

Metro housing bond's regional scope the right approach

There are two women who stay nights in a shelter, and on some warm days spread a blanket on the waterfront like picnickers. One morning I saw the one woman helping the other walk with a cane, because her wheelchair just stopped working in the shelter – something about the wiring,

they suspected. I witnessed the tenderness of the two, always leaning on each other. I thought about how beautiful their support is of each other.

Most of the time when we talk about affordable housing in this city, we are not talking about them.

They cannot rent the apartments often described as affordable. Most apartments built through the inclusionary housing ordinance are priced for people who earn 80 percent of the median family income, and median income in the greater Portland area is about \$80,000 for a family of four. We certainly need this housing, but this is not affordable housing for people who live in extreme poverty.

A person cannot simply move from homelessness to housing that's on the open housing market without a lot of extra support.

Just think about how modern-day homelessness parallels the massive federal disinvestment in public housing, which plummeted in the 1980s never to recover. We don't have enough places that very poor people can afford to live. Shelters and camps and relatives' couches are the only places affordable to people with no rent to give.

During the last Point in Time Count, Clackamas County reported that the number one reason people stated for how they become homeless was because they can't afford the rent.

And too many people in the region are spending too much of their income on rent, particularly in communities of color.

What this means is that there is a thin thread between housing and homelessness. One catastrophic event can lungé a person or family onto the streets.

I know that a lot of people in our region

care about homelessness and want to step up when they can.

We are about to have such an opportunity, because Metro has been busy drafting a housing bond measure.

Here's why I'm calling attention to the Metro housing bond measure right now.

This month, Metro released its draft guidelines for a \$516.5 million general obligation bond, about twice that of the Portland bond we passed in 2016.

Over the next few weeks, people in the community can weigh in on the details. In early June, Metro Council is expected to vote to refer the bond to the ballot, which means all of us in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington Counties will have the opportunity to vote on the bond this November. Since January, community advisors have been working on the technical aspects and oversight of the bond, as well as how racial equity can inform the way the revenue is used.

The Metro housing bond proposal allows us to ask for whom housing is affordable, and to make sure that the poorest among us are counted.

It makes a lot of sense to widen the scope of where we think about housing people, because poverty and homelessness do not stop at county lines.

Whether you're in Multnomah, Washington or Clackamas County, let's make sure we are prioritizing that people have a safe place to live. The private market is not going to solve this. If we are concerned that people are homeless, all of us need to make sure they have housing.

When we describe a need for affordable housing, let's include everyone, and then take the steps to make this happen. We need to make housing affordable for those who are living on the streets and in shelters, and not leave them to fend for themselves.

That's why when I think about something like a housing bond, I think about so many moments I witness in the Street Roots office, or on the sidewalks – so much astonishing humanity and love. These are some of the folks we need to think about as we now cast our sights on the opportunity to support a big regional housing bond.



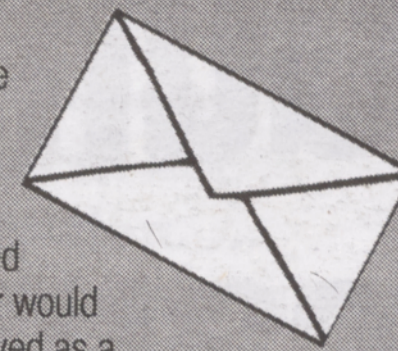
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