

Round-up: What's happening on the homeless front

It's a question I get a lot:

Israel, can you explain to me what's going on out there?

Let's start with Salem.

Housing legislation is moving forward on important eviction protections, inclusionary zoning and investments for homeless and housing services.

Is it the package we wanted? No. Will it move the issue forward? Yes.

The new housing legislation will allow for incremental changes and let local governments create a pathway for more revenue for affordable housing and provide minimal support

for tenants.

Special interest groups, including the home builders association, big developers, landlords and the Realtors association continue to block progress in Oregon. They should be happy. They got a pretty sweet deal.

Saying that, I agree the current legislation should move forward. Not passing anything isn't an option. Kudos to legislators and advocates who remain in the game and continue to work to give people a safe place to call home.

What about the Portland Business Alliance's (PBA) public relations campaign on homelessness, including a push for shelters in places like Wapato?

The campaign could be so much more. It lacks political sophistication and doesn't offer a clear path forward. Wapato isn't a practical option and simply bashing the mayor doesn't really get us anywhere. What happens if the next mayor doesn't agree with the PBA on homeless policies?

What about the mayor's race and candidates?

Most of the candidates are swinging for the fences and trying to hit a home run on the issue of homelessness and housing. That's amazing.

It's important that we don't forget that we currently have a comprehensive strategy on homelessness and there's work being done.

Multnomah County and the city of Portland are trying to deliver a new \$30 million investment this budget cycle for housing and homeless services. We are also working hard to deliver a long-term, dedicated revenue stream for affordable housing. These things aren't guaranteed. In trying to distance themselves from current office holders and their opponents, it's important that candidates don't lose sight of all the great work that's being done. If we're not successful with these efforts today, no amount of campaign promises will help us tomorrow.

But Israel, I'm reading all of these horrible things about the mayor's plan for camping and the homeless.

Homeless people, in some aspects, have become tabloid news. Forget about how we actually solve this problem, look at all the dirty bums under the bridges. The race is on to find out how many screwed up things homeless people are doing before the next deadline or evening news broadcast.

Why is that?

There are a lot of people and powerful interests in the city that loathe the mayor's camping policy. Many people are hoping it will fail. By allowing tent camping, people experiencing homelessness have become much more visible in the city. The reality is there are fewer places for people to sleep, which has created larger camps. That's driven hysteria in neighborhoods. The mayor had to act. The verdict is still out on the new policies. But until we address the larger housing issue in our community, I'm not sure there is a right answer. If Seattle or San Francisco are any indication, the noise around these issues isn't going to go away. It's just going to get louder and louder.

Obviously, I'm a strong supporter of groups like Right 2 Dream Too. People can debate the merits of having tent cities all day long. The reality is they are both practical and safe for people on the streets. Is it a logical solution? No. Neither is having hundreds of thousands of people experiencing homelessness in America.

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Honestly, I'm just really pissed off about the entire situation. I care about the homeless, but my rent is skyrocketing and I don't know what to do.

It's important to remember we are all on the same team. I realize people are pissed about what we are calling a housing crisis today. Unfortunately, for people of color and people experiencing the hell that is homelessness, the crisis has been going on for decades.

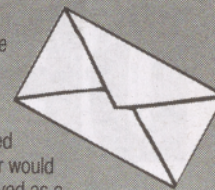
Through all the tragedy, heartache and injustice there has always been love. Unconditional love. It's important to remember that the fight we find ourselves in is a long slog that will require all of us – from those inside politics to people on the streets. We have to work together. Shouting and tearing each other down has never gotten us anywhere. I would hate to see the housing issue – which ultimately is about helping people who are suffering – be hijacked by the same kind of political climate that is taking over national politics. We have to value one another. We have to respect one another, even when we disagree. Being pissed all the time will never get us to the finish line.

So what can I do?

Get engaged. There are lots of opportunities to do so. You're only one Google search away from getting involved in any number of advocacy groups working on these issues across the Pacific Northwest. Volunteer your time. Donate money to your favorite cause. Tweet questions to elected officials and candidates. Don't give up hope. We've got work to do.

Write in

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