

Mixed messages muddle positive steps in homeless crisis

By now the homeless and housing emergency recognized up and down the West Coast has been well documented, with lawmakers and organizations rallying to push major improvements to our homeless programs and housing market.

EDITORIAL

The first-ever West Coast Mayors Summit wrapped up in Portland with an alliance to end homelessness for the tens of thousands of residents who live on the streets among our fair cities. That includes holding federal lawmakers accountable for directing sorely needed resources to local communities struggling with a national issue. Sharing best practices, speaking with a unified voice to Washington, D.C., and trying new approaches are all promising first steps to better solutions. Street Roots is wholeheartedly supportive of this concerted effort.

On the streets, however, all of that looks a very long way off. On the streets it is cold, wet and alienating. On the streets, authorities are still sweeping people from camps.

These are two worlds, joined simply by their desire to make it stop, in a sea of mixed messages.

On one hand, the city has been working productively with both Right 2 Dream Too, now more than 4 years old and close to securing its own property; and Hazelnut Grove, a homeless encampment creating its own civility near North Greeley Avenue. Both locations have been essentially sanctioned by the city. Meanwhile other camps – and there are many – are targeted for removal by sheriff deputies, neighborhood associations and private interests. In this time of homeless emergencies and calls for bold action, the streets are subjected to the same disruption and displacement we've seen ad nauseam. It

promotes suffering and estrangement on an individual basis, and sets successful camps up for failure under the crush of newly displaced arrivals.

County officers have been clearing out camps from under bridges, using the prison inmate crew to do the job. (Somewhere in that misguided arrangement, there's a commentary on preserving a seamless line between the poor and the persecuted.)

And just last week, city employees cleaned the sidewalks around the St. Francis Dining Hall, a haven among the homeless community for providing security, rest and regular meals. To the city's credit, this was not billed as an official sweep, in that it barred people from returning. It was a routine cleaning, requiring no formal notice and people were allowed to return. However, doing such an action, on short notice, in the middle of a string of heavy rains, is rotten timing. When the health and welfare of people is literally hanging in the balance, the system has to bend toward common sense.

The city is working to streamline its system among bureaus to create a consistent response that all parties – including people who are experiencing homelessness – understand. That means police, park rangers, security officers and other enforcers are on the same page. The city has also pledged not to conduct formal sweeps of camps when it cannot, with any confidence, tell people where they can go. These are beneficial steps, but the city is only one of many players in this process, and it will take the larger community to get on board. Whether it's in East County or the city's central core, we cannot successfully get people off the streets while continuing to push them to the edge.

Policy and practices are one thing, compassion is something else entirely. It will take both to move closer to a solution.

It may be raining, but SR vendors are shining bright

With the holidays upon us, it has not been an easy month for Street Roots vendors. Record-breaking rainfall have all but stopped sales of the newspaper on a couple of days and that never happens. It's a bummer because December is typically the vendors best sales month. Readers and supporters have

responded with great care and love. It's much appreciated.

We are coming up on our first anniversary of a weekly publication. Vendor sales overall have increased, while supporting more people

than ever with an opportunity to gain an immediate income. Our journalism continues to be some of the best in the city and our advocacy is having a real impact on both public policy and the lives of people experiencing homelessness and poverty. We are a little train carrying a heavy load.

We can't do it without you! Everything we do at Street Roots is through the lens of love and nonviolence. It's not easy work. We know many of you believe in us as much as we

believe in you and the people of Portland.

Here some ways you can help Street Roots this holiday season, especially during this wet and miserable rainy season.

First and foremost, stop by and give your favorite vendor some love. If you don't know the vendor, let them know you're a Street Roots reader and how much you appreciate vendors in the community. Being able to communicate that you care goes a long way.

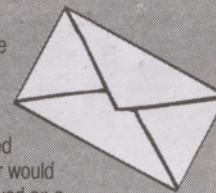
Many vendors are reporting that readers have given them holiday cards, some great tips and other random acts of kindness. Thank you!

You can also give a donation to Street Roots at streetroots.org or at the Willamette Week Give!Guide, giveguide.org. Sign up to give a small donation monthly and become a recurring donor with Street Roots. It goes a long way. Your support matters. Really, it does.

Your support today of Street Roots will ensure that we are able to publish 52 editions of Street Roots in the coming year and give vendors a real source of income in 2016. That's amazing. Thank you, and happy holidays!

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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If you are interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at streetroots.org/volunteer. Or call our volunteer coordinator for more information at 503-228-5657.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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