

No Place to Call Home

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

crisis," she said. "Section 8 housing is very important but we need to start making sure the majority of rentals are reasonable. Unreasonable, exorbitant rent cannot be the standard."

Holland also explained that unregulated evictions were disproportionately affecting African-Americans and Latinos.

"They can evict you based on however they feel without giving you a reason. It might be illegal to evict you because of the color of your skin but it's not illegal to give you no reason. So you have black families turned on to the street. The black homeless rate has gone up 48 percent in the past year or so and there is no way to evaluate whether any eviction is reasonable or racist if no-cause evictions are perfectly legal," she said.

The City Council voted to declare a housing emergency after the long meeting, citing an estimated 1,800 homeless people

sleeping on Portland's streets on a daily basis. But for renters worried about rent hikes that put them on the edge of homelessness, there seemed to be no clear answers.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau, stated he would propose new fees on developers to help pay for more subsidized housing, and offer incentives for construction projects that include such housing.

Saltzman also wants to extend the required 30 day no-cause eviction to 90 days, which is still less than the one-year notice proposed by affordable housing advocates.

"Tenants are tired and in distress," said Justin Buri, executive director for the Community Alliance of Tenants. "They're tired of moving, tired of homes making them sick, tired of paying over half of their income on rent."

Commissioner Nick Fish pointed out that although city officials might have their own ideas



PHOTO BY OLIVIA OLIVIA/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Zev Nicholson, organizing director at the Urban League of Portland, calls for housing solutions for renters as high prices and no-cause evictions are taking a toll on the community. The protest came during a rally outside City Hall before an Oct. 7 council hearing on the housing crisis.

of how to help renters in crisis, policies at the state and federal levels impact local housing issues in ways that are beyond their control.

"It should come as no surprise to people in the room that people want to live in our community or that people from the around the country are pouring into Portland or that our national and local

economy is changing so dramatically and leaving so many people behind," Fish said.

"All of these threads are part of a larger reality in Portland," Fish added. "When the city becomes denser, when land becomes scarcer and more valuable, it's not those at the top that get squeezed. It's those at the bottom."

Fish went on to say that city

must work for change with its state and federal partners.

Josh Alpert, the Mayor's chief of staff, explained that there was no clear path for local leaders to follow which probably accurately summarized the city's unsure direction. "There is no model to follow, no playbook," he said.

At the end of the day, Mullen and other residents returned to their shelters, overpriced apartments, or street corners, and not much was immediately different on a day that seemed to have started with a lot of hope.

"Maybe something will change," said Mullen, "Maybe they can go to Salem and advocate ending that ban on rent control or stopping these evictions."

But short of new regulations, Mullen's focus would be on finding a safe, reasonable place to live before his four month stay in transitional housing was over.



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