

Housing initiatives a step toward 'righting the ship'

In his State of the City address, delivered last week before City Club of Portland, Mayor Charlie Hales talked about spending the past two years "righting the ship."

Financially, the city is stronger than it has been for several years, with commissioners and bureau chiefs now licking their chops over the city's budget surplus.

But righting the ship means different things to different groups of people, and for many Portlanders, it

means correcting the inflated rental and housing market that has left many residents underwater or simply adrift without a home.

This is a familiar issue for readers of Street Roots, who have no doubt read this in our pages in the past. But the crisis of housing continues to build, and an increasing number of middle-income families are feeling the pinch. It is a very real crisis that is harder to reverse with each passing year.

So we're optimistic with the announcement of some positive plans in the works. None of them are panaceas to the problem, but they show a refreshing effort to get serious about our widening housing deficit.

We applaud the City Council for investing \$20 million in housing in North and Northeast Portland to build, repair and preserve much-needed affordable housing for Portland families. By the Portland Housing Bureau's own assessment, it is nowhere near enough to correct the displacement, past and present in the neighborhood. But it is a start to leverage even greater financial investment in the area.

Other projects are being explored to build small,

basic and affordable apartments that give people who are working their way off the streets a place to move into. The tiny house movement also offers a viable housing option for families with children on smaller budgets.

This week, the Portland Housing Bureau – in the budget surplus request process – boldly asked for \$7.2 million – half the total surplus. The other half has already been dedicated to infrastructure maintenance.

The bulk of that request – \$5 million – would be dedicated to the Housing Investment Fund to preserve affordable housing in areas at risk of being gentrified. These are the neighborhoods where jobs are created, where public transportation is accessible, where the good schools are located. We should be preserving these neighborhoods for all.

Let the market take care of it, some might say. But in reality, the housing market hasn't taken care of itself without government manipulation and subsidies for decades. Tax credits, increment financing and similar incentives benefit developers and homeowners. Taxpayers help people get into very nice homes, even second homes, every year.

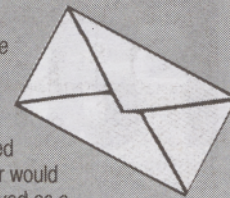
Meanwhile, the demand for housing assistance continues to increase. Portland's affordable housing deficit for our poorest residents, according to federal housing and census reports, is more than 20,000 units.

Today we have a very popular city that each year becomes increasingly unaffordable for a growing number of residents. To put our resources and energy into preserving and creating affordability is the right thing to do if we want to still recognize our neighbors 10 years from now. Let's right this ship.

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Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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If you are interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at streetroots.org/volunteer. Or call Volunteer Coordinator Grace Badik for more information at 503-228-5657.



EDITORIAL

Vendors, readers inspired by weekly paper

How is weekly going? That's the question we've been getting all month. Amazing.

For readers who aren't aware, vendors purchase the newspaper for 25 cents and then sell it for a suggested \$1 in the community. When we launched weekly at the beginning of January, we set the price of the paper for vendors at 35 cents instead of 25 cents in order to offset some of the increase in printing costs. The first couple of editions sold like hotcakes, but it was clear that additional 10 cents was eating into the vendors' income.

After talking with vendors and the larger community, we made the decision to come back down to 25 cents. After all, why should vendors have to pay the price? Wasn't the entire idea of going weekly suppose to mean a boost for vendors' income? Exactly. It was the right thing to do.

So how's it going?

Customers have responded overwhelmingly. People have communicated to vendors and staff and through social media that the move to weekly was right on time.

Small business owner Chloe Eudaly, who runs Reading Frenzy on Mississippi Avenue wrote, "You know that little paper that's sold all over town by homeless and formerly homeless people for a buck? It's not just a hobby or an excuse for spare change. They're doing investigative journalism and advocating for some of the most disenfranchised and vulnerable

members of our community. They're helping people get off the street and turn their lives around. Buy it. EVERY WEEK. Go Street Roots!" Yes!

Newspaper sales have increased overnight by nearly 40 percent over a two-week span.

"It's been going great," says Daniel, who sells in Northeast Portland. "My sales have literally doubled at my location. It's allowed me to really plan out my days and meet my basic needs, while being able to save some money to get into housing."

Then there's the reporting. Wow. The editorial team led by managing editor Joanne Zuhl and reporter Emily Green have been knocking it out of the park. And Street Roots continues to be a platform for people experiencing poverty and for social justice organizations around Oregon. Together we are stronger.

We are proud of the work that we are doing and hope you are enjoying the weekly edition of Street Roots as much as we are. The work continues. It always does.

Watching the vendors overcome unimaginable circumstances of poverty and then to deliver the newspaper each and every day to readers throughout Portland – it's truly inspiring. Readers offering their support by giving people a hand up is what makes it all come together. It's a true testament to the strength of the human spirit. It gives us hope, both individually and collectively. Go team.

From all of us at Street Roots, thank you. We couldn't do it without you.



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.