

EDITORIAL

Effort to control sidewalks
sidesteps civil liberties

Oregon statutes are filled with preemptions, those law-of-the-land overrides on local government. They have their supporters and detractors, depending on what side of the argument you're on, but in the best of matters they can be protections against the whittling away of civil rights that we hold self evident.

One such preemption is that if you're going to get removed from a public sidewalk for being a nuisance, the people removing you had better have a good reason. The burden of proof that you intended to be a nuisance is on them.

That's been a thorn in the side of Portland's sidewalk laws for years. Locally, sidewalk laws have tried to prohibit people from sitting and lying on public

thoroughfares, but they get tripped up when the state says you can't just wholesale remove or harass people just because you don't want them around. Freedom of expression prevails.

The first significant chip in this civil liberty

is winding its way through the State Legislature now. It's a bill that would change state law to prevent it from preempting a city's authority to regulate or control the public's use of its sidewalks. The Portland Business Alliance is pushing the bill, with the less than veiled intention to ban sitting and lying on sidewalks entirely, homeless included. In other words, Oregon — on this issue — keep those pesky civil liberties off our sidewalks.

To be sure, there is illegal behavior on our sidewalks, and aggression and violence should be met with police enforcement, just as our laws currently allow. And indeed, sidewalks are intended to facilitate pedestrian traffic, which our laws protect as well. In addressing violations, the onus is on the police, where it belongs. Extending prohibitions on sitting and lying on sidewalks beyond this is to target people not intentionally breaking any laws or blocking a single step. And history bears out that the people caught up in this net are predominantly homeless.

Street Roots wants to see a thriving business community. We want safe sidewalks, and we want individuals and organizations to respect one another and work in partnership toward a better tomorrow. With a \$25 million shortfall in our city's budget, and 10 percent cuts hitting our most vital services for sheltering our city's thousands of homeless men, women and children, we should be rolling up our sleeves looking for ways to work better together, not slipping through back doors to grab the upper hand. The House should kill this bill.

Oregon's founding fathers crafted a constitution that, like its federal counterpart, makes paramount the protection of free speech, but with even broader strokes: "No law shall be passed restraining the free expression of opinion, or restricting the right to speak, write, or print freely on any subject whatever; but every person shall be responsible for the abuse of this right."

To that we say, hear, hear. And here, too, if you please.

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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Stay connected with us online
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Businesses, readers and vendors work together

Street Roots is growing. At the core of what we do is our vendor program. More than 80 individuals and families who sell Street Roots in the community collectively represent the idea that people

experiencing poverty and homelessness can provide for themselves. Of course, it takes a great newspaper team, a loyal readership and the larger community to make vendors successful.

DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

What often times gets left out of this narrative is how the business community plays a critical role in helping people get a hand up. We have relationships with more than 50 local businesses in the community that work with our vendors to maintain their livelihood.

Street Roots is in the process of expanding our outreach in the community and to vendors. The strategy is two-fold. First, we're working on providing more services to vendors in-house. Our relationship with Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest has allowed us to think about creative and effective ways to empower vendors to have the tools they need to be successful in the community.

Our volunteer coordinator, Kara Dimitruk, has been with us for a little more than six months, ushering in a new volunteer program and working one-on-one with vendors to create an environment where they can be more successful in sales. In the coming year, we are working on implementing a foot-care program, haircuts and monthly motivational speakers for vendors. We couldn't be more thrilled with Dimitruk's work and the work of the JVC program. If you would like to get involved with Street Roots by volunteering on one of these projects go to streetroots.org and fill out our nifty volunteer application.

The second part of the outreach strategy is developing stronger relationships with the businesses where Street Roots vendors sell. Our vendor coordinator, Cole Merkel, a

former Jesuit Volunteer himself, has started doing quarterly outreach calls and visits with store managers and owners of local businesses, letting them know we're available and asking how we can better serve their needs. We believe having a happy business that works with Street Roots equals a happy customer and, ultimately, a happy Street Roots reader.

During our outreach, the overwhelming majority of store managers and owners talked about how happy they were to have Street Roots vendors in front of their establishments. Having a Street Roots vendor greet customers with a smile and a "thank you" creates a stable environment in front of stores. It also allows vendors to become part of the fabric of local neighborhoods and gain a sense of belonging and dignity. It also allows individuals the ability to establish themselves financially.

We know that we aren't perfect. Everyone at Street Roots didn't get here because they woke up one day and wanted to be a Street Roots vendor. For many, it's a matter of survival. For others, selling the newspaper helps improve their quality of life.

Whatever the reason for selling the paper, it is hard work. You have to be a salesperson. You have to endure rejection and decades of stereotypes about homeless people. Some people are verbally or physically threatened or abused. On the flipside, for every negative interaction there are numerous positive ones. People begin to know vendors by name and learn their interests. They engage in dialogue about the neighborhood and about what's in the latest edition of the paper. Class and cultural lines are bridged and new conversations emerge.

We have vendor feedback and incident report links on our website (streetroots.org) that let readers write in about vendors. We welcome your feedback and input. It helps make the entire Street Roots team stronger, and a stronger Street Roots means a stronger community. We can't thank vendors, businesses and readers enough.

LETTERS

Reemergence of sit-lie controversy sparks reader response

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

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

One of the main problems with Portland's sit-lie ordinance is that it was enforced sparingly, and then only when a person was assumed to be homeless. Never once was I asked to "move along" when I was sitting on a sidewalk waiting for a bus or MAX. I can assume it was because I don't appear homeless.

That said, something needs to be done about aggressive panhandling in Portland's downtown streets. I am one of those who will not give money to panhandlers, but will purchase food, especially for animals/pets. Maybe the secret is in taking away the need to panhandle. Novel idea.

CARMEN DUNNINGTON
Portland

We already have laws prohibiting negative public behavior, and we have been through this ad nauseum for as long as I've lived in Portland, over 20 years now. Business owners, we love you and value you and like spending money with you, but if you cannot deal with the urban landscape looking urban, it is time to open up shop in SE Portland or somewhere that is more in accordance with your needs. And Charlie Hales — I was worried you would be too much in bed with business, and this gives me a sinking feeling that maybe I was right. Charlie, I like you: Please prove me wrong!

ORION
Portland

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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.