

# Now is the time to get housing done

On the morning of Jan. 31, dozens of people lined up at Catholic Charities in Southeast Portland for the possibility to get a shot at first-come, first serve affordable housing units at the St. Francis apartments.

Of the 102 units becoming available, only 10 of those units were for people with incomes of 30 percent or less of Portland's median family income, which amounts to \$14,300 per year for a single person. More or less, people experiencing homelessness or living in shelters.

Street Roots reported that some of those individuals seeking housing were from outside of Portland. A caseworker from Wilsonville had traveled to the city to represent her clients in Beaverton who were seeking housing.

Then the news came that numbers at Multnomah family shelters were skyrocketing. Historically, family shelters in Multnomah County had a no-turn-away policy. As it turns out, many residents from outside of Multnomah County are trying to access shelter in Multnomah County.

It's a surprise to no one. The lack of affordable housing throughout Oregon is affecting Oregonians everywhere. Bend is a disaster. The coast, too. Southern Oregon is off the grid, literally and figuratively speaking. The state of Oregon continues to treat the housing crisis with kid gloves, pretending that things like homelessness and affordable housing are an urban problem.

Local communities around the Metro region and the state (with the exception of Eugene) invest almost no money or ongoing revenue into the production of affordable housing units or homeless services. It's a nightmare scenario for Oregonians, and unfortunately, Multnomah County.

This year, Street Roots joined in partnership with Meyer Memorial Trust to launch a two-year project on Oregon's rural housing crisis. Across the state, in our most rural areas, the ratio between people's income and housing prices are among the highest in the nation. Tourism housing is consuming affordable housing stock, and even well paid professionals are finding it difficult to stay in rural communities because there is simply a lack of places to live at a reasonable price. It is no wonder that we see Oregonians, many from the metro region, are coming to Multnomah County for housing.

Multnomah County social services aren't innocent either. It's not uncommon that social service providers working to house people have to find units on the private market further and further out. I've had social workers tell me they've housed

people in places like Woodburn, Wilsonville and Battle Ground, Wash.

Throw in rising rents in Portland and mass evictions and it's a nightmare. No amount of housing units on the private market can undo an entire generation of people being thrown into housing instability from the housing bubble and the 2008 recession, all the way to the present mess we find ourselves in.

This, on top of nearly 40 years of affordable housing disinvestment from the federal government, and a Trump administration that threatens to burn the house down. It's not looking good. We need resources and we need them badly. Like yesterday.

That brings us to today.

First and foremost, Metro, our regional government, needs to find a way to prioritize affordable housing in the region. I'm not talking pennies here, I'm talking billions. All the green spaces and transportation projects in the world aren't going to help tens of thousands of people that find themselves housing burdened.

Multnomah County, in my opinion, should be thinking outside of the box to continue to create revenue for more affordable housing dollars. Everything should be on the table. Tourism dollars. Sales tax. Increasing the short-term rental tax, etc.

Building more shelters in Portland in today's environment will be a massive policy failure. Now I'm not saying we don't need more shelter. I'm saying

without creating more revenue for actual affordable housing units and maintaining our rent assistance strategy it will all fall in on itself.

Politicians may be tired of dealing with it, but you know what? They are going to have to deal with it. This problem isn't going away.

More so, statewide housing advocates must find a way to rise to the occasion. Doing what we've been doing isn't getting us there. We need massive investment and strategic vision. We need to be more sophisticated. We must build a foundation to move policy in way we've never dreamed of. If not, the reality is the problem will just continue to get worse.

I believe that there's no better time than the present, and out of every crisis comes an opportunity to reflect and change, and do things better or differently. Regardless if you're a tax spending liberal or an angry neighbor or business owner, we all want the same thing. The public is hungry for something.

Poor people don't care about policy or procedures or systems or anyone's next election or how advocates get it done. They care about having a safe place to call home and protecting their family. Let's find a way to get it done. The alternative - well, there is no alternative. There's only more homelessness.



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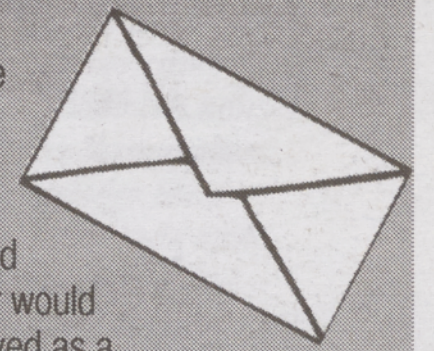
By Israel Bayer

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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](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org). We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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