

Budget plans offer a bold step forward

Each of the proposed budgets by Multnomah County and Portland invest heavily in housing and homeless services, pledging more than \$50 million in additional support toward the homeless emergency declared in October.

It's much needed relief for many, but not nearly enough in scale to solve the problem. Something we already know.

No smart person can argue that we don't need radical housing reform in Oregon coupled with multiple, long-term, dedicated revenue sources to build more affordable housing. There are no easy answers. There are even

fewer paths to solving the problem. But on the options we do have, it's essential that we deliver.

That's why I don't understand the controversy around Mayor Charlie Hales' proposed 0.3 percent increase on the business tax – a move that will create an additional \$8.7 million in revenue.

Instead of newspapers, politicians and some business leaders celebrating smart policy, we find ourselves playing politics and freaking out about a 0.3 percent business tax. Really?

The argument against the tax is that it would hurt small business owners. However, the expressed intent is to structure the tax to protect small business, as it should. One such option is creating an owner's compensation deduction that will allow small business owners to trim their taxable profits by up to \$125,000.

I get it. Portland could deliver a balanced budget without a tax increase. People think this mayor isn't a team player. Communication is horrible. Other commissioners and stakeholders weren't brought along. The mayor never creates a consensus. It's his last year in office. It's nothing more than a legacy budget.

It's no secret that some people in Portland don't like the mayor's style. That's fine. I'm no Charlie Hales apologist. Sometimes I don't like it either. Saying that, it doesn't mean we should take our eyes off the prize. What we should all be interested in is helping the people of Portland. We certainly shouldn't be playing politics at a time of such great need.

We don't get to have our cake and eat it too.

Business leaders and other commissioners should be cheering on this policy move. It promises to have little impact on small

businesses and goes to support the very things that groups such as the Portland Business Alliance have been up in arms about – helping solve homelessness and supporting public safety.

Let's be honest: A homeless emergency and massive investments in housing this year probably would have never happened if the mayor hadn't gone off script. Of course, city and county leaders, advocates and nonprofits would have continued to do the best we could given the circumstances, but I'm not sure we would be looking at the scale of investments in our city without someone coming along and turning the issue on its head.

Maybe it was the mayor's meeting with the pope, or the fact that he's not running for office again next year that he's going all in. I really don't care.

It would be easy to argue that maybe we should wait on the next mayor and City Council to make big changes to our system regarding the issue of housing and homelessness. That's naive. The crisis is bad enough that unless we aren't able to act swiftly than we will continue to fall behind. If we as a community aren't actually treating the housing crisis as an emergency than we aren't going to save our city.

Think about this. The city just swept an estimated 450 people from the Springwater Corridor.

Four hundred and fifty! If that were 450 people displaced in a small town in Kansas from a tornado, everyone from the National Guard to the Red Cross would be called in. Instead of being offered food and shelter, most people were cast out into the city with no place to go. That doesn't even take into account the 5,000 other people on our streets, many of whom are small children and elders. It's a hard-knock life.

The truth is there are a lot of people getting rich in Portland right now. Business is good. Our city is thriving and growing. Beneath all of the new business, condos and shine is an entire class of people struggling to survive on our streets.

There's absolutely no reason that a 0.3 percent increase in the business tax and a healthy budget shouldn't be passed this year. We have to set our ideologies and misgivings to the side. We have to act boldly.

Everyone knows there are no easy answers to the problems that lie ahead. The challenges facing Portland will require great leadership, political risk by all, and an enormous lift to address the problem at hand. We have to go the extra mile. We have to seize the moment.



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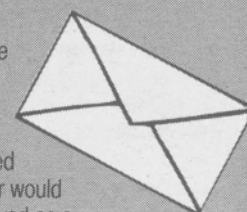
DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Our city is thriving and growing. Beneath all of the new business, condos and shine is an entire class of people struggling to survive on our streets.

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