

Open Wapato Jail to homeless on tenants' own dime



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BY JOHNNY WILLIAMS
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Society wants homeless people to get up, and they would prefer that they do it on their own. Yet, homeless people are spending so much time in line that they have no time to get their high school equivalency diploma (GED) or job training. It's like you are in a flat bottom boat, with a big hole in the bottom, and you are so busy trying to bail out the water that you can't row the boat to shore.

Some say that the problems are easy, but you just need to look at the problems in reverse. Take a person who had been sleeping under a bridge, but has managed, by himself, to finally get into his own place. What did it take to get him there? He had to save money for the deposits, first and last months' rents, and work one to four weeks before he got his first paycheck. Before that he may or may not have had to get a GED or job training. Before that he may or may not have needed drug and alcohol treatment. During all of his time unhoused, he needed to shower regularly, wash his clothes, have a place to store his belongings, and have a place to eat and to sleep.

In looking at the homeless, I see several types of people. Some would give anything to get inside and are trying hard to get back into a home but can't find a way. There are those who with a little help, or a lot of help, can get up. There are those who have disabilities, mental and or physical. These are the ones who need housing — meaning government-sponsored housing. That leaves the people who have given up.

I think you can first give homeless people a place to get everything needed to get back up. I will show you how tax dollars could be saved and the county can make a profit.

First thing on everyone's mind is where will the money come from? A lot of homeless people have jobs! They just can't afford an apartment. There are a lot who get government checks, but, yet again, not enough to get an apartment. What do they do? They go to a motel and stay as long as the money holds out, and then it's back out until the next paycheck.

Across the country, that's a lot of money; money that could be used more wisely. My proposal is to take Wapato Jail and the grounds and open it up for the homeless. For sleeping, have a huge night shelter open every night. Have mats on the floor to sleep on.

There are 525 beds; some could be occupied by couples, others by singles who share a room. Have on the outside a tent city with large tents for the people who don't have their own tents, and a place for those who do. Have a section that is like Dignity Village. If you sleep in the village section, you pay \$25 per month per person, plus you do sweat equity, i.e. security, cleaning, maintenance. If you have a bed in the main building, you pay \$200 per month. Everywhere else one can sleep will cost a dollar a day.

That gives everyone meals, showers, lockers for storage, laundry and a place to sleep.

If you have, let's say, 500 people who are each paying a dollar a day. That is \$15,000 per month. If you have 525 beds and each of them bring in \$200 per month, that is

\$105,000 per month. That's \$120,000 a month. The money is being paid by the homeless, not the taxpayers. And that's not counting the \$25 each from those who live in the village.

To feed everyone, I would have everyone turn over his or her food stamps. By using the food stamps, you could buy in bulk to save money with all of the money going to good nutritional food. No resources would be spent on soda, chips, ice cream and such. Also utilize the food banks to further subsidize the cost of food, which saves money.

Also, I would move all the self-help programs that are available all over the city for GED, and the drug abuse programs, parenting classes, job training and such.

Move them to one location; that way there would be no transportation issues.

By moving the programs from the other locations into the one place, where there is no rent or extra utilities to pay, that saves tax dollars.

Now, the county owns the property so there's no rent to be paid, after the insurance and the utilities are paid, the rest is profit. That would go to the county.

People will be able to straighten out their lives, and that will do nothing but help the economy.

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