

Solutions, not sweeps, will end homelessness

Every year about this time, like clockwork, the City of Portland conducts annual camp sweeps in inner Southeast Portland, and eventually parts of downtown right before the Rose Festival.

And every year, like clockwork, Portland's media machine jumps on the story as if it were the first time homeless camps have ever been swept. Elected officials and the police claim to be helping the homeless by cleaning up the troubled camps, while posturing to

neighborhoods, businesses and the general public that they are getting tough on crime, so to speak. The script is always the same.

What makes this year different?

One thing you could say is neighborhoods where homeless people have historically slept en masse are rapidly changing. With new housing developments, rising rents and businesses emerging throughout the city. There are simply fewer public spaces where people are allowed to sleep.

There's no question that with more organized business, neighborhoods and cycling communities — on the eastside specifically — people experiencing homelessness will systematically continue to be pushed out of the area, at least for the time being.

The rhetoric behind the sweeps is standard — it is the first step to getting people into housing. Everyone supports that. But where is the next step? The largest shelter agency in the city, Transition Projects, has a 5-month wait list for men — 462 men on the list. And there's a 7-month wait list for women, with 271 in line. They have 310 shelter beds. They're all full. They almost always are.

What's the long-term plan for people on the streets in camps? Some elected officials will point towards A Home For Everyone, the latest plan to support people experiencing homelessness and an increase in money in this upcoming budget. Others will point to supporting more rest areas for people on the streets and Right 2

Dream Too on the inner eastside, something inner eastside residents should support.

Put into context well beyond the sound bite, this collection of tents, tarps and human beings is the product of limited social resources, a lack of living wages and job opportunities; a decline in our affordable and low-income housing stock; and a development agenda that is plowing over formerly low-income lots and erecting luxury rentals and condos. Currently, Multnomah County is an estimated 20,000 units short of affordable housing. It doesn't help that skyrocketing

rents are hurting local efforts to support people with rent assistance dollars. Not only are there not enough units available to house people, the burden of first and last months rent and stabilizing people's lives adds additional obstacles for social service providers and people experiencing poverty.

Human beings are living in extremely unhealthy conditions, regardless if their sleeping in an "entrenched" camp or alone down by the river. Living without a home means living through a traumatic experience that isn't logical or rational. People die, very literally.

People are experiencing mental health

crises, domestic violence, sexual assault, sleep deprivation, trauma in many forms.

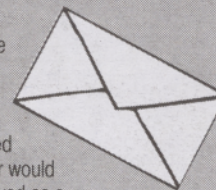
What can be done?

The mayor's office has touted the idea of more rest areas citywide for people experiencing homelessness. More or less, this would be a place for people on the streets to have a safe place to sleep. If we are to turn the corner on homelessness in Portland not only does the city need to think out of the box, it needs to get serious about prioritizing long-term housing investments in our community, including regulating development, taxing groups such as Airbnb, implementing demolition fees and building more affordable housing, to name a few. Until that day, camp sweeps will come and go, but homelessness will remain the same.

If we are to turn the corner on homelessness, Portland needs to get serious about prioritizing long-term housing investments in our community, including regulating development, taxing groups such as Airbnb, implementing demolition fees and building more affordable housing.

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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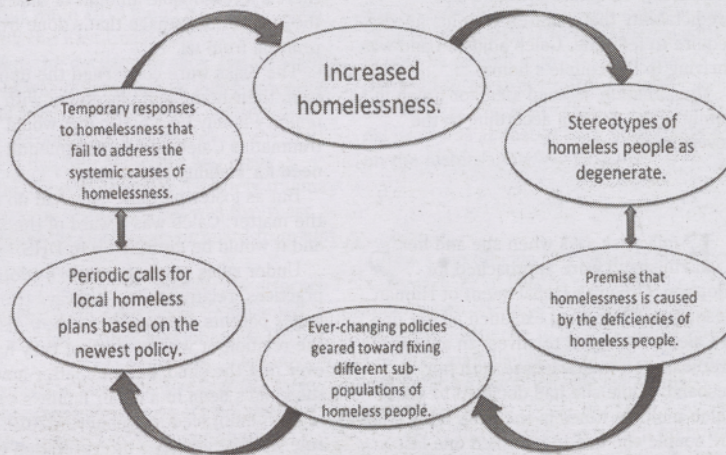
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EDITORIAL

Vicious Cycle of Homeless Policy

Since passage of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the federal government has created several homeless plans but they continue to fail because they lack political will, adequate funding for actual housing, & implementation.



• It has replaced tens of billions of HUD housing dollars with a few billion homeless assistance dollars.

• There are 355 ten-year plans to end homelessness that cover 860 cities, yet homelessness continues to grow.

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Street Roots is a member of the Western Regional Advocacy Group, or WRAP, a coalition of organizations along the West Coast working to eliminate the root causes of homelessness and poverty.