EDITORIAL

Goodbye free rail zone, and everything you stood for

The free rail zone, once known as Fareless Square is gone.

In a city that prides itself on being green, innovative and equity driven, it seems odd that besides a few organizations and voices in the wilderness, losing the free-rail zone didn't seem to matter much.

It sure wasn't all that important to Tri-Met. Didn't hear much from the city, or other government institutions on the issue. The business community didn't seem to mind, and why would they. Most out-of-town visitors, especially those attending conventions, will have their ride subsidized with revenue from a visitors tax.

It is one more component in a long line of missteps over the past two decades that have tilted Portland's urban core further away from being a diverse and innovative downtown for the future.

When Fareless Square began in 1975, and throughout the years, it was held up as a beacon in the movement of progressive economic development, helping curb air pollution and encouraging people not to drive.

Fareless Square helped divert car congestion, gave people an opportunity to ride freely to sporting and other cultural events downtown. And it allowed people to travel from one part of the city's concentrated core to another – to shop, enjoy lunch and generate a vibrant commercial center – unencumbered by additional charges.

In neighborhoods like Old Town, it allowed downtown citizens, many elderly and low-income to travel outside of its food desert to buy groceries and other goods. It allowed service workers who can't afford to live or park downtown to travel freely to their jobs from outside the downtown core.

It's all gone. The reality is that new charges applied to rail service downtown – on lines that already cut through the heart of the city – will nickel and dime the students, the elderly, and the service class who rely on the zone to enable their already limited livelihood.

Of course, time will pass and the city will adjust. Gentrification will continue and Portland's downtown demographics will continue to trend toward wealthy, white individuals and families, while middle-class and poor people will be pushed toward the city's outer rings. That's not to say that abandoning the free rail zone is at fault for this sweeping reality. But it is one more component in a long line of missteps over the past two decades that have tilted Portland's urban core further away from being a diverse and innovative downtown for the future.

We get it: Times are tough and revenues are down. Portland is still thriving, compared to many cities. We are one of the leading cities for alternative transportation modes in the country, and banking our investments on streetcars and cycling programs will lead us into the future.

That's not enough. Having a free rail zone coupled with these investments would uphold true innovation, ensuring a hub for commerce, entertainment and an equity in mobility that will never return.

TriMet, its union, local government, and the business community could have saved the free-rail zone. They didn't. We will all pay the price, literally, and Portland will suffer for it.

Making change, every day

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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

People tell me all the time how great the vendors are in the community and what a community asset they are for local neighborhoods. They also tell me, often with bewilderment, that the vast amount of the vendors represent themselves very well. Yes, people experiencing poverty do have manners.

We also take our fair share of incident reports on vendor altercations and other random inquiries about individuals and families selling the newspaper. We want to make sure that readers know that we have a Vendor Incident and Feedback form on the SR website at www.streetroots.org.

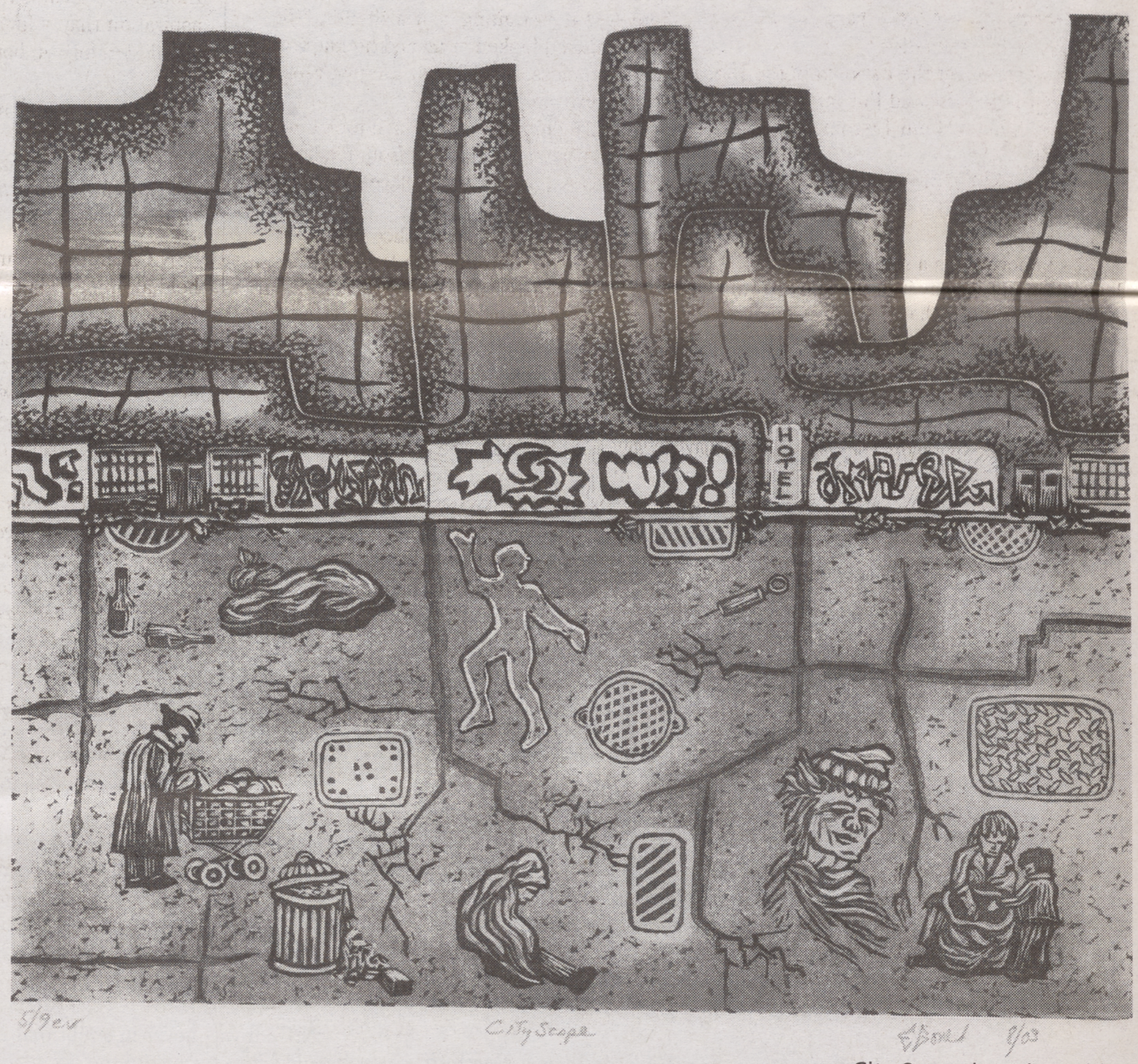
Individuals go through an hour orientation before becoming a vendor that includes a 35-minute video about SR and selling the newspaper, along with a time for questions and answers. Vendors receive 10 free papers, tips on turf, and are out the door. It's no easy task to sell a newspaper. It's even harder when faced with the needs of survival and being constantly exposed to the elements.

Once a vendor goes through orientation, we ask that they abide by some simple rules when out on turf. Beyond the basics, like not smoking or being intoxicated, we ask vendors to not be aggressive in any way. It's pretty simple. Does it always work? Of course not, but for the vast majority of the people selling SR and the community at-large, it's a great fit.

Part of what makes SR great is allowing people to find their own voice, either through the sales of the newspaper or being published. Making money is the goal, but allowing for people to build self-confidence and community is something that makes the vendor program special.

We work hard so that vendors can thrive in different environments. Mostly though, it's readers like you that make it possible. Being able to create community on street corners and in front of businesses throughout the Portland area is something that we can all appreciate.

One vendor recently told me that she enjoys the conversation that naturally unfolds with readers as much as making money when selling Street Roots. Thank you, Portland, for taking the time and helping change people's lives, one conversation and one newspaper at a time.



City Scape by Ed Gould

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.