

# Saltzman promises a "fresh set of eyes" at housing bureau

Shelters, domestic violence, foster care among priorities commissioner emphasizes in city's housing agenda

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Portland Mayor Charlie Hales shocked City Hall watchers when he announced his bureau assignments in early June. With few exceptions, each commissioner walked away with a new portfolio of responsibilities. It shuffled the balance of power in City Hall, and gives each commissioner a lot to learn.

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman takes over the Portland Housing Bureau, which oversees the city's efforts to end homelessness and provide affordable housing throughout the city. He assumes the rule on the heels of Commissioner Nick Fish, who won a Council seat in 2008 with the explicit intention of being the city's housing commissioner.

Saltzman inherits Fish's legacy, including reorganizing the city's housing machinery and creating the Portland Housing Bureau; breaking ground on the Bud Clark Commons; expanding the city's emergency winter shelter program, and trying, but failing, to negotiate flexible camping guidelines for homeless individuals who could not seek shelter.

Giving the Housing Bureau to Saltzman is not a decision out of left field: the council's longest-serving member was a chief architect behind the creation of the Portland Children's Levy, which pumps millions of dollars each year into domestic violence, children and education programs. He is also one of the region's most vocal advocates for children's issues and domestic violence prevention, issues he hopes to work on as the city's new housing commissioner.

**Amanda Waldroupe:** What was your reaction when Mayor Hales made his bureau assignments and nothing was as people expected?

**Dan Saltzman:** I'm of the school of thought that it's good to shake things up. I was surprised to the extent he mixed things up. There's a learning curve, but with that comes a new zest, a fresh set of eyes looking at issues, asking questions, hopefully asking good questions. Everybody always thinks they're asking a dumb question. There are no dumb questions.

**A.W.:** In terms of you taking a position and advocating for particular issues or policies, what kind of role will you take?

**D.S.:** There's issues that I bring to this



Dan Saltzman

that are priorities of mine. I'm very interested in more emergency shelters for women. I have a pretty long-standing interest in family shelter space and domestic violence. Do we need more shelter beds, or things like hotel vouchers. With a hotel voucher, you can bring an adult male child with you. In a shelter, most have rules about not having teen male children. Another one is what are we doing with kids aging out of foster care.

**A.W.:** What is it about the demographic of foster kids aging out of the system that concerns you so much?

**D.S.:** It's a set of individuals that demand our attention. Many of them have suffered horrendously in foster care, have no sense of what's up or down, right or wrong because they've lacked positive parental role models. I feel a special obligation to do something about that.

**A.W.:** How do you think your approach will be different from the previous housing commissioner, Nick Fish's?

**D.S.:** I'm not sure I could tell you what my legacy will be. I can tell you these are the areas I'm always going to be passionate about.

**A.W.:** A couple weeks ago, the Housing Bureau released a point-in-time report showing a 10 percent increase in street homelessness. How well do you think the city's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and its Housing First

model is working?

**D.S.:** If you look at the numbers between the point-in-time reports in the last two years, you could probably say it's not working as well. But I think a lot has been achieved since we passed the first plan. The whole evolution of the concept of services connected to housing ... has come of age in the last 10 years (and) how we marshal resources that we already have at our disposal.

**A.W.:** The 10-Year Reset Plan recognizes the existence of various subpopulations in the Portland homeless population — people with disabilities, children, people experiencing domestic violence. Knowing that there are these different demographics of people, what do you think the Portland Housing Bureau can be doing differently?

**D.S.:** It does require, as the Reset Plan calls for, close collaboration between the city, the county and Home Forward. I'll be quite blunt that the chronically single adult issue is an important issue, but it's not as huge a priority for me as some of the other areas I just cited.

**A.W.:** Why?

**D.S.:** It's important to provide people with opportunities to get off the street — like rent assistance and services connected to housing, but there's a core population that none of that is ever going to touch.

**A.W.:** Do you think homelessness can be ended in Multnomah County?

**D.S.:** No. I don't. I think there's a lot we can accomplish. Services connected to housing, rent assistance, the Bud Clark Commons and services like that all have roles. Do I see that ultimately ending homelessness? No. I'd loved to be proven wrong.

**A.W.:** There's a bill in the Legislature that would curb discrimination against people with Section 8 vouchers. What else do you think landlords and people in the real estate and the rental community can do to alleviate poverty and provide assistance to low income and potentially formerly homeless renters?

**D.S.:** First of all, I hope that bill passes. It will really open up a lot of opportunities for Section 8 renters that are currently just not

available. Fair housing is a very important area — that there's no discrimination based on gender, race, and economic circumstance. There's a lot of action going on there. I would expect the multi-family rental industry, which to all indications they have been, a full partner in making sure that this is not tolerated. To the extent that there can be fewer barriers to getting into rental housing in terms of security deposits, credit history and things like that — on balance, that would be probably be a good thing. But I'm sure there's a whole other side to that.

**A.W.:** Are you saying that you would like to see landlords not consider credit history?

**D.S.:** Not being in their shoes, I can understand how they would react to a statement like that. But there might be some happy median there.

**A.W.:** In the backdrop of what we've been talking about are the budgets for these various programs. The Housing Bureau is very reliant upon one-time funding and it's struggled to find a stable revenue stream, one that can be more or less reliable in years going forward. Are you interested in seeking a stable funding source, and where do you think it can be found?

**D.S.:** I think we made a big step in the budget we're about to adopt. We took a lot of one-time funded housing services and converted them to ongoing. That was a huge chunk, almost \$9 million worth of one-time programs in our ongoing programs. But many of our one-time funded programs get funded with serial, one-time appropriations. The safety net and the issues around homelessness have always enjoyed that status.

**A.W.:** Mayor Hales has made a point of saying he wants to address panhandling in some way. Do you share his concerns about the issue?

**D.S.:** I don't want to wade into the sidewalk management issues because I find it to be quite confusing, frankly. We get a lot of complaints from people about the environment downtown. We've always gotten those complaints, though. I'm not sure there are any answers out there.

**A.W.:** You seem to be saying that this issue

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## Homeless one-night count brings numbers up 10 percent

STAFF REPORTS

The number of homeless counted on the streets of Portland and Multnomah County is up 10 percent over 2011 figures, according to the figures released earlier this month.

The latest 2013 Point-in-time count conducted by the city and county reported 2,869 people who were homeless — meaning sleeping in emergency shelter, vouchered into motels or sleeping outdoors. Of those, 1,895 people were found literally sleeping outdoors on the night of the count.

An additional 1,572 people were sleeping in transitional housing on the night of the count, bringing the total number of individuals and families above 4,000 people.

"The numbers are consistent with what we've been seeing on the streets," says Executive Director Marc Jolin with JOIN. "We know as a system we've helped thousands of people avoid eviction and

homelessness, while housing thousands more."

Jolin went on to praise local government for prioritizing the safety net, but says since the beginning of the recession it's been an uphill battle. "There's a lot more we need to do as a community and society if we're going to end the tragedy of thousands of vulnerable people who have no place to call home."

A breakdown of the report's findings:

- Half of those sleeping outdoors have been homeless for less than a year.
- Chronic homelessness (a focus of the 10-year plan to end homelessness), increased by 27 percent since 2011 among individuals sleeping outdoors.
- The number of literally homeless persons in families with children increased by 72, or 18 percent, since 2011. There are 749 homeless children in Multnomah County, 264 of them under the age of five.
- The number of literally homeless women increased by 171, or 22 percent,

since 2011.

■ More than half of the homeless population has a disabling condition.

■ Nineteen percent of the overall homeless population and 41 percent of homeless females were affected by domestic violence

■ The number of people of color who are unsheltered was 38 percent higher in 2013 than in 2011; the number of people of color in emergency shelter was 16 percent higher; people of color experiencing homelessness are more likely to be families with children than the overall homeless population.

The report notes the reason for the continued increase in homelessness is due to unemployment and extremely low vacancy rates, which the U.S. Census Bureau places at 3.4 percent in the Portland metro area.

The low vacancy rates have contributed to higher housing costs and limited rental availability. This has been especially

challenging for low-income households, who must compete for a limited number of affordable units. The current fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Portland metro area is \$912, which is 64 percent of the monthly income for a full-time minimum wage worker.

The report also notes that the death of 56 people on the streets in 2012 could have been prevented with housing.

Nationally, it's unclear if homelessness has increased or decreased overall. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, overall homelessness has decreased since 2005 in Oregon. This conflicts with local and state data that show an overall increase in homelessness.

Many insiders believe homelessness has overwhelmingly increased nationally due to the recession and the lack of state and federal funding for housing and homeless services.