

A synopsis of the housing crisis, today and tomorrow

People ask Street Roots why we aren't covering more of the housing crisis in the newspaper. It's a simple answer for a complex problem: We pride ourselves on publishing original content.

Every media outlet in town is covering the issue. Oregon Public Broadcasting, the Portland

Mercury, the Portland Tribune, the Willamette Week and the Oregonian — they are all running with stories about the current housing crisis. Sometimes the same story told in a slightly different way.

I also think that in the age of citizen journalism and

social media, sometimes a specific issue or story about the housing crisis is being introduced to the public and dissected long before it ever appears in print. People from all walks of life are speaking up. It's having an effect on how we prioritize housing in our community.

The housing crisis is real. It deserves the media coverage. Lots of it. The current rental market is unforgiving and thousands of people find themselves on Portland's streets.

Thousands more find themselves on the brink of homelessness or being pushed out of the city. For some, it's a familiar tune. For others the shock is very real.

Using editorials, poetry, vendor stories and advocacy, Street Roots continues to be at the heart of the conversation.

Here's a year-end round up of what's shaking on the homeless and housing front, in no particular order:

At the top of the list would be the homeless emergency. Some might say it was reactionary. Haters are going to hate. The emergency has allowed city and county governments to put into action a series of far-reaching policies and resources that we collectively know are needed.

The Welcome Home Coalition estimates that we are currently short a minimum of 24,000 affordable housing units in Multnomah County. We have got a lot of work ahead of us.

Elected officials are working to secure \$30 million in new funding next year for affordable housing and homeless services. Some say it's too ambitious or simply political. I say it's been a long time coming. People are suffering, and in some cases dying on the streets. We haven't been close to being at the scale needed for investments in the past three decades.

How will plans for affordable housing and homeless services be implemented? It's called, "A Home for Everyone." The group is made up of both the public and private sector and is working on implementing a very complex strategy. That strategy includes investing in ending veterans homelessness, new shelters, expanding housing placement for women, children and youth, looking at legal campgrounds and investing in building affordable housing.

Will the plan work? Portland, like many American cities, has had to deal with the lack of sufficient federal support for affordable housing for more than three decades. The plan is the

most comprehensive effort to date. Will it end homelessness in Portland? No. Will it help thousands of people end their homelessness and improve our overall affordable housing structure in Portland? Yes. It's a great plan, considering the circumstances, and without control over of the market or outside forces.

Last week the city voted for a \$1.2 million short-term rental tax in Portland. The tax, on operations such as Airbnb, will be allocated to a housing trust fund and can be used on multiple projects each year. It's a small, yet significant victory considering how fast the rental market is changing.

This comes on the heels of another small victory led by the Community Alliance of Tenants and others to create much needed legislation to protect Portland renters from an unforgiving rental market. The new rules state that landlords must give tenants at least 90 days notice of no-cause eviction and any rental increases of 5 percent or more.

The 50 percent set aside for affordable housing in urban renewal areas was also a much needed victory this year. The new allocation will allow an additional \$67 million to build affordable housing units in urban renewal areas.

What needs to happen in 2016?

Oregon legislators need to deliver. Everything — including more resources for affordable housing and homeless services and new eviction protections — is on the table. So is inclusionary zoning, which would require new housing developments to include affordable housing. It's time for the governor and the state legislature to act in a meaningful way on the housing front.

Neighborhoods also need to be a part of the solution. Portland needs to site more shelters and have your support for more housing resources. It's going to happen. In some cases, tent cities are going to be allowed. Also, we have to have smart growth strategies moving

forward. Without smart growth attached to affordable housing, we are doomed. The work of Anti-Displacement PDX is doing is worth our support. Check them out.

All of our local officials need to support our collective efforts. It takes a village, and without a rock-solid team moving forward we are going to find ourselves on shaky ground. The housing and rental market effect every aspect of poverty, including education, youth violence, displacement and gentrification. Without stable housing, all of our approaches to ending poverty and giving people an opportunity at a better life begin to fall in on themselves. Supporting housing and an increase in wages means supporting, every day, the foundation of our city.

Lastly, we must find a permanent revenue source for affordable housing. A big one. A homeless emergency this year helps us begin to build a bridge to support giving people a safe place to call home in the future. Saying that, it's still not enough. Don't stop demanding action Portland.



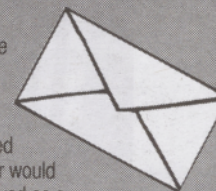
DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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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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