

## EDITORIAL

## Bold moves a good start to prioritizing people

**B**old. That's the word we would use to describe Multnomah County right now.

Multnomah County Chair Marissa Madrigal and the County Commissioners are going big. A new \$1.4 million mental health program to prevent people experiencing mental health problems from being warehoused in our county jails is just the start. Increased support for housing, backfilling a recession-torn budget, and getting out front on after-school programs is all a part of the proposed budget package this year. We like it.

The idea of putting people first is an important step to balancing a community on the brink of being overrun with high housing costs and a lack of blue-collar jobs in the region.

**Business as usual doesn't get us there. It doesn't cut it. It simply doesn't live up to the dreams we collectively share and work toward as a community.**

It's no secret that Portland and Multnomah County are changing, in many cases for the better. It's also a cold hard fact that common Portlanders continue to struggle.

Today, a minimum-wage worker would have to work 71 hours per week in Multnomah County to earn enough to afford a two-bedroom apartment. That's not counting basic health care, food and utilities. If our elected leaders aren't seriously considering a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, they should be. When we prioritize people, the rest will follow.

We commend Mayor Charlie Hales for prioritizing additional money for housing and homeless services, but it's simply not enough. At times, the direction the city appears to be going baffles us. The bike share program may be a good idea, but is it really what Portland needs right now? Should Portland families, already battling a rising cost of living, be saddled with a new monthly tax for transportation projects? Meanwhile, people of color and other hard-working Portlanders have begged for years for significant, ongoing investments for affordable housing, only to see the issue languish by neglect, here and in Salem. Hard questions still need to be asked and answered.

There's no question that Portland is on the rebound. New companies are moving to town, the tourism industry is booming and in the next few years we're going to see a lot more cranes in the sky.

What we need now more than ever is people power. We're talking about economic development to support working people and housing prices that supports those individuals and families living in our neighborhoods, attending our schools, and creating the diverse community we all deserve. Business as usual doesn't get us there. It doesn't cut it. It simply doesn't live up to the dreams we collectively share and work toward as a community.

We commend our elected leaders for a job well done, but ask them to carefully think about how all of our moving parts get us to a place where people of all colors can thrive; where we don't see thousands of people sleeping on our streets; where both our elders and the young can co-exist; where young families can afford to live and play; where we are proud to be trailblazers on issues that matter. That's a Portland we can all work towards — a Portland that works.

## Knowing you're not alone makes all the difference

**M**ike has lived a very hard life. Challenges with mental health, addiction and living with Tourette's syndrome have for years contributed to a life on and off the streets. Mike has been a regular at Street Roots for quite a while now. We've both seen



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## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

each other at our best, and at times, our worst. I'm proud to call Mike my friend.

"I always feel like I should be doing something more than I am, but the damage that my mind and body has gone through is real,"

Mike told me last September. "I'm going to continue on, day-by-day, step-by-step. I may fall down. I'll have to get back up. My progress isn't going to happen at the pace I assume it should happen. It certainly isn't going to happen at the pace that someone wants it to happen. I can't be rushed. I feel like, right now, as long as I try to be clean and sober and to be a better person, that is all that matters. Instead of walking up to a dope dealer and socking him in the mouth, I'm writing poetry, I watch the Seahawks, I sell Street Roots. I'm doing the only thing I know how to do to survive and to stay sane. I'm working to find God."

Fast-forward nine months and Mike is still hard at it.

Mike spent nearly seven months in local shelters, something he said was one of the biggest challenges of his life due to his

impatience with people and living with Tourette's.

"I've wanted to give up and use every single day," Mike says to me. "But I haven't yet."

Being an avid Seahawks fan, Mike tells me laughing, "Having the Seahawks win the Super Bowl helped a lot."

Today, with the help of the community and a powerful determination, he is in housing and going strong.

Mike recently told me in front of Street Roots, "I don't know if I can do this. I have this voice inside my head that's constantly pulling me back and tugging at me. It has me doubting myself."

I laughed and told Mike that he was an amazing man and no one could ever take that away, and to have faith that he wasn't alone. I told him I had just had a meeting with some of the smartest people in politics, and to be honest, they were just making it up as they went along. We all wake up hoping to just make it through the day, doing the best we can. The only difference is that some people have a wealth of resources at their disposal and some don't. Hearing that voice tugging at us, it's part of the human experience. What matters is community and knowing you're not alone.

"I like that," Mike says.

"I just made that up," I said, laughing.

"I know," he said with a smile.

"One day at a time," Mike says with a

fist bump.

True that.

Go Hawks!

## 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

## The Whys of Youth

by Robert Strandlof

Dog ran over the freeway  
crying, why?  
Rolling down mountain roads on bikes  
passing cars on right, why?  
Trying to understand fire,  
striking matches behind couch, why?  
Learning to drive on dirt road  
Dad sitting on hood shooting beer cans, why?  
Sitting in boat,  
waiting for California to fall into ocean, why?  
Maybe youth can be understood when I am older  
or maybe youth is just what it is,  
a time to be a giant, monster or Superman, why?

## 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 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.



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.