

# Real solutions to improving housed, homeless relations

The frustration and conflict between neighbors and people experiencing homelessness has always existed. Saying that, the past few months it has reached an all-time high – not just in Portland, but also up and down the West Coast.

San Francisco will be voting in November to ban people experiencing homelessness from sleeping in tents. In San Diego, a serial killer targeted people experiencing homelessness, brutally killing three individuals this summer.

In March, a woman in a Seattle neighborhood who was fed up with people experiencing homelessness

took a hammer and smashed the windows out of a car with people camping in it. They responded by nearly beating her to death.

In Portland last week, A 46-year-old man named Jeremy Kidwell placed a pipe bomb under an RV where people lived. The owner of the RV recovered the device and confronted Kidwell.

Police searched Kidwell's home and found PVC pipes, hobby fuses, gunpowder and literature about booby traps. They placed the man under arrest.

Kidwell later told the police that he did it because he was tired of homeless people.

There's no question that some people's distaste for seeing human suffering has turned sour.

So, what the hell is going on?

The reality is it all starts with more than three decades of failed housing policy. Local communities have collectively lost hundreds of billions of dollars to maintain affordable housing stock over the past 30 years. It's a nightmare.

On the West Coast specifically, the train has come off the tracks for poor people. Homelessness has remained a constant from the 1980s up through the Great Recession.

I've written extensively on the history of this crisis and ways that we need to

get ahead of the curve in regard to creating more affordable housing and reforming housing policies in our community, at both the state and federal levels.

None of that seems to matter today. The past may have contributed to the environment we find ourselves in today, but that doesn't help us right now. No amount of history lessons or ongoing injustices change the fact that neighbors are angry and people experiencing homelessness and poverty in the hundreds of thousands are caught without any kind of safety net.

So, what do we do? Like, right now? What is the five-minute plan for thousands of people on the streets?

If I could wave a magic wand, I would propose these steps to bridge the gap between people on the streets and angry neighbors.

First things first: Organized camps. We have to scale up, in orderly fashion. I'm not talking about mass shelters. I'm talking about a network

of camps throughout our region that have access to services and are not under the constant threat of being displaced and harassed.

Trash. It's simple, really. Put people experiencing homelessness to work through trash pick-up. Not one or two people, but dozens of people, trained to do outreach and simply provide trash collection. Right now we have county inmates cleaning up homeless camps. Seriously? It's not only slave labor and humiliating; it's not growing our economy at all.

Speaking of work, how about we bring people experiencing homelessness and poverty into the 21st century? Our work systems models are outdated and not geared toward the needs of people experiencing crisis. If we can find investors to create start-up companies for the creative class, why aren't we collectively working to recruit investors to solve the core social problems in our community? It would be a win-win.

What about having work crews removing invasive plants from our public parks? How about creating an environment much like the tech community has that creates the space for people to be creative and do what they are good at? You're good at wood carving or making windmills out of beer cans? Let's figure that out. How about giving former drug dealers and people exiting prison the ability to create micro-businesses?

The thing is, we're trying to fit poor people into an economy that doesn't exist or create any kind of wealth. Our work systems programs are woefully underfunded and way too centralized. They should be broken apart and led by nonprofits, not by government.

When it comes to responding to crisis. Some would argue we need more police officers to provide community policing. But that's an old world view and has never curbed poverty. It's only helped maintain decades of segregation between poor people and people of color and affluent white neighborhoods.

What we need are people experiencing homelessness doing outreach with the police and fire bureaus, being liaisons between neighborhood associations and homeless camps – to respond to crisis and build authentic relationships and to help coordinate trash pick-ups and to be able to rely on law enforcement to target violent criminals.

I'm not talking about two outreach workers. I'm talking about 100, all across our city. Not only would we be creating income for people – we would be working to respond to and curb desperate situations that appear to be happening between our homeless and housed neighbors every single day. The ability to get upstream on a range of issues from health to public safety would be enormous.

Lastly, we need to educate people to be stewards of the land. Just like the tourism industry needs money to market Portland and Oregon to create a bustling economy, we need money to educate neighbors and people on the streets how to work together and take care of the city we love.

The harsh reality is we can't keep doing what we've been doing and expect different results. We need more resources for housing. We need flexible income opportunities for people on the streets and we need to put those resources toward building bridges in our community that provide opportunities to all work together.



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By Israel Bayer

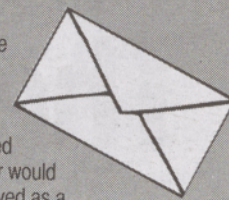
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A shop in the community of Ocean Beach, Calif., created novelty stickers and patches in response to the uptick in the number of people experiencing homelessness in their community.

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