

Elections bring hope for new housing solutions

The season has shifted. Even sunny days have the snap of autumn to them. During a downpour, a Street Roots vendor bundled up in a doorway, scooting himself just deep enough under the awning to mostly stay dry, a small tarp to his chin as a blanket.

At Street Roots we have begun to fret about socks for all the damp feet that people will suffer, and not too long after that, when the freezes come, the thousands of hand warmers people will need, and the gloves and the hats.

But I have a sense of hope right now, too. Autumn brings us the Nov. 6 elections. It's less than a month until ballots arrive in the mail. Plenty of vendors use Street Roots as a mailing address, and I am glad, because it's urgent that their votes count.

I hope that when you look at the measures for housing, that you think of all of them marking their ballots when you mark yours. This election is really important when it comes to housing.

I am proud that our regional government was creative enough and bold enough to put together a big housing bond – \$652.8 billion over 20 years. All the housing built or purchased with this bond money must be permanently affordable. In other words, once it's built to be affordable, it has to stay that way. Just like the buses and libraries and roads, we should expect that our public dollars support housing so that our region does not become a place where only wealthy people can afford to live. This is a public concern, and the private market alone will not fix it.

Some people ask, why Metro – aren't they the zoo people? The recycling people? This is why: As the only directly elected regional government in the nation, Metro is big enough to spread out taxes so that the average homeowner pays about 5 dollars a month (an estimated 24 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value), and the solution crosses county lines. Metro is big enough to pool these funds and establish oversight, but it doesn't build the housing. That happens through local municipalities, housing authorities or, if the statewide constitutional amendment passes (Measure 102), other affordable housing providers too.

This past week, I traveled with the Welcome Home Coalition to see affordable housing projects in Milwaukie. I stood before the River Glen apartments for families who make half the median income or less, and then pay no more than one-third their income on rent, the federal standard for affordability.

Trell Anderson, the executive director of Northwest Housing Alternatives that runs River Glen, described how a project like this is funded. Because it is impossible to simply cover the costs through rent – the whole point is to get the rents affordable for low-income families, after all – Northwest Housing Alternatives layers financing from many different sources: federal, state, and local sources, grants, bank loans, on

and on. He showed a chart of layers, like a bright cake of finance, to explain this. Since this is a reality of how affordable housing is financed, the statewide Measure 102 is important to pass, too, making it possible to layer the Metro bond funds into these other layers of finance, rather than locking the funds into housing authorities only. In this way, more deeply affordable housing can get built.

As he talked, a girl, maybe 11 or 12, walk by, her backpack slung over her shoulder. She was done with school for the day, heading home to the River Glen apartments. That layered chart Anderson was holding up? It was all about that child who lived in an apartment building that was stable, and not in a shelter or a car or a tent. That's why we need to vote yes on both measures to house up to 12,000 people in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties.

These aren't quick fixes. Projects are coming online for the Portland bond we passed in 2016, and the problem is so big that sometimes, it's hard to notice. But the people who get off the streets and into housing? They notice. Just last week, the Portland Housing Bureau announced that it was purchasing the Westwind Apartments in Old Town, 70 single-room occupancy apartments that – through a partnership with Multnomah County – will be paired with supportive services for people exiting homelessness.

The Westwind project joins other projects built or planned with Portland bond money – 263 apartments at the Ellington Apartments in Northeast Portland; a 51-unit building at 105th Avenue and East Burnside; lots on Northeast Prescott and Southeast Powell slated for future affordable units. If Measure 102 passes, the Portland bond will also have more flexibility to be combined with other funding streams.

None of this is enough, and none of this is quick. But here's what it is – all of us trying. All of us saying yes, we will take this on, this deep inequality, and acknowledge that public solutions are necessary, again and again. The Metro bond doesn't solve our housing affordability and homeless crises. But it plays an important role.

Here are some ways you can help the Yes for Affordable Housing campaign. Register to vote. Volunteer for the campaign by signing up at yesforaffordablehousing.com or texting "Housing" to 38470. If you have a lawn, grab a sign and display your support. Some Street Roots vendors have volunteered to have lawn signs at their sales locations this weekend, Sept. 22 and 23, so look on Street Roots social media streams, as well as @YesForHousing to find out where to go to both support your vendor and pick up a sign.

And, importantly, vote Yes for Affordable Housing measures 26-199 and 102. When you fill in the bubbles on your ballot, please know that you are a part of something big – the largest effort our region has ever taken to fund deeply affordable housing. And then, on Nov. 7, we get to work with more solutions.



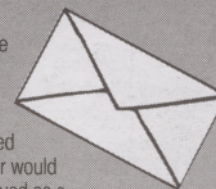
DIRECTOR'S DESK

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