

EDITORIAL

Why housing matters
in this election

There's a lot of personality in the upcoming elections. This is Portland, after all.

And in these times, the gravity of this election is further weighted by the stagnant economy, the city's pressing financial straits, and the many directions this city can go, possibly far afield from where it has been.

Housing, however, seldom breaks the surface on Portlanders' voting minds, when it should.

Of course, housing has always been political. Not too long ago, housing policy meant dead-end tenement projects that concentrated poverty while tax deductions

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encouraged middle-income homebuyers to sprawl into the suburbs. Today, in Portland certainly, the trend is to return to the established urban cores, where tax breaks

incentivize revitalization by major developers. Revitalization has given room to gentrification and displacement as the fallback phrases in this local election cycle, as low-income families are now getting pushed further and further to the edge of town, literally and figuratively.

Meanwhile, families are losing their homes to a foreclosure pandemic manufactured by the financial industry. Some of them are joining the ranks of couch surfers and hotel residents, of car campers and tent dwellers — becoming homeless. The politics of housing is about the proliferation of urban renewal districts and the appropriation of those tax revenues to new development, including low-income housing. It's about keeping our options open for creating future revenue sources as existing sources run dry. It's about the definitions we apply to those in need — often creating square pegs for round holes. It's about a small group of homeless campers who survived the winter in peace and safety at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Burnside, under the watchful eye of city code enforcers.

On housing pivots so many issues our current slate of candidates are eagerly talking about: transportation, job development, public safety and schools. Each and every one of us has a vested interest in how our government moves forward on housing concerns, no one more so than those who are living on or close to the streets. But the same goes for any family struggling to keep its home, or any individual who is relying on the small, single-room apartment that is keeping him clean and sober, and maybe finally, employed and engaged in our community. Our housing policies are reflected on our sidewalks, in our school halls and our emergency rooms. Unstable housing has been directly linked to lower grades in school and poorer health. And the Mobius loop of stable housing and gainful employment leaves one almost inseparable from the other.

The city needs representatives in office who not only understand housing's role in Portland's social, economic and environmental fabric, but who will not lose sight of that relationship to special interests pulling them in one direction or another.

This is not a call for a vote, but rather a call for leadership that shares the value of safe, stable and affordable housing as much as we all do. This is Portland, after all.

A positive message always wins out

Street Roots is happy to announce we were honored at Northwest Pilot Projects' (NWPP) annual event this year with a Community Service Award for

DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer

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

outstanding achievement and service to Portland's elderly, homeless and poor.

Since 1969, NWPP has been offering housing and service opportunities for a life of dignity and hope to Portland's elderly,

disabled, and homeless. Each year, NWPP has successfully housed many Street Roots vendors, and we are indebted to their services.

On another front, I'm humbled to receive the Hilltop award this month from Multnomah County for my lifelong community work with the people experiencing homelessness in the region and for my work with Street Roots.

I've dedicated my life to the street newspaper movement, for better or worse, and couldn't be more proud of all of the vendors, volunteers, staff and board members at Street Roots for helping the newspaper continue to grow and be recognized in the community. At the end of

the day, everything we do is built around the idea of not only giving people outside of the system an income, but also hope.

The great Woody Guthrie once said something to the effect of not letting anyone or anything knock around your hope machine. I would like to believe that all of the sweat and tears that the entire team at Street Roots puts in to presenting this newspaper and the Rose City Resource is ultimately about hope.

Day in and day out we work with many individuals that have been to hell and back, and may be experiencing a high level of trauma due to the brutal realities of homelessness. With a little bit of hope and self-worth through the sales of the newspaper and the relationships we all build with vendors, we begin to believe we can do anything, be it personally or collectively.

Together, we refuse to accept that poverty is a hand we have been dealt, and nothing can be done about it. Instead, we work to create individual and social change in a way that will make the world we live in a better place. With each sale of the newspaper, readers become part of that collective movement towards something positive — both in the lives of the vendors and in the city we live. Together, we fight back with a positive message of love.

LETTERS

Portland's veterans housing assistance underutilized

The federally funded Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program is designed to help homeless veterans nationwide by offering supportive services and a Section 8 voucher to obtain a modest apartment. The Portland VA Medical Center started receiving VASH vouchers in May 2008 to serve homeless veterans in our region. Until recently, the Portland VA had never used more than 75 percent of their allocated vouchers. Thus far, more than \$1 million in rent subsidies intended for homeless veterans in our area has gone unutilized.

As of April 1, 39 — 16 percent of the 245 VASH vouchers available to the Portland VA — were still not leased up. There is certainly no shortage of eligible homeless veterans locally. Fully utilizing these VASH vouchers will increase the chances our region will be awarded the maximum number of additional vouchers. Let's all encourage our colleagues

at the Portland VA to immediately lease up all available VASH vouchers. Homeless veterans deserve no less.

BOBBY WEINSTOCK
Northwest Pilot Project

Vendor's book impresses

I finished reading the book by (Street Roots vendor) Sam Al-Jondi and enjoyed it very much. I was impressed by his philosophy and by the way he portrayed values of virtual importance to humanity in his work, in a very simple style while displaying a great deal of depth and thought.

Please convey my best wishes to Sam Al-Jondi, and that I was indeed impressed.

SHAHIRA EL SAWY
Dean of Libraries and Learning
Technologies The American University in Cairo

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢

goes directly to the vendor
who sold you the paper

25¢

goes toward
printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.