

Housing is not the only social justice issue

Homelessness. Housing. Crisis. Those three words have become commonplace in our city over the past three years.

It's for good reason too. The skyrocketing rents are leaving many Portlanders at risk of losing their housing.

Thousands of people continue to suffer on our streets. There is no end in sight. It is a crisis. No question.

Saying that, it doesn't mean housing is the only social justice issue that should be deserving

of our attention or the media's watchful eye.

A colleague of mine recently communicated that with the amount of attention being focused on housing in our community, we are losing an opportunity to connect the issue itself to the larger social justice movement. Other issues that are equally important and ultimately connect with the issue of housing are being drowned out. It's true.

For example, why are we more focused on the issue of a homeless shelter than the fact that mentally ill people are being warehoused in our county jail? Why are we talking about homelessness without talking about the fact that the lack of criminal justice reform in our community continues to create more homelessness? It's one thing for government to highlight these issues in a report or offer a recommendation. It's another thing all together to actually do something about it.

It's easy for government, nonprofits, the business community and neighborhoods to call for more revenue and policies to support housing and homeless services. The house is on fire.

It's a lot harder to call for radical reform at the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, to end racial profiling or to hold the Portland Police Bureau accountable to its residents.

What about focusing on the fact that TriMet should be offering low-income bus fare region-wide, or asking that hospitals offer more than window dressing through

their philanthropy programs while maintaining record profits in the tens of millions? The list is long.

The reality, my friends, is the game is rigged. Anyone who's got any skin in the game knows this. If you're a person of color, you've known it from the day you were born.

We like to think of ourselves as a sophisticated city, but the reality is we live in an environment where everyone knows everyone and there's limited resources, capacity and political capital to go around.

In short, it's hard to create social change on multiple fronts at any one time. Step out of line or upset the wrong person or group and there goes your ability to raise money and to have the political capital to influence good policy. It's these very dynamics that stunt social change or reform in our city and our state.

During the recession it was most apparent when you would see large corporations, like banks, force local housing and homeless agencies to provide photo ops for \$5,000 donations, when in fact it was those very national banks that helped create the housing crisis. It's humiliating.

Our system is riddled with these kinds of realities.

None of this is to say that great work isn't being done in our community. It's to say that to be able to get ahead of many of the problems that face our community, especially in the context of poverty, we've got work to do.

In a time when there is a growing divide between government and the realities playing on the streets it's important for all of us, including myself and Street Roots, to connect the many social justice issues. We can all do a better job. We will.

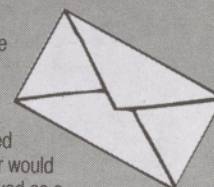
There's no shortage of work to be done from the environment to early childhood education, from tax reform to police accountability, from transportation issues to criminal justice reform. We're all on this planet together, and we all have a responsibility to make our community the best it can be. We have to support one another.



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

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer



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 Meghann Van Pelt, Jesuit Volunteer
Development Assistant Patricia Romero
Reporters Emily Green, Suzanne Zalokar, Sarah Hansell, Leonora Ko, Jared Paben, Amanda Waldroupe, Stephen Quirke
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 Marcus Swift
Directors Rich Rodgers, Michael Anderson, Leo Rhodes, Sandra Hahn, John Brown, Dan Jones

Volunteers

Jan Bayer, John Barker, Stacey Heath, Anjali Rathore, Zoe Klingmann, Haven Herrin, Dan Jones, Dennis Hogan, Tom Wright, 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, Paul and Madeline Gefroh, Mary Ann Joyce and Faye Powell.
If you're interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at streetroots.org/volunteer. Or you can call our volunteer coordinator for more information at 503-228-5657.



ILLUSTRATION BY ART HAZELWOOD