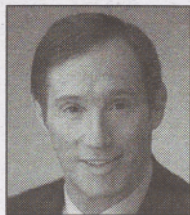


Thanks to 'the Portland in us,' 2015 saw progress on housing



Dan Saltzman is a Portland city commissioner

BY DAN SALTZMAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A week ago, the Portland Business Alliance came into my office with one of its members. This member had a building downtown that he would be selling in the coming months, but the business tenants were gone and the building lay dormant. Could we use it as a temporary shelter?

Within a week, we had done all the necessary inspections, prioritized funds, and lined up a nonprofit partner to run services. This new site will add 100 beds to our shelter capacity this winter and will open less than a month from the offer to provide space.

During this holiday season, inundated by record rainfall and with all of Portland witnessing the suffering of those without shelter, this small piece of our housing continuum fell into place. This story reminds me that it is not just new ideas or cutting through red tape that have helped provide shelter to those men, women and children experiencing homelessness. It is not even through agreement on how best to address the affordable-housing crisis or homelessness. Rather, it is doing the work to move the city forward through the crisis despite these differences.

In 2015, we worked more closely than ever before with our public, private and nonprofit partners. We have not only listened to advocates but have helped them deliver their message to Salem.

I am happy to share with Street Roots readers just some of the fruit of these labors. We have released \$61.6 million in city, county and federal funds for affordable

housing – the largest notice of availability this metro area has ever seen. We have, through the Home for Everyone collaborative with Multnomah County, the city of Gresham and Home Forward, worked with private landlords and regional partners to house 690 homeless veterans. We raised our tax-increment set-aside from 30 percent to 45 percent, shifting our urban renewal dollars to provide an additional \$66.7 million for affordable housing. We improved an underutilized tax-exemption program to provide an estimated 300 units of affordable housing per year. We required all lodging taxes from short-term rentals be dedicated exclusively to affordable housing, a move expected to raise an additional \$1.2 million annually toward our housing investments. And we provided a safety valve for vulnerable renters by tripling the notification time landlords must give for rent increases and no-cause evictions.

Oh, and we hired a new housing director, Kurt Creager, who hit the ground running so fast you would think he'd been at the job for years instead of months.

Meanwhile, the new shelter opening in January will provide much-needed capacity. It won't be open indefinitely, but it still fills me with a sense of hope for 2016. Offers such as this one – of a spare building – are not isolated incidents, but I think a real acknowledgment of how our city has rallied behind the housing crisis.

We don't all agree on how to solve these issues. We debate. But we act anyway. It's the Portland in us. To sit and do nothing for those that deserve the dignity of shelter and a home is not an option.

NATURE, from page 7

Springs is a fabulous example of providing something that is totally artificial but still provides natural functions. The week after it was dedicated, I was driving north and there was a flash across my windshield. I look over and it's an osprey. It had landed in Tanner Springs and went on to catch a fish. Some person had been releasing koi. It's a very small space, it's one city block. But the cool thing about Tanner Springs – and a microcosm of what we're talking about – is that it is part of a park triptych: Tanner Springs, Jamison Square Park and the Fields. Two blocks to the south of Tanner Springs is Jamison Square Park. There are trees there but, you know, it's a hardscape. Thousands of people show up there. You don't see thousands of people in Tanner Springs. Duh. You're not supposed to. Then there's the Fields, north of Tanner Springs, which is just a huge open grassy areas with a dog park. They all provide different functions. But you have nature. It's faux nature, but people love it. It's people's access to nature within a block or a few blocks of where they live. That is an example of what we need to do more of.

A.W.: It's interesting that you bring up the Pearl, because it is probably one of the most planned neighborhood in Portland and developed fairly quickly. That seems to be what you're advocating for: better, more holistic planning.

M.H.: Exactly. To respond to your density question again, the philosophy of Portland and Metro's strategy is to develop along transportation corridors and regional centers. You get a huge bang for your buck if you will. That takes pressure off the rest of the urban landscape. There's less natural green and more artificial green in those centers. The critical thing is how we are going to implement the Comprehensive Plan. What kinds of zoning and what kinds of codes are we going to have? One of the things the Plan calls for is weaving nature into the city. It's one thing to talk about that and another to have the zoning and codes line up.

A.W.: Any final thoughts?

M.H.: We are in the same conversation we were in when I started 35 years ago – at which time very progressive elected officials and very progressive planners said there's no room for nature in the city. It's taken 35 years where they're saying no, and that doesn't make any sense. There was that era of building consensus that people needed access to nature. The same progressive elected officials and planners are saying that today we have to be denser and we can't afford to protect trees and we can't have all this green stuff. It's the same damn argument. It's just as bankrupt a philosophy as it was 35 years ago.

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