

OSTPDX Meeting April 10, 2018

“Homelessness and Affordable Housing – What’s the Problem and How Can We Work to Fix It?”

This program featured a panel including Bob Stacey, Metro Councilor; Mark Jolin, from A Home for Everyone; Brandy Tuck, from Portland Homeless Family Solutions; and Laura Golino de Lavato, from NW Pilot Project. The panel gave an overview of the homeless issue in Portland, discussed their programs to address homelessness, and the proposed ballot measure expected to be on the November ballot.

Lynn Youngbar introduced OSTPDX, Las Cuatro Amigas and the leadership team.

Next meeting OSTPDX: Tuesday May 8th

- Phil Keisling about voter mobilization
- Kelsey Paden from Defend Oregon about upcoming ballot measures that we need to defend against - don’t sign! Also support for an initiative about corporate tax transparency.

Task force work continues choosing candidates to support.

**Marc Jolin - director of city/Multnomah County Office of Homeless Services (“Joint Office”) - government**

He has worked on homeless issues in Portland for over 20 years. Started on homeless issues in Philadelphia. Ran Homeless law project. Ran JOIN (does street outreach to the homeless). Belief in the possibility of change drives his work. City/county director for 18 months, when they decided to join forces: Home for Everyone. Values: person-centered; the people have the best information about what they need; build trust, long-term commitment, love and care are most important (even though they are the government!) Average age of death of the 80+ homeless here was 49 (those who are housed live into their 70’s). Last year they helped 8,000 prevent homelessness, enabled 5,000 to become housed. Prevention, placement and sheltering numbers are up significantly in the last few years. The community (businesses, landlords) has really pitched in.

And yet homelessness went up 10% in the last year. 4,000 in any night are homeless. Probably three times as many have home insecurity (sleeping in someone’s garage, for instance). Why? Mostly due to rents increasing more than wages. We don’t have enough affordable housing. Mental illness and addiction are a smaller cause; most people with those issues are housed. Disability monthly payments (SSI) are maximum \$750 a month, which doesn’t get you a place now. (A studio apartment in the housing market is \$900). Social security benefits average \$1200, so elderly can’t afford a one-bedroom apartment. Federal benefit levels are pretty hard to change.

So the biggest need we have is to get more housing that people can afford. Why not rental subsidies for extremely low income households instead of tax cuts for the wealthy?

Shelters are full. Shelters aren't cheap, and not a solution to homelessness.

### **Brandi Tuck - Portland Homeless Family Solutions (non-profit)**

Executive director of PHFS for twelve years. She works with families who are homeless. Mostly funded through the above city/county program; donations very helpful. "Homelessness is not normal, and we should not treat it as such. We have to fight our compassion fatigue." (Israel Bayer). We already spend far more on subsidies for the wealthy (mortgage deductions) than on subsidizing low income families. Homeless students have difficult lives.

We haven't always had homelessness. There was a homeless epidemic in the '30's, but then the New Deal helped (white) people, and we had little homelessness until the '80's. (People of color had the deck stacked against them due to redlining etc.) In the 80's the federal housing authority budget was slashed, public housing fell into disrepair, and mental hospitals were closed. All this was exacerbated in communities of color. Thirty-five years later we are still struggling. Nationwide we are 4+ million units short, in Portland we are 28,000 units short.

Their organization provides support to families with client-centered practices. While they are working on housing, they provide interim shelter for 100+ families a night, plan to quadruple that within the year. They also do homelessness prevention.

How we can take action:

1. Work with their office on policy, including at the federal level
2. Volunteer in a shelter, build relationships
3. Donate things (community warehouse)
4. Donate money
5. Donate expertise (property management, graphic design, etc).

### **Laura Golino de Lavato - NW Pilot Project (non-profit)**

Executive Director of NW Pilot Project. (No, they don't train pilots!) In 1969 services like these were started by a chaplain at Good Samaritan Hospital to help people being discharged from the hospital; it grew into Meals on Wheels, among other services. NWPP continues to work with very low income seniors in Multnomah County, primarily on housing, transportation, and advocacy work. They are a small organization. Serve 1500 seniors in Mult Co every year. Housing = health. They are helping many seniors to prevent homelessness, as well as housing the homeless.

Trying to set up a local version of federal housing section 8, but which has fewer barriers. Doing a tiny program to start, with help from Home Forward, Joint Office and Meyer Memorial Trust.

Actions: volunteer on a board, donate, ask questions, be educated and involved.

### **Bob Stacey - Metro Councilor (government)**

Sam Chase (NE rep on Metro) works on homelessness from Metro's perspective. Stacey's expertise is urban planning, they work together. Dramatic rent increases have led to

a huge mismatch: more people moving here than housing being built (after 2008 housing crash stopped construction cold).

Welcome Home coalition said: we need lower rent units. They approached the city and the county. Portland voters approved a bond for this.

But - the problem extends beyond the city itself. There are as many homeless kids in Beaverton as in in Portland. Metro decided to wait on a transportation issue, and move forward on instead on homelessness. Their polling show that homelessness and housing affordability is number one issue for voters. There are twice as many households in the Metro area as in Portland alone. They are hoping to get funds (at a cost of about \$50 per household) to move forward and help with affordable housing region-wide.

The Oregon constitution has a barrier to Metro working with housing organizations in joint ventures. The legislature has referred a constitutional amendment to voters to change this which will be on the November ballot. Metro is thinking about putting a measure on the ballot for 2600 new units ( $\frac{1}{2}$  a billion dollars) of permanently affordable housing. Metro has land acquisition expertise, but not in running housing projects themselves. They would partner with other governmental and non-profit organizations like REACH. But if the constitutional amendment doesn't pass, they would only be able to partner with governmental orgs.

They want to provide additional housing in good neighborhoods (like where you and I live), but also in any neighborhoods where people want to stay.

#### Questions:

1. "When homeless are moved by authorities, why can't they keep their possessions (which may have been donated by neighbors)?" Marc: authorities only respond when complaints occur. Inner SE has been a particular trouble spot, and city is trying to prevent new encampments in that area. Things are not supposed to be thrown away, they are supposed to be stored. Sites which are posted or cleaned up are posted on a public web-site.
2. "Is Portland too welcoming - do our services bring people to Portland?" Marc: They have asked this, and less than 200 of 4000 came to Portland due to services. Most came since they thought they might have a job here. Neither Portland, Seattle nor San Francisco bus people out of town unless they have a documented relative willing to house them in a different state. We can't build a wall around Multnomah County. We should have concerns about the regional and state-wide response.
3. "Can't we leave camps under the freeway? Maybe provide them Port-a-potties?" Bob: This property is owned by Oregon Department of Transportation; maybe there is some lack of coordination among governmental areas. Metro at times has tried to move people out natural areas. None of this involves easy decisions.
4. "What about the relationship between mental illness and homelessness?" Marc: of the unsheltered, about 72% self-identify as being disabled (including addiction and mental illness). Overall trying to change to low-barriers shelters. Chronic homelessness (definition = over a year), is the fastest-growing population. De-institutionalization and failure of adequate community and supportive services clearly contribute to the homeless problem.

5. “Is there a directory or some central resource to figure out where to donate or what to do? This would also educate people about what is already being done.” Suggestions:

- 211info.org
- Street Roots guide (small yellow booklet).

6. “Homer Williams proposition” Marc: Proposal to open a temporary membrane shelter (like Cirque du Soleil) for 100+ people at the end of Broadway bridge in Pearl; low-barrier, “navigation center”; help with transition to housing. Monies from Tim Boyle, businesses want to step up. Marc is in favor of this.

7. “How should we respond to requests for money?” Human engagement more important than money. OK to give them money. In the long run probably more effective to give money to an organization. Advocacy community is split on these issues.

8. “Is Metro Bond Measure possibly going to be on the ballot at the same time as the constitutional amendment?” Bob: possibly, and the value of the public investment will be maximized if the constitutional amendment also passes.

9. “How many of the homeless we see are “travelers” who move up and down the coast, and is the strategy to deal with them different?” Brandi and Laura: Seniors and families are not travelers. Most traveling occurs in the summer, sometimes to particular events. Strategies are basically the same overall, but it is always tailored to the individual. Harm reduction, hygiene and safety are priorities for travelers.