

EDITORIAL

Time to step out of the sidewalk quagmire

A bill that would essentially revive Portland's sit-lie law died in an Oregon Senate committee last week. That's good news for people experiencing homelessness and free speech advocates around the state. In Portland, it's far more complex.

The Portland Business Alliance was hoping the bill would clear the way to create stricter guidelines in Portland's sidewalk ordinance. The city's previous sit-lie policies have been ruled unconstitutional on three separate occasions. House Bill 2963 would have prohibited the state from preempting a city's authority to control or regulate the sidewalks — something that played a key role in both appellate and circuit court rulings that struck down prior Portland sidewalk laws.

Where do we go from here?

For years, homeless youth, often called "road warriors,"

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have been at the epicenter of the Portland Business Alliance's public policy efforts. Downtown businesses and some non-profits have deemed the street youth unreachable and a

nuisance to the flow of traffic and to an overall friendly business and tourism climate in downtown.

The general public at times has become fed up with the number of "aggressive" panhandlers downtown. The Oregonian editorial board has written on many occasions about the confrontational behavior of the street youth and called for government to do something about it. Mayor Charlie Hales has signaled that panhandlers in Portland are one of his top priorities.

The failure of House Bill 2963 certainly puts a damper on those plans, but it certainly won't stop them.

Street Roots believes that when there are bad actors in our public space, homeless or not, and they are breaking the law, law enforcement should arrest them. If someone's being assaulted on the streets, there's a law for that. If someone has an aggressive animal that's threatening, or off leash, there's a law for that too. Law enforcement should enforce those laws when necessary.

More so, if the city wants to curb bad behavior in public spaces, the city should dedicate more time and resources to mental health and homeless outreach workers and police walking the beat.

Homelessness in Portland's downtown core is not going away. Oregon is experiencing a growing number of homeless youth in our school system and a recession that continues to punish the poor. It's not realistic to think we can sweep people on the streets out of sight, out of mind.

Whatever the solutions are, they need to be met with innovative thinking and harm-reduction models. If we've learned anything over the past three decades with the criminalization of the poor, it's that you can't stop poverty with stricter laws that offer no real solutions to the problems.

The sidewalk issue is a quagmire. The sooner we can move on from this discussion and on to the larger issues our city and region face concerning poverty, the closer we will be to providing an opportunity for those asking for change on our streets corners.

Bureau change-up must be more than change

Mayor Charlie Hales has shuffled the deck at the city by reassigning bureaus to each commissioner saying, "This will allow commissioners to interact, and to share their passion and knowledge for the various bureaus."

From the outside looking in, it's too early to determine what the implications might be for

the city and its residents.

The optimist side of me wants to think that by reassigning bureaus, each commissioner will be able to tackle a range of issues, while being able to understand at a deeper level how the city can work in unison to come to grips with important problems today and in the decade to come.

The pessimist in me thinks that this might be just a reshuffling of the deck chairs with no clear vision for the future.

I'll be the first to admit that change can be a good thing, and that by changing some of the assignments we can combat cronyism. Saying that, it's hard to believe that the city will not struggle in some areas due to such a radical changeover.

The city is coming off back-to-back one-term mayors. This has a major impact on citywide systems and the residents served. Possibly, Charlie is at the beginning of a long run as mayor and this is one small strategic step in a much grander plan. If not, it might well as be more busy work, and change for the sake of change. Time will tell.

While we've accomplished many great things on the housing front, and continue

to work towards providing people with a safe and stable home, revenue for affordable housing and homelessness has declined. Most of this has occurred because of the recession, the decline of revenue from the state and bad federal housing policy.

Locally, we've collectively held the line. While many urban communities have experienced dire shortfalls for housing resources, Portland has found a way to prioritize our most vulnerable residents despite having a hole in the bucket. Part of this is having great leadership, the other part is having an innovative public and private sector that prioritizes housing and homeless services.

Saying that, the writing is on the wall. We need leadership to generate more resources for the many culturally diverse communities that need access to an affordable and safe place to call home. Without additional resources, we are spinning our wheels, and the gap between the rich and the poor, both fiscal and cultural, will only grow.

I believe that we have a range of housing champions at City Hall, including Dan Saltzman, who has a proven track record of getting things done and supporting Portland's most vulnerable citizens.

The question becomes this: can we turn having great champions for housing into new resources? Advocates, the business community and Portland's residents are ready. It's a matter of leveraging all of these partnerships into something of value and not getting bogged down in dealing with homelessness, specifically downtown, when there are greater challenges in housing in our city and state.



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.

How To Heal

By John Michael

Nature everywhere but not a drop to drink.
Poisonous minds create dry bone desserts.
You heal a child with affection
Dry bone deserts need affection.

Nurture the soil.
Nurture the seeds.
Sing to the new shoots.
Call the weeds flowers.

The moon loves your laugh,
Laugh yours for her.
The sun shines brighter
When you dance.

Your feet can leave the ground,
But not forever.
Earth and sky are in you,
Run in your blood.

But you square yourself in,
Being your very self.
Torture others with your intellect.
How sad.

I love you.
Allow me to kiss your cheek.
Hold my hand
And let's walk
Into that dry bone desert.
Kindness for others
Heal your own wounds.

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 guides, call 503-228-5657. 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.