

## EDITORIAL

## City has to back up good intentions with leadership

Mayor Charlie Hales didn't become mayor with the hopes of having to solve homelessness, especially in a growing city like Portland. But the crisis of thousands of people sleeping outside, as it relates to mental health, public safety, neighborhood livability and the lack of housing is exactly what Hales has inherited.

Hales isn't alone. The same debate about what to do about homelessness and the housing shortage is happening all across the United States.

We commend the mayor for making homelessness a budget priority in the upcoming 2014-15 budget.

**Everyone has an opinion on how to spend what little we have to solve the massive problem of homelessness. It takes more than good intentions and idealism to manage the problem.**

It's not an easy task. The complexities of the homelessness and housing crisis in our city and around the nation are many. The federal governments lack of support for local communities on the issue has been an

ongoing crisis. In 1978, the federal government budgeted \$83 billion through the Bureau of Housing and Urban Development toward housing for low-income Americans. In 2012, that number was closer to \$41 billion. Currently, Congress is looking at cutting \$9 billion in food stamp assistance over the next 10 years. That's not to mention the lack of vision on supporting people without employment.

In many ways, Portland has a mayor and four city commissioners who are not only sympathetic to the cause, but also understand its many complexities. You can't solve homelessness with one central theme or strategy, and you can't simply make the problem go away.

How a city responds to its own residents, and people struggling without a home, is a direct representation of the values of that community. In Portland, it's clear we need ongoing support to help individuals and families have the opportunity to be successful. It starts with giving people a safe place to call home.

It's not an easy task for government to solve the issue. Everyone has an opinion on how to spend what little we have to solve the massive problem of homelessness. It takes more than good intentions and idealism to manage the problem. It's one thing to care about the issue, it's another all together to dig in and work towards solving it.

Creating a more coordinated effort with the community and mental health outreach workers, housing women and children experiencing homelessness, and finding a permanent location for Right 2 Dream Too are all in the best interest of the city. And that makes us all stakeholders. And fortunately, many hands make light work.

## We have the energy to power solutions

What happens when a group of people experiencing homelessness and poverty decide to take matters into their own hands and organize to

improve their quality of life? Unfortunately, they often are looked upon as a nuisance in the community.

It's common knowledge that many people on the streets are demonized as lazy and not doing for

themselves. We also know that the Portland Business Alliance and The Oregonian editorial board advocate for stricter sidewalk laws, and that law enforcement is forced to act, sweeping camps when they are deemed unruly or where there is open drug use and/or violence.

That's why I can't understand why Right 2 Dream Too and other homeless advocates are discredited when they work to reverse the very trends considered to be at the root of the problem.

What makes one homeless organization a success and a group like Right 2 Dream Too a nuisance in the community?

For more than two years, Right 2 Dream Too has worked to give more than 100 individuals and families a safe place to bed down at night. The organization has rules prohibiting any drug use or violence. They have worked with local social-service agencies and government to get people off the streets and into permanent housing. They have participated, like other organizations, in public process, and are respectful to institutions even in the face of those groups trying to discredit and destroy their existence.

In many ways Right 2 Dream Too is not only a response to homelessness itself, it's a response to the very critics like the Portland Business Alliance and The Oregonian editorial board that have consistently advocated for safer behaviors downtown. Unfortunately, these critics have repeatedly chosen to throw groups like Right 2 Dream Too and many others under the bus due to short-sighted policy strategies that repeatedly fail to come to fruition. The

reality is that while many institutions are tired of seeing homeless people downtown and throughout the community, people experiencing homelessness and advocates trying to find solutions are pretty darned tired too.

While it may be hard to believe, we are actually making headway. The latest \$1.7 million bump from the city to support targeted outreach for homeless women and people experiencing crisis is one example of taking the bull by the horns and working surgically to deliver outcomes. It's clear that moving forward we can't be thinking in terms of us-versus-them, but instead work together to deliver real housing options for people on the streets. We have some real opportunities in the next city and county budget cycles.

Right 2 Dream Too is a no-brainer. The city must work together with Right 2 Dream Too and the business community to find a location for the organization. The group offers real solutions to the illogical reality of homelessness. I don't personally know where the group should end up permanently, but I do know that they are not going away and deserve a safe place to call home.

When it comes to The Oregonian editorial board, I personally have no qualms with any newspaper determining an editorial stance based upon in-depth reporting and taking everyone's account into consideration. We just ask that they also take into consideration the complexities and harsh realities of homelessness, and the fact that there is a reason groups like Right 2 Dream Too exist. It's not because nearly one million people woke up this morning in America wanting to be homeless.

There's no single strategy or theme to tackle the problem of homelessness. It requires a coordinated effort. We will have to continue to work together across political, economical and ideological philosophies. Being able to offer housing to people suffering from mental health and addiction means working with a broad coalition of individuals and organizations. We can't do this in a vacuum. No one organization or entity can solve this problem alone.



## 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 DO YOU THINK?

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

## LETTER

On behalf of myself and many others, I would like to thank you, and the many other sponsors and others who helped bring love, peace and joy to the many homeless and below-poverty line individuals during the 2013 Christmas holiday Season. Your gifts and theirs allowed many families and individuals to experience a safe and happy holiday!

DAVID L. MAY  
Portland

## 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](http://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.



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