

Summer brings old complaints and new opportunities

Every summer it's a different neighborhood or area of the city being flooded with homeless people.

One summer it was homeless punks with skateboards and their dogs downtown.

The next summer it was the Park Blocks.

Let's not forget the dirty hippies from the Rainbow festival.

Last summer it was the Springwater Corridor.

Apparently, this summer, it's RVs and homeless campers in eastside neighborhoods.

The frenzy is always the same. It cycles from

neighborhood to neighborhood based up a changing economic climate and development throughout the city.

The message is always the same: Homeless people are invading our community. What are the police doing? What is the mayor doing? Why is our system failing us?

Of course many of the network TV stations have a field day with it all. It's like watching reality TV with upscale, angry neighbors and destitute homeless people.

"Tonight at 5, 6 and 10, homeless people and neighbors square off in a battle over public space ..."

"I'm homeless and have no place to call home," says one homeless person.

"Homeless people are puking in my yard and I pay taxes," says one neighbor.

What exactly is the city doing about it?

"We are doing everything in our power to give people access to shelter and housing," says a spokesperson for the city.

"It's not enough," chimes in another neighbor with an Obama T-shirt on.

"Homeless people shouldn't be allowed near our schools and parks."

No, wait. That's an actual proposal by one neighborhood group in Laurelhurst.

Can someone inform the group of the hundreds of Portland school children that are experiencing homelessness?

Meanwhile, I'm getting messages from people saying, Israel, where do you live? Do you pay property taxes? I run a business. I own a home in Portland. How dare you defend these people?

I'm just going to go ahead and take this time to make another public service announcement for Portlanders. We are experiencing a housing and homeless emergency. The federal and state government have abandoned their posts when it comes to providing adequate housing resources and protection for renters. Rents are skyrocketing. Poor people are now being evicted from their apartments by the scores, hundreds of families are caught in emergency shelters and thousands of people are being pushed to the edge of society.

Now, I realize that we have problems, lots of them. Climate change, the refugee crisis worldwide, a war on immigrants and oh, by the way, Donald Trump is president. And yes, homeless people sleeping in our neighborhoods.

Now I'm not going to say that we all have more important things to worry about, because the reality is worrying about the housing crisis is real – very real.

But I will say pushing homeless people from one neighborhood to the next is not going to solve the poverty crisis in America, much less climate change or helping rid our country of right wing, bat-shit crazy people who believe people like you and me, regardless of how we feel about the homeless, should all go fly a kite.

I don't think it's a stretch to say that having angry Trump supporters receive unjust airtime on network TV and other media helped contribute to a toxic and divided environment nationally. In actuality, having angry liberals drive housing policy due to the same kind of unjust airtime has the potential to lead to the same kind of toxic and divided community over homelessness and housing.

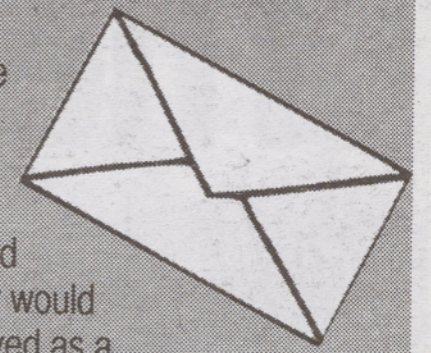
The reality is, we do know how to help end people's homelessness.

What we need is to all be heading in the same direction, regardless of our political bent. That direction is creating the political will and foundation to develop new and emerging policies to help end the housing crisis.

Until that time, it's all noise. Giving us story after story of the plight of the deserving vs. underserving homeless – all of which will need to find another neighborhood to sleep until further notice.

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 Executive 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.



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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.

Been there, done that: The Laurelhurst Neighborhood Association wants the city to prohibit homeless people in a designated area, including its centerpiece, Laurelhurst Park.

