

Businesses key in city's success in housing

Street Roots was honored to receive the Portland Pearl Rotary Club's Community Vision Award last week.

Speaking to a room full of business representatives and Pearl residents I was reminded that we all have a role in providing people with a safe place to call home.

We could argue until we are blue in the face over tent camping and what is the right strategy moving forward when it comes to street homelessness. Saying that, we

shouldn't paint all businesses with a broad brush when it comes to poverty and politics.

I think there is a common misunderstanding in our community about social justice's relationship to business. For example, more than 200 businesses donate in-kind goods or donations to Street Roots every year.

The global tech company OMBU and open source developers built our news site for free. Stumptown Coffee donates hundreds of pounds of coffee each year to keep Street Roots vendors warm and caffeinated. Sock It To Me provides socks to all of our Street Roots vendors. Frank Creative, a nationally recognized marketing firm in town helps us with messaging and donates design materials for all of our events and promotional items. We aren't in this alone.

Street Roots also works at more than 70 sales locations throughout the county supporting vendors selling the newspaper.

Street Roots wouldn't be successful without our partnerships with the business community. Saying that, building authentic relationships in the business community doesn't mean we always have to agree. Street Roots is both real and honest in the work we do. Sometimes that means speaking truth to power and backing up our editorial content and sharp opinions by

talking about. Some business owners are loud, it's true. Others are pissed about homeless people in front of their business. I get that. Some have even joined a lawsuit against the city over tent camping guidelines. None of those things will curb homelessness or provide answers to the housing crisis in our community.

Much of the business community is at a crossroads when it comes to the issue of the housing crisis. It's a new era in Portland and many people are being left behind. It's real. The scale of people suffering or being displaced is enormous. People's wages are lagging and the cost of housing is skyrocketing.

Here's the thing. We need government to support a civil society and that includes increasing investments in affordable housing through new policies and yes, enacting legislation that support tenants, many of which are seniors and families. It's just that simple. The good old days of making money off of the free market and housing without regulations is over. It should have been over a long time ago. That doesn't mean different industries won't still see record profits, but it's time to share the wealth and be open to change.

That brings me to the new proposal by developers Homer Williams and Dike Dame. It's a \$100 million plan to build space for 700 new shelter beds and create 700 beds in dormitory-style housing — \$60 million of which they have agreed to raise. The other \$40 million which would need to be raised by government.

I talked with Homer and consultants from San Antonio for more than an hour last month about the project. Is it a good idea? Seeing a major contribution from the business community like this is a fantastic idea. Saying that, the devil is in the details. Building shelter that will eventually have to be funded by government subsidies through a one-time private investment is not viable solution. Having government divert \$40 million on the front end away from current services is even more of a challenge.

Street Roots recommendation was that if the business community wanted to truly commit to curbing homelessness in our community several things needed to happen. First, support the upcoming housing bond measure in the November election. Second, come to the table to help legislators in Salem increase their investments in affordable housing. And third, provide a major cash injection for permanent housing. It's the wisest investment.

It's not so much that we don't need more shelter. It's that right now we are bottlenecked by not having enough housing available to support our most vulnerable residents. Creating a mass shelter at this very point in time might give some people on the streets relief, but until we have more investments — and I'm talking in the billions — we are stuck robbing Peter to pay Paul. It's simply not working.

I will wager to say that if we don't create more housing immediately that street homelessness will double in the next decade. I said it. The reality is if we can't house people today, how we will house thousands more who will join their ranks tomorrow?

My point is that the policies we enact today will have huge impacts on tomorrow. Not to mention it is people's lives we are talking about. We have to be smart and calculated and we can't afford to be wrong.

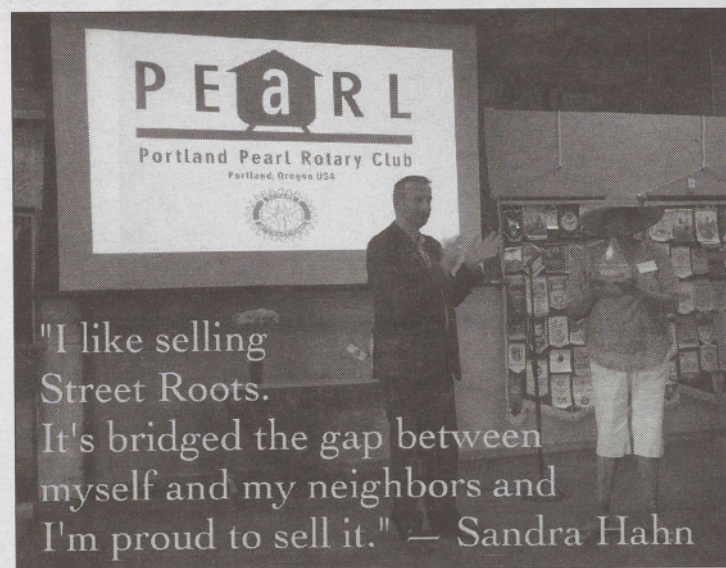
So, my advice to Homer Williams and Dike Dame — who I both know have huge hearts and care about this issue — is to throw their weight behind the housing bond on one hand and work to invest \$100 million dollars to provide permanent housing on the other. It would not only be historic, it would be the wisest investment we could make. It would be another example of how the business community can rise above the noise when given the opportunity and do great things.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.



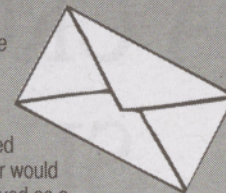
having authentic relationships and highlighting the voices of people on the streets. We aren't naive.

Still, the narrative in some circles that the business community is against the homeless is false. The vast majority of people working for or owning small businesses in Portland care very deeply about the issue. Why wouldn't they? It's not just the homeless experiencing a housing crisis, it's their employees that are also experiencing housing instability.

When media outlets in town report that the business community is against encampments or the homeless, I always wonder what business community they are

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.



Street Roots

211 NW Davis St.
Portland, OR 97209
503-228-5657
Fax: 503-227-3117
www.streetroots.org
www.news.streetroots.org
Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. and 7:30-11 a.m. Sun.

Advertising

Interested in advertising in Street Roots?
Contact Israel Bayer at israel@streetroots.org

Staff

Executive Director Israel Bayer
israel@streetroots.org
Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl
joanne@streetroots.org
Vendor Program Director Cole Merkel
cole@streetroots.org
Operations Director Sarah Beecroft
Development Director Sarah Cloud
Program Assistant Scott Jackson, Jesuit Volunteer
Development Assistant Ann-Derrick Gaillot
Reporters Emily Green, Suzanne Zalokar, Ann-Derrick Gaillot, Sarah Hansell, Leonora Ko, Jared Paben, Amanda Waldroupe
Photographers Diego Diaz, Joe Glode, Ben Brink
Editorial Assistant Monica Kwasnik
Canvasser Desmond Hardison

Board of Directors

Chairman Brad Taylor
Vice-Chairman Rachel Langford
Treasurer Heather Stadick
Secretary Amber Bielman
Directors Bruce Anderson, Rich Rodgers, Michael Anderson, Leo Rhodes, Nora Coon, Marcus Swift

Volunteers

Jan Bayer, John Barker, Stacey Heath, Stephanie Holum, Anjali Rathore, Zoe Klingmann, Haven Herrin, Dan Jones, Rob Shyrock, Dennis Hogan, Tom Wright, Eileen Deerdock, Vince Waldman, Judy Taylor, Karen Allen, Monica McKune, Susan Wolfe, Lucas Hawthorne, Thomas Buell Jr., Jeanie Lunsford, Yasmin Amirsoleymani, Jason Cohen, Tom Ray, Doug Spangle, Susannah Kamala, Jon Raymond, Hilary Smith, Diana Richardson, Cherie Manning
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.