

# Portland Business Alliance: We can do better

The Portland Business Alliance took out a full-page ad a recent Oregonian with the title, "We can do better than this." The ad goes on to say, "Our city is experiencing a crisis on our streets and in our parks. Every day thousands of people sleep in our parks and open spaces and panhandle our sidewalks. Turning a blind eye to people living on the street is not a humane solution to Portland's homeless crisis. Portland is better than this. Sign our petition to tell Mayor Hales and Portland City Council that the people of our city want and deserve a better solution."

## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer



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The petition goes on to say, "Portland is better than this. It's time to get serious about addressing this long-standing problem that affects every person — residents, visitors, those in need of services — in the city. We need to provide more emergency and temporary shelters, an area where the city ranks as one of the lowest compared to other major metro areas. We need more humane solutions for people who want help because no Portlander should have to sleep on the street."

On its face, the campaign seems like a practical call for housing and resources — something we can all agree on. In some ways, Street Roots doesn't disagree. It's time for bold action on housing and homelessness in our city. There's simply no place left to turn.

Saying that, buying a full-page ad in The Oregonian and orchestrating a Change.org petition seems like a sensational attempt to force the mayor into responding to the issue.

Here's the thing. When it comes to having tools at our disposal to combat our housing and homeless crisis we are hurting badly. Here is a short-list of tools used in other states that are prohibited at a local or state level.

- **Construction Excise Tax:** Local governments are barred from imposing excise taxes on construction projects.

- **Document Recording Fee:** A constitutional ban is in place on any new state and local taxes, fees or assessments at a time of sale or transfer of interest in real property.

- **Inclusionary Zoning:** This option would let local governments adopt land use regulations that effect establishing unit, building, or parcel pricing. It is prohibited under state law.

- **Real Estate Transfer Tax:** The real estate industry successfully imposed a constitutional ban against any new state or local taxes, fees or assessments at time of sale.

- **Rent control:** The option to impose rent

regulations that limit rental rates and increases is banned under Oregon statute.

- **Minimum wage:** Local governments continue to be prohibited from setting local minimum wages — something that continues to hurt social services and working people, especially with the high price of housing

- **So, how about a full-page ad asking the legislature to take on any one of these important issues, or recruiting landlords to help end veterans homelessness?**

Where was the Portland Business Alliance when it came to supporting inclusionary zoning in the recent legislative session, or supporting efforts to open the doors to a real estate transfer fee? Why aren't developers being organized to help contribute to a local housing trust fund? Why aren't Oregon hospitals being compelled to invest real resources to help house people currently homeless as a known extension of health care? After all, aren't most hospitals seeing record profits?

My open question to the business community is: Why do we continue to blame City Hall and people experiencing homelessness, when nothing will change unless we start working together to tackle the problem holistically?

Don't get me wrong — I want City Hall to act too. Street Roots would like to see the city commit to giving a majority of next year's budget surplus to housing, while also supporting a public initiative to support housing and homeless services. Saying that, simply blaming City Hall doesn't really get us anywhere longterm. Believe us, we know. We've been down that road before.

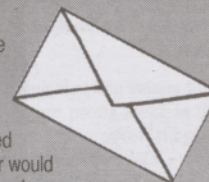
Targeting people experiencing homelessness in city parks and on sidewalks doesn't really get us anywhere, either. Sweeping vulnerable people from public spaces isn't the answer. Sweep people to where? The Westside? The Eastside? Into the neighborhoods? It doesn't work. It's inhumane and not even practical. Can we move on?

My point is, the Portland Business Alliance has a real opportunity to help solve the problem of individual homelessness. Imagine business leaders helping negotiate ways to create more affordable housing units with developers or helping facilitate conversations with the homebuilders and the real-estate industry to find long-term solutions. Let's all work together to increase the minimum wage to support workers in Portland to maintain a healthy middle-class. Let's find a way to make housing our community's number one priority. When that day comes, the Portland Business Alliance won't need to buy an ad in The Oregonian — it will already be front-page news.



## 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](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org). We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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Interested in advertising in Street Roots?  
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