

Charlie Hales

Less than two weeks before hosting a West Coast summit of his peers, Portland's mayor talks about the critical agenda items: climate change and homelessness



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

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Street Roots recently sat down with Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and talked about the issues of homelessness and climate change. Hales will be joining mayors from Eugene, Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco in a summit on the subjects on Dec. 11 and 12 in Portland.

Israel Bayer: *Thinking about defining moments in Portland's history, such as our urban growth boundary or stopping the Mount Hood freeway, how do you think Portland should come together to have that same moment and turn the tide on displacement and affordability with a new kind of Portland moment that creates lasting change?*

Charlie Hales: I believe having the council declare a state of emergency and then follow up swiftly with very real things is an important moment, if not a defining one.

In 44 days, we've created the first-ever rent protections in the history of Portland, enacted \$67 million dollars to go toward affordable housing, and made all the preparations for a new women's shelter. For government to get that much done in a time period measured in days instead of months or years, is something we're proud to be doing. I'm proud of the community for coming together and demanding action and the leadership we've had on the council.

I.B.: *You're holding a mayors' summit in*

December with other West Coast mayors – concentrating on both climate change and housing. What do you hope comes out of the summit?

C.H.: It will be our goal to learn from one another. I go to these U.S. Conference of Mayors conferences and it's what we do. Most mayors are pragmatic and generous with their ideas. There's no one hiding behind any kind of political agenda and we get into the weeds about what we can do to make our cities better.

(Seattle Mayor) Ed Murray and I were together at the Vatican talking about housing and homelessness and that's what led to this gathering.

I.B.: *Did the pope talk to the mayors about your responsibilities around poverty?*

C.H.: Oh yes, very much so. We were there to talk about climate change and the pope talked to us very in-depth about how climate change is not just about the environment, it's about people. The pope's encyclical is billed as being specifically about the environment and climate change, but he told us this is as much of a social issue about people as it is about the environment. Obviously, they are very much connected.

The pope talked to us about displacement of people due to climate change and the erosion of culture. He talked about how climate change is disrupting culture and the disrupting of culture creates displacement and refugees which leads to trafficking and

survival, which leads to people dying trying to cross an ocean or a border to simply better their families' lives. It was a very powerful experience for me. Climate change and poverty are interconnected. The Vatican is noticing that most forward motion and innovation is happening on a city level and he challenged mayors to do more. It was powerful.

I.B.: *Declaring a state of emergency on housing sends a very clear signal to Salem and Washington, D.C., that this is a crisis that can't be ignored. Do you plan on asking for additional state and federal support this year to support the housing emergency?*

C.H.: One of the reasons we created a state of emergency on homelessness was inspired by the federal government's efforts on ending veterans' homelessness – by witnessing how we've been able to house so many homeless veterans in a red-hot housing market. The reality is, when you have the right partners, and we can scale up our support for housing, we can be successful in getting people inside. Being a part of efforts to end veterans' homelessness has been a teachable moment for me, because it shows with the right

We are in grave danger of becoming San Francisco and we have to use every single tool we have and some more that we don't to change the likely outcome that only the rich live in this city and the poor and working class live in our surrounding suburbs.

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