



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

What will it take to end homelessness?

Portland, like many cities throughout the United States, finds itself at a crossroads. How do we collectively tackle the housing crisis and begin to really put the resources needed into ending homelessness?

Anna Griffin's series on homelessness in *The Oregonian* has provided the region with a broader perspective on the issue. People around the city, in doorways and under bridges, in coffee houses and pubs, in the halls of power and at neighborhood gatherings are all asking the same question. How can

we tackle the housing crisis in our city?

Regional government leaders, foundations and supporters like you have been working for years to hold the line both politically and financially when it comes to housing thousands of people experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, after 30 years of divestment by the federal government from public housing, no regulations on maintaining affordable housing locally and multiple recessions, we still find ourselves asking the same questions.

What new ideas or tools can we use to specifically tackle the issue of homelessness and housing? That's the question I posed to civic leaders, government officials and advocates. Here's what they had to say.

Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County chair: "I spent the morning of Wednesday, Jan. 28 at JOIN's day center on Northeast 82nd Avenue. It was the second time I've participated in the one-night street and shelter count and the experience reminded me in a very tangible way how desperate the need for housing is in our community. It is my number one priority as Multnomah County chair.

"Creating 'A Home for Everyone' and the collaboration between Multnomah County, the cities of Gresham and Portland, Home Forward and Meyer Memorial Trust was a first step toward creating a common agenda that will align policies and dollars to make new strategic investments.

"This past month, we committed to end all veteran homelessness by the end of 2015 and we were awarded a \$2 million federal grant to house 130 chronically homeless households.

However, no matter how efficient or well-coordinated our system becomes, unless we have new tools such as inclusionary zoning and more dollars to develop affordable housing units, we won't make a significant impact on the housing gap, especially for our extremely low-income neighbors."

Jes Larson, director of the Welcome Home Coalition (a coalition working to provide long-term supportive funding for affordable housing and homeless services): "We know housing is the antidote to homelessness. What we haven't solved is our strategy to sufficiently fund our housing affordability infrastructure. Local communities historically relied on federal resources to fund affordable housing, but these funding streams have been cut dramatically year after year for the past four decades and newer state-level funding strategies have never filled the gap. After 30 years of divestment, we've created our modern-day rate of widespread homelessness and a housing crisis that affects most family budgets.

"To solve homelessness, we need to act locally. We can learn from other U.S. cities acting locally by dedicating new revenue streams to fund affordable housing. For example, in Miami, Fla., a 1 percent dining tax generates \$20 million annually and has reduced the city's rate of homelessness from 8,000 to 800. That's \$1 for every \$100 meal out ending homelessness.

"Seattle's property tax levy is another leading example. The average homeowner pays \$65 a year, in turn generating \$20 million for housing development, rent and homeownership assistance.

"Boston, for example, uses a combination of developer fees on commercial and residential projects to produce nearly \$20 million in affordable housing investments each year.

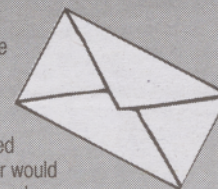
"Many are familiar with San Francisco affordability crisis, where voters recently passed a ballot measure to require a \$20 million set-aside from the city's general fund for affordable housing, with a schedule to increase to \$50 million by 2045.

"These are just a few examples of how local communities are coming together to dedicate local funds to address local housing needs. It's time for the Portland metro region to come together and decide how

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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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DIRECTOR'S DESK

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