

EDITORIAL

Portland needs a centralized storage facility for camp sweeps

For nearly a year, Street Roots has been advocating for a more centralized location for homeless campers who have their possessions confiscated during camp sweeps.

A recent article in the Portland Mercury outlines just how ridiculous the entire situation has actually become. Not only is the facility located in outer Southwest, away from the city's core, but until the Mercury's reporting, it didn't even have an address on the odd-looking facility tucked away off of Southwest Barbur Boulevard.

If the goal is to get people off the streets and accessing services and housing, then creating practical resources for people's belongings is part of the solution.

There's not even a pretext of trying to facilitate the items return.

Street Roots recommends creating a kind of one-stop shop that would allow people experiencing homeless to store their gear (personal

belongings, shopping carts, sleeping bags) in one centralized location. This location could serve as an access point for people on the streets and social-service providers to connect to services. It would also solve the problem of not having a location to provide people who have had their belongings confiscated.

If the goal is to get people off the streets and accessing services and housing, then creating practical resources for people's belongings is part of the solution.

Likewise, the city and anti-poverty advocates, including Street Roots, need to work to bridge the gap between the environmental impact people on the streets have with neighborhoods and in our natural areas. We believe that together we can find a way to be better stewards of the land and to deter littering. That can't happen without some creative thinking and coordinated efforts to address about these issues in a new way.

It's a slap in the face for people experiencing poverty — people without resources — to have to travel to outer Southwest to recover their belongings. It makes it extremely difficult to build trust and long-lasting relationships.

The city has done a great job with finding a breakthrough formula to deal with public spaces downtown and on sidewalks. There's no reason to think we can't do something great when it comes to camp sweeps. We have to move beyond creating a short-term solution to a long-term problem. Moving people from park to park and neighborhood to neighborhood doesn't solve homelessness. More targeted harm reduction camping policies will result in better outcomes.

Walking beat a positive impact on the streets

In a time when many urban environments are becoming more draconian in their approach to banning people experiencing homelessness from public spaces, Portland may be on the verge of bucking that trend.

This summer, the Portland Police Bureau put 10 police officers on the streets in downtown Portland and along Hawthorne Boulevard with the idea of building authentic relationships with

businesses, the larger community and people on the streets.

The police officers were a part of a walking beat strategy put together by the Mayor's office and the bureau with the idea of moving away from heavy handed policies that have historically failed time and again not only in Portland, but throughout the United States, as well.

Think about this: With more than 2,000 interactions with people experiencing homelessness and the general public, the 10 police officers only wrote 21 citations this summer. The officers made just over 200 arrests, mostly for outstanding warrants. We will take those odds any day of the week.

Being able to find the right formula that doesn't criminalize any one group of people in public spaces is a real breakthrough for Portland.

We know people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable. On one side of the gun is a broken criminal justice system that leaves Americans with very little opportunity, and on the other a criminal element that preys on people in poverty. There's nothing about surviving on the streets that is black and white. It's just different shades of grey that requires human beings to make impossible choices

day after day to survive. The trauma of homelessness and poverty is a cruel one.

Does this mean that we should simply celebrate and call it day? No way.

Street Roots hopes that the walking beat strategy can be extended in different parts of the city with the idea of building authentic relationships between the police and Portland residents.

Does that mean we believe we should let up on our efforts to create transparent police accountability, or to encourage changes at the bureau that encourages officers to live inside the city limits and to reflect the community it serves? Absolutely not.

In my mind, part of the evolution in creating a better police force is to inspire Portlanders themselves to become police officers, or at the very least to engage with officers in the community and not feel threatened. There's no better way to do that than by having a transparent bureau and maintaining authentic relationships.

If we as a community can come together to approach the issue of homelessness from a harm reduction model and move away from heavy handed policies that target the homeless and often times people of color then I believe we are on the verge of collectively doing some great things. Time will tell.

For far too long we've been arguing over public sidewalks instead of working toward solving the housing crisis in our community. I believe in my heart that given the opportunity, people want to do the right thing when it comes to the issue of homelessness. That's businesses, concerned neighbors, law enforcement and more. Together, we can do far more good than we can by tearing one another down.

The police walking beat was a step in the right direction. Now, let's continue to work together to give all people the opportunity at a better life and housing.



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Sleeping on Portland City Sidewalks Unprotected

by Sandra Harmon

I search the crowds each day
For my son in hopes
Ben's smell and touch
Stronger than a memory;
Overshadowing the fear of my new brain tumor.
I pick up my backpack and sleeping gear;
Exhausted again.
When I see a boy eating a PB&J on a park bench
More emotions arise.
I fight the choking vomit;
The vomit is not from the tumor this time.
Wasn't I told walking away from domestic violence
was the right thing to do?

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 a proud member 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.