

## Heavy lifting still needed to solve City's budget problems



Commissioner Steve Novick was elected to Portland City Council in 2012. He currently heads the city's Transportation, Emergency Communications and Emergency Management Bureaus.

BY STEVE NOVICK  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

On March 6, KATU conducted a poll of Portlanders, asking their views on various options to help close the City's deficit. The poll found that 85 percent were opposed to closing "the Clark Center, a 90-bed homeless shelter." The idea of closing the Clark Center drew the opposition of more Portlanders than any other cut that the poll mentioned.

In subsequent weeks, Nick Fish, Amanda Fritz and I all let Mayor Hales know that we placed a very high priority on preserving not only the Clark Center, but the other safety net services championed by Street Roots. On April 30, Mayor Hales released a proposed budget that preserved the safety net services. The budget the Council finally adopted made significant cuts to police, to fire and rescue, to administrative services, to planning; it assumes that city employees will not receive a full cost of living increase; but it made no cuts to the safety net services.

Unfortunately, there will still be cuts in safety net services this year. The support services that the Portland Housing Bureau provides, for instance, were forced to absorb a nearly \$1.3 million reduction from the Federal government. That affects programs like rental assistance, transitional housing, and permanent housing and access for

vulnerable populations.

But there is some reason to hope that next year will be better for people in need. On January 1, the Affordable Care Act will become fully effective, which means that thousands of people will suddenly become eligible for Medicaid. Right now, the city and especially the county spend a lot of money on health care (including "regular" physical health care, mental health services, and alcohol and drug treatment) for those who are uninsured. If Medicaid starts picking that up, your local governments should have more money to spend on other services — such as affordable housing.

Personally, I am interested in exploring the question of whether national and state health reform provides an opportunity to restructure the way emergency medical services, including the huge percentage of the fire and rescue bureau's work which falls into the medical category — are delivered and paid for. Right now, fire and rescue's medical-related work isn't covered by health insurance. I hope that I, as Commissioner for the Bureau of Emergency Communications, along with Commissioner Saltzman, as Fire and Rescue Commissioner, can talk with the medical industry about forging partnerships whereby we change the way we do business in a way that helps reduce their emergency room costs. In return, they can help bear some of

the cost of our medical services. If we are successful, that too could free up local tax dollars to improve other services.

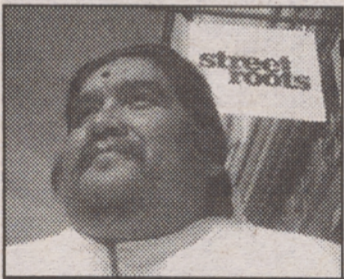
Now that I have been assigned the role of Transportation Commissioner, I have another set of inequities and funding shortfalls to try to figure out how to deal with. I want to work with TriMet to see how soon we can add more frequent bus service in underserved areas, such as along 122nd Avenue. I want to add sidewalks in places where there are no sidewalks, so children can walk to school and seniors (and others) can walk to transit. But we also need to figure out how to address a \$750 million street maintenance shortfall, over the next 10 years (\$75 million a year; we're only spending \$10 million a year now).

Those are going to be heavy lifts. But I don't think they're impossible lifts. After all, Portland families, businesses and governments spend \$244 million a year on car maintenance and repair, and over \$600 million on gas. We should be able to come up with a small fraction of that for street maintenance, plus some additional funds for sidewalks and transit.

I look forward to working with you on these and other issues. I thank you for your advocacy for services for the vulnerable in the city budget. And I am grateful to my fellow commissioners and the mayor for responding to that advocacy.

## Sometimes, finding a good friend in the rain is just Ducky

I had been in Portland for about a month looking for a place to sell my Street Roots. I was on the MAX when I noticed Trader Joe's in the Hollywood District. I decided to try my luck. Standing in front of Trader Joe's, my sales were going great. Then one of the workers from Trader Joe's told me I couldn't sell in front of the building. But I could sell on the sidewalk by



### THE WANDERER

Leo Rhodes

Leo Rhodes is a street activist and homeless advocate. He is also a vendor with Street Roots and a regular contributor to the newspaper.

the main road, just not in front of the store. I looked toward the sidewalk, there wasn't very much foot traffic. On the other side there were a lot more people walking.

So I went over to sell by Panera Bread, coming to an agreement with another vendor to share the turf. I took the mornings.

Days went by and it started to rain. Panera Bread has an over hang with tables and chairs under it. When the rain got too bad I would get some coffee and wait until it stopped or slowed down. If it were warm enough I would stand in the rain.

A few people said I was crazy. "Why don't you get out of the rain?" Others would ask if I had an umbrella, and some would even offer me one, saying they would bring me one next time they came by. The next time I saw them they would tell me they forgot the umbrella.

One day a guy came up to me and we got to talking. At the end of our conversation he said, "I have an umbrella for you if you want it." I said sure, I'll take it.

"It's a small one," he said, "Do you still want it?" I looked him in the eye and said,

"Yes, I'll take it. Hey, every little bit helps." He looked at me, smiled and shook his head a little, then said, "OK, remember you asked for it."

I looked at him, puzzled, and then thought, "Aw man, what's he going to bring me?" A few days later he walked up to me with a big smile on his face. Excited, he said, "I brought your umbrella." I watched him as he grabbed it out of his bag. The first thing I noticed was a duck's head. Smiling, he gave me the umbrella. It was a little kid's umbrella. I was shocked. I guess it showed on my face, because he immediately said, "Well, if you don't want it." With a sad look on his face he tried to grab the umbrella out of my hand. I pulled the umbrella close to my chest and told him, I want it.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Yes." I replied. He looked at my face for a while. I repeated, "Yes I'll take it." He started smiling again. Then he told me the umbrella was his daughter's. She was happy to give it to me. He started laughing telling me his daughter is in college and outgrew this umbrella.

Some people smiled at me, others laughed at me. Still others made the comment, "That's a small umbrella. I have a bigger one if you want it." So I ended up with four different umbrellas, one bigger than the next. Months later the guy that gave me the little umbrella came by. Disappointed, he said, "Where's my umbrella that I gave you? You gave it away?" I pointed to my bags and said, "It's over there." He got happy and stayed a while to talk. He asked if I still use the little umbrella. I told him, "Yes, I use it to protect my bags." By the look on his face I knew he

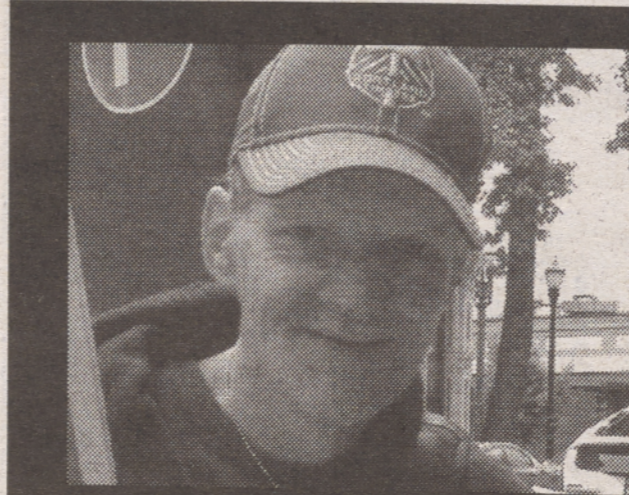
didn't understand so I showed him. He said, "Wow, that's cool."

The years have gone by and I've had many umbrellas. Since 2009, I've had the little umbrella. It kinda became my security blanket. Hell, it was with me when the rent-a-cop told me I couldn't sleep in a doorway. It was with me when I was walking in the rain in the freezing cold and in the hot summer days and nights. I started to call the little umbrella, my Little Ducky. Then I shortened it to Ducky. During the rough and hard times I would say to Ducky, "One of these days we'll have a place and we'll be inside."

I was staying at a friend's place, when I noticed Ducky was gone. I panicked and started looking for Ducky. I didn't find him. Sadly I went to sell my papers at Whole Foods in the Hollywood District. I felt like I had lost my best friend. My regular customers noticed I was sad. They asked, "What's wrong?" I didn't tell them, I felt they wouldn't understand. After a while I thought to myself, what are you doing. Ducky was only a little umbrella, stop acting like this. I started laughing at myself. Another thought went through my mind, the movie "Cast Away" with Tom Hanks, and how he felt when he lost his friend Wilson, the volleyball. Sometime later I found Ducky, and now, just like I promised we're inside.

I and other homeless and formerly homeless people make documentaries about homelessness. The project is called, "Empowered Voices Media Project." EVMP is through Sisters of the Road, with support from Portland Community Media. The name of my operation: Ducky Productions.

Thank you for lending a hand up in  
Portland and supporting your  
neighborhood vendor!



This man works.  
So does  
Street Roots.