots.wordpress.com.



Fallen Off the Edge

A new book by Art Garcia

"Fallen Off the Edge" is a chronicle of one man's experiences after returning from the Vietnam War. Told through the eyes of Street Roots columnist Art Garcia, this book celebrates the major victories born from a series of questionable choices. Art's jocular storytelling takes the reader along with him in and out of the California prison system over the course of 10 years until he found the strength and courage to pull himself up from the fall.

The book is available online at www.blurb.com under searchword Art Garcia.

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