

THE NEXT ANTI-PANHANDLE CITY

The Eugene City Council moves forward
— out of nowhere — with panhandling ordinance

Rain or shine, some people experiencing homelessness are standing at intersections with signs asking for money, work or food. Some signs even joke that the wife had a better lawyer. All of them are hoping for a hand-out from drivers, though.

The Eugene City Council made its first step to pass an ordinance that would prohibit the transfer of goods from a vehicle to pedestrians. However, ACLU of Oregon says it's ready to challenge the city if the ordinance passes and results in citations.

During a Jan. 14 City Council work session, City Councilor Mike Clark proposed moving forward with a panhandling ordinance that mirrors Springfield's.

Clark moved to direct City Manager Jon Ruiz to design the ordinance's language. The next step will be a public forum.

During the work session, Clark said the proposal was in response to an "overwhelming" amount of citizen input asking for the ordinance. He said he brought it up as a safety concern, among other reasons.

The council approved Clark's proposal, with Claire Syrett and Alan Zelenka opposing.

Heather Sielicki, an advocate for the homeless, wrote a letter to the City Council and shared it with *Eugene Weekly*.

"It stigmatizes and dehumanizes people asking for help and encourages discriminatory views," she wrote. "Implementing ordinances to impose restrictions on sidewalk and roadside solicitation is a waste of law enforcement energy and tax payer dollars. We have real public safety needs in this community, and responding to panhandlers is not one of them."

The ACLU of Oregon wonders whether the City Council is using its powers wisely.

"I think the question the people need to ask is, what are their city councilors doing?" says Mat dos Santos, legal director for ACLU of Oregon. "Are they trying to resolve this problem of the housing crisis? Or are they passing empty laws that will get challenged in court and cost millions of dollars?"

Eugene's proposal isn't the first time the ACLU of Oregon has seen an ordinance that prohibits panhandling.

Sixty-one other cities in Oregon have ordinances that prohibit the transfer of goods from vehicles to people on the street. One of these cities is Springfield.

"What a travesty that you'd pass a law to prevent a Good Samaritan who is helping someone in need," dos Santos says.

Springfield passed the ordinance in 2016. It allows police to cite violators up to \$50 for transferring money, food or property to a pedestrian.

Clark commended the ordinance in Springfield for improving safety.

Yet, the Springfield Police Department hasn't issued any citations since the ordinance passed, says Amber Fossen, the city's public affairs coordinator.

"Springfield Police has historically approached violations of the ordinance as an educational opportunity," Fossen said in an email to *EW*.

One of the effects of prohibiting the transfer of goods to pedestrians would affect Eugene-Springfield Fire Department's "Fill the Boot" campaigns, which usually raise money for muscular dystrophy.

If the ordinance allows the fire department's campaign to continue, though, it would be unequally applied, thus a discriminatory application.

Dos Santos says the ACLU is open to challenging the ordinance if it gets enforced.

If the council approves the ordinance, dos Santos urges people to go out and hand out money to people experiencing homelessness in front of police.

"I hope people will do it, because it will have real political backlash," he says. ■



SLANT

• The fractures in the national Women's March didn't dampen **Eugene's inclusive Womxn's March** on Jan. 19. We asked a police officer to estimate the crowd when men, women, children and their signs were still streaming in to the Wayne Morse federal courthouse plaza from all directions. She estimated 2,000 then, so it was many more than that on a rainy Saturday morning. Sen. Ron Wyden and his team were there. Crazy fun music and dancing changed the stern face of the courthouse. Certainly these marches that started in 2017 kicked off the great mid-term elections of 2018 and, hopefully, will help bring back our democracy.

• The federal government has long subsidized the arts; **Eugene's Very Little Theatre and Eugene Symphony are now offering to subsidize government workers.** VLT is giving free tickets for the Noel Coward comedy *Blithe Spirit* to federal workers furloughed by the GOP's government shutdown. The show opens Friday, Jan. 25, and runs weekends through Feb. 9. Idled workers can get a pair of tickets to any performance by calling 541-344-7751 or at TheVLT.com. The symphony has a similar offer for its Jan. 24 concert; call the Hult box office at 682-5000 for tickets. See our story on the shutdown's local effects in this week's news section.

• Two Lane County authors received special recognition this week when they were selected as finalists for the **2019 Oregon Book Awards**. Mary DeMocker of Eugene, author of *The Parents' Guide to Climate Revolution: 100 Ways to Build a Fossil-Free Future, Raise Empowered Kids, and Still Get a Good Night's Sleep*, and Noah Strycker of Creswell, author of *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World*, are finalists for the Frances Fuller Victor Award for General Nonfiction. Winners will be announced April 22 in Portland. Strycker just happens to be *EW* arts editor Bob Keefer's son.

• **Gov. Kate Brown's smart, upbeat, sometimes sassy speech** in Eugene Jan. 22 reminded us here at *EW* why we put her picture on the cover and strongly supported her in the November elections. Speaking at a City Club of Eugene event on the UO campus, Brown spelled out the actions we need to take in Oregon on education, homelessness, health care, parental leave, climate change, disaster preparedness and more. Several times she pushed the Climate Energy Jobs bill, asking the audience to help pass it. We were left with revenue questions. Where will we get the money? She mentioned a cigarette tax, but that's not enough.

• Last week, despite an effort to use correct pronouns for **Charlie Landeros**, the veteran and father who was shot by Eugene police at Cascade Middle School and who used they, their, them pronouns, we allowed some wrong pronouns to creep in. We deeply regret the error.

SLANT INCLUDES SHORT OPINION PIECES, OBSERVATIONS AND RUMOR-CHASING NOTES COMPILED BY THE EW EDITORIAL BOARD. HEARD ANY GOOD RUMORS LATELY? CONTACT EDITOR@EUGENEWEEKLY.COM

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