

Go big for housing and go big with the Metro bond

A couple falls asleep on their mattress, a blanket pulled up to their chins. Elsewhere, a man nods off in a pink overstuffed chair. These are scenes that might be unfolding in houses across the city, but that mattress is on the side of the road heavy with traffic, partially

covered by a freeway overpass. And the overstuffed chair? It is on a narrow sidewalk alongside a warehouse.

It is not news to you, I know, to read that housing is too expensive, and not just in Portland, but all across the region, all across

the state. People are struggling, and sometimes in desperate circumstances, sleeping on furniture left on the side of the road or in tents.

Our housing market is mightily inhospitable to poor people.

We need a big, public response because the private market will not house all the poorest of our neighbors. We cannot wait for the market to solve this. It won't.

But there's reason to celebrate. On May 22, Metro announced that it will increase its planned general obligation bond to \$652.8 million.

Yes! Let's go big with this bond.

Why? It's worth repeating: The private market cannot solve the housing crisis for the poorest of our neighbors. It will not pencil out. If we care about actually having homes for people on the streets, we have to step up. That couple on the mattress, that man in the overstuffed chair – they deserve actual shelter around their furniture.

On June 7, the Metro Council will hold a public hearing to refer the regional affordable housing bond to voters in November. So if you feel strongly about this, please let Metro councilors know. They need to hear that voters all across the region want a strong public response to making sure all our neighbors have secure, quality housing.

There are many reasons why we need to create deeply affordable housing on a regional level. During the most recent Point-in-Time count of people struggling with homelessness, Clackamas

County surveyed people on what led to their homelessness. The number one reason? Unaffordable rent.

Students across the tri-county area are struggling with homelessness. Beaverton School District has tallied the largest number of homeless students of all the school districts in the state.

This is a regional problem.

And single-occupancy apartments will not house these students and their housing-insecure families. Apartments need to be big enough for families. Metro has prioritized a portion of the bond dollars for three and four-bedroom apartments that fit families.

More children will be housed. More elders, who might live in intergenerational family structures. So as we evaluate how this money gets spent, look at the number of people served, rather than the number of apartment.

Let's build our movement over the next five months and pass this bond! Here's what it will cost per year to the average property owners: \$60. In other words, the cost of tickets for a group of five or six friends to spend the afternoon at a Hillsboro Hops baseball game. Or an evening out watching "Avengers" at the local theater, perhaps with some popcorn.

Housing people across the region is certainly worth that.

Metro planners have learned from some of the obstacles that the city of Portland has had to overcome with its bond, and they are designing a bond with a clear timeline and oversight, while the implementation will be done at the local level. Clearly, all the next steps are not going to be easy. If they were, we'd have this all solved by now.

We must not settle for a status quo that results in cruelty.

People all across this region care that neighbors are sleeping outside, that children are moving from couch to couch as families desperately try to keep things intact, that working people make choices between medicine and rent, unable to save for their senior years. People care. So let's go big for housing!



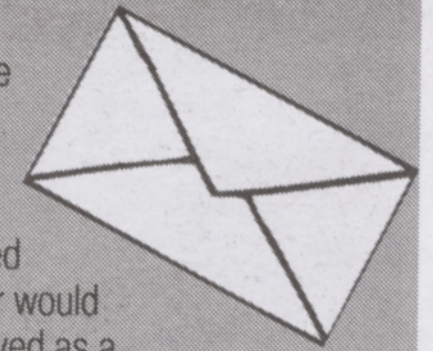
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