

## EDITORIAL

## Whitten keeps stirring the pot on housing justice

More than a month into his hunger strike, Cameron Whitten has maintained his campaign against housing injustice for longer than many people probably expected.

But then Whitten has never been one to bend to conventional expectations.

The former mayoral candidate is using his Occupy-backed celebrity to draw attention to homelessness and call for housing justice. And attention is what he's getting. He has been camping outside City Hall since early June, and has attracted followers to his cause, using the stage to talk about the issues.

**Whitten's response is to rebel against the shoulder-shrugging resignation of another summer with homelessness.**

He has three requests of the city. The first is to withdraw the fines against the owners of the lot leased by Right 2 Dream Too, a homeless overnight

rest area. The city is fining the owners more than \$1,200 a month for code infractions. The second request is the put a housing levy measure on the November ballot, something the city has abandoned in the wake of other failed levy attempts. The third request by Whitten is for the Multnomah County Sheriff to issue a one-year moratorium on home foreclosures in the county. In varying form, all of these concerns have validity. Right 2 Dream Too needs support, not sanctions. The foreclosure crisis has devastated families, and the city has to find another, sustainable funding stream for low-income housing.

While several city commissioners, including the mayor, have talked with Whitten at his 24-hour sidewalk camp, they have shown no signs of moving forward to accommodate his requests.

But something else is happening here.

You can fault him for not having the answers to the problem, or using tactics that you might not agree with. But who among us has the solution we all want to hear? Neither passersby nor the occupants of the corner offices in City Hall have put forward definitive answers to the constant stream of people hitting the streets. Despite Portland's progress in getting people into housing, getting people sober, employed and off the streets, our ultimate success is undermined by economic stagnation, joblessness, housing costs and regressive attitudes toward people who are down and out. Our response as a city is measured more by how we react to this landscape than our ability to change the landscape altogether.

Whitten's response is to rebel against the shoulder-shrugging resignation of another summer with homelessness. It's not about the list of unmet demands, or the sideshow atmosphere that flares up around these kinds of campaigns. It's about presence — and sacrifice. This effort, and the many before it, remind us that behind the rhetoric on homelessness and intermittent coverage in the media, there beats a real passion to call out the injustice in housing, and work to improve the lives of people who lack shelter, safety, health care and hope. It takes community to bring it all together, and that's what Whitten is building — through social media and in the press. People are talking, and even that helps move the ball forward.

## Summertime offers so many opportunities

It's summertime, and for many people on the streets, including Street Roots vendors sleeping outside, it makes for a challenging time of year. We all know winter can be a tough for people on the streets, but summer brings its own set of issues. For many people, it means bedding down hours later than they normally would, and staying hydrated becomes essential.



## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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

For Street Roots vendors, being able to maintain a stable income means everything. Your support of the vendor program and newspaper allows vendors to be able to be independent day-in and day-out, giving people on the streets much needed resources to be able to end their homelessness. Having money can mean having a healthy meal and getting a hotel for the night. It may mean being able to sustain oneself indoors, or the ability to put down first and last months' rent somewhere.

Street Roots serves people with all kinds of backgrounds and circumstances. Some people sell the newspaper for daily survival, while others are using the sales of the newspaper to maintain a small flat or cover basic health care costs. Your support of the vendors allows people to have a hand up, and gives hope to individuals and families who have found themselves on the fringes.

We know how much vendors appreciate their regular customers and developing new relationships with Portlanders. If you are hosting friends or family this summer, introduce them to your local vendor. If you have a break room or lobby at your place of work, share a copy of the paper for others to read. The biggest barrier Street Roots faces in the community is people believing that the newspaper is a paper for the homeless and not the entire community. You can help change this, and in the process continue to help people change the way we address poverty in our community. The social change, literally, is in your pocket. From all of us at Street Roots, thanks for the love.

## Editorial on free rail zone loss strikes chord

Many of you wrote in on our editorial on the loss of the free rail zone (Street Roots, June 22). Here are a few of the responses:

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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

TriMet decided to double contingency funds from \$10 million to \$20 million this year, citing concerns about the ongoing labor dispute. TriMet expects, nevertheless, that not all of that \$20 million would be spent on employee health insurance and pensions. Indeed, some of the \$20 million would, ostensibly, be used to administer a grant program that allows qualified social service agencies to distribute free tickets to their clients.

Had TriMet lowered the contingency fund to \$15 million, it could have easily saved both the free rail zone and student passes, each of which costs under \$2.5 million a year, while still reasonably covering the possible liabilities for funding employee benefits when TriMet loses the arbitration.

This has never been about TriMet's fiscal crisis. TriMet and the City of Portland's war on free rail zone/Fareless Square has been continuing for years. In 2008 it attempted to eliminate the Fareless Square, only to encounter a popular opposition from citizens. In 2009 it once again attempted to eliminate Fareless Square, this time using the opening of the Green/Yellow lines as an excuse for ending free bus services. At the same time, TriMet also tried to end free service in the evening (failed) and also to change the free zone boundaries from Lloyd Center to Convention Center (failed). ...

(TriMet General Manager) Neil McFarlane presided over the worst service cuts and worst fare increases in TriMet's history. The TriMet board, appointed by the governor at his pleasure, has no

accountability to citizens, yet has a power of taxation, policing, and legislation.

It is time for the citizens to fight back and eliminate TriMet. The state law already provides for a takeover of TriMet by Metro, and we all need to pressure Metro to assume control over the regional transit system, which would not only bring accountability to our public transit, but also would save taxpayer money by reducing the overlapping layers of regional bureaucracy.

— SARAH MORRIGAN

When a certain mental health company gave me a job and I moved to Portland then yanked it away in less than three months, I depended on Fareless Square. I got my groceries, etc. Every time I went on a job interview it was \$5 for a day pass. Thank you, TriMet for making Portland a city out of reach for us now.

— CONNIE SEYMOUR

I've always found it sadly ironic that Portland has invested a lot of time and money to provide a safety net for green spaces, but the safety net for people is practically gone.

— MARILYN JOHNSON

Fareless Square going away was worse, in my view. Portland was famous for it. But, what the (Portland Business Alliance) wants, the PBA gets, no matter how harmful it is to the health of Portland's cultural or civil society as a whole. I've never forgiven them for killing off Artquake, which was the most awesome thing Portland ever spawned during my life here.

— KATIE BRETSCH

## 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.

Street Roots  
211 NW Davis St.  
Portland, OR 97209  
503-228-5657  
Fax: 503-227-3117  
www.streetroots.org  
www.streetroots.wordpress.com

## Staff

**Executive Director** Israel Bayer  
israel@streetroots.org  
**Managing Editor** Joanne Zuhl  
joanne@streetroots.org  
**Operations Director** Sarah Beecroft  
**Program Assistant** Cole Merkel, Jesuit Volunteer  
AmeriCorps Member  
cole@streetroots.org  
**Grant Writer** Sarah Cloud  
**Accountant** Heather Stadick  
**Reporters** Amanda Waldroupe, Jake Thomas,  
Devan Schwartz, Robert Britt, Sue Zalokar  
**Photographers** Leah Nash, Ken Hawkins, Kristina Wright

## Board of Directors

Bruce Anderson (Chairman), Michael Anderson (Vice-chairman), Heather Stadick (Treasurer), Eddy Barbosa (Secretary), Rich Rodgers, Brad Taylor, Leo Rhodes, Ken Hawkins, Nora Coon, Darren Alexander

## Volunteers

Mary Pacios, Leo Rhodes, Jan Bayer, Eliese Baker, Sue Zalokar, Michael Moore, Robert Britt, Cynthia Kiehl, Hannah Schultz, Robyn Wirkes, Shannon Lattin

## 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.