

EDITORIAL

Opportunity Initiative a good investment in tomorrow

What a weird and wonderful election system we have here in Oregon. Myriad initiatives and referendums spinning tens of thousands of signatures into ballot measures in a seemingly endless cycle.

This November, one of those initiatives comes from an unlikely place: The Oregon State Treasurer's office. The Opportunity Initiative would establish an endowment funded by state investments from borrowed money. Debt payments would be made out of the state's general fund, but the prospectus is that the returns on the investment will far outpace those payments, with money to spare for student aid for higher education and training.

Education can be a passport out of poverty; an economic equalizer.

The goal is that, over time, as this endowment builds, more low-income students will have a shot at a higher education or

specialized vocational training. And consequently fewer students will be left behind for lack of funds.

This is critical, wide-angle thinking that we should be applying to many aspects of society. We've watched as the cost of housing, food and simply living have increased year after year, to both great profit of some and the detriment of many others. Meanwhile, wages have effectively declined, and middle-wage jobs have not returned to Oregon even six years after the Great Recession dug in its heels. In the absence of a meaningful housing trust fund, supported by our state legislature, safe, stable housing has slipped through the fingers of thousands of Oregonians. Poverty is rising with no correction in sight. One out of three Multnomah County residents is struggling to make ends meet, according to a new county report, and no amount of patchwork to the safety net will prevent more from falling into the same trap.

That's the bad news, but the good news is we can fix it, and one example of what that might look like is the Opportunity Initiative.

The Opportunity Initiative is an attempt to stem the tide on the education gap before it's too far gone. Oregon ranks 47th in the nation in terms of our per capita contributions to education, according to the state treasurer's office. Our statewide investment has declined while individual costs have skyrocketed. Such an imbalance can have a domino effect – inadequate education, stagnant employment opportunities, a declining labor market and on downward. The opportunity to be trained and educated well for a career and gainful employment shouldn't be a luxury of the wealthy. It can be a passport out of poverty; an economic equalizer. But today, higher education is pulling out of reach from even middle-class families, ever widening the gap, with many graduating with a lifetime's worth of crippling debt.

This is not a perfect solution to the education funding mess, nor is it the only key to correcting the economic imbalance we live with across this country. It's one proposal with great potential for years to come.

Summer has its challenges – and its rewards

Street Roots vendors work hard in the summer. It's not easy. Being homeless in the summertime isn't any fun. Longer periods of daylight are



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DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

a welcome sign for many Portlanders, but for many people on the streets it can mean going long stretches of time without adequate sleep. Typical locations for people to sleep in the winter are often off

limits due to summer events or simply a more vibrant city atmosphere. The dangers of heat stroke and dehydration are real on the streets.

Here are five ways to support vendors this summer.

1. Water. Water. Water. If you remember it, don't hesitate to share a bottle or glass of water with your favorite neighborhood vendor.

2. Stop and talk to your neighborhood vendor. Introduce yourself, and let the vendor know what you like and don't like about the paper. Stay engaged and help us build community. Street Roots provides a safe place for individuals to engage with people on the streets in a positive atmosphere.

3. Become a Street Roots ambassador and help spread the word. Buy an additional Street Roots and introduce the organization to at least one friend or coworker this summer. Turning on your peer network to Street Roots is one of the best ways you can support the organization and vendors.

4. If you are traveling out of town with family or friends, buy an extra copy of Street Roots for the road. Reading Street Roots at the airport, train station, on a road trip or by the campfire is bound to spur some great conversation.

5. If friends or family are visiting from out of town. Let them know what Street Roots is and the concept behind it, and encourage them to buy a copy if they are visiting Powell's or other locations where vendors regularly sell.

Lastly, don't forget about our upcoming Street Roots auction. The auction starts on Friday, July 18. It's the perfect way to support Street Roots and get something great in return. Find out more at www.streetrootsauction.org.

From all of us at Street Roots, we appreciate your readership and support of vendors selling the newspaper. Giving a hand up and getting a great read in return is our goal. Thank you for making that possible. Happy summer!

LETTERS

Suggestions to City Hall for better streets, democracy

"...all power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority..."

— Oregon Constitution, Article I, Section 1

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

Portland's streets and sidewalks are crumbling. This indisputable fact has recently consumed our city's political discourse, as pundits and policymakers debate how best to tax the people to pay for critically-important infrastructure. As I've watched this debate unfold, I've become more convinced than ever that the debate in City Hall totally misses the mark. Portland's fundamental challenge is, as with Mayor Hales' and Commissioner Novick's "street fee" proposal, a top-down administration that irresponsibly wastes taxpayer dollars, while ignoring the needs and the will of our communities.

What follows are a few commonsense solutions to the challenges we face, which not only use public funding in a more responsible way, but also make our democracy stronger:

1. To ensure that the city is repairing our streets without breaking the bank, all street repair projects must be subject to an open bidding process, with the Portland Bureau of Transportation competing with any interested party to provide high-quality repairs at a low cost. This will make PBOT a more accountable, more transparent institution, and will ensure that we do not

waste a single cent of taxpayer money.

2. The city should perform preventative repairs on our streets before a given problem requires extensive repairs, which can often take considerable time and lead to significant inconvenience for communities. Some jurisdictions have had great success at repairing cracks and other minor problems in roadways by pouring rubber or similar materials into pavement gaps, which can extend a road's life span while cutting costs.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, our incredible network of neighborhood associations must be able to exert greater autonomy over their own communities. Specifically on streets with particularly low traffic, neighborhoods and their community representatives should be able to manage their own neighborhood watch programs outside of the city's toxic public safety bureaucracy. Further, neighborhoods should have the power to decide how low-traffic streets are utilized and maintained based on their own community standards.

It's long past time to reinvest in our neighborhoods, and give our communities the space, resources, and – most importantly – the freedom to control their own destinies. Only by bringing power back to the people can we meet the needs of all Portlanders.

— PATRICK KANE
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 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 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.