

NWNW Homelessness Forum Final Report

April 20, 2016

Introduction: The Neighbors West-Northwest Neighborhood Coalition recently hosted a community forum in an effort to inform people about the work being done on homelessness in the Portland area. Our invited speakers were Marc Jolin, the Initiative Director of A Home for Everyone, and Josh Alpert, Mayor Hales' Chief of Staff. The Portland Police were also invited to present. On the day of the forum, a lawsuit was filed against the City requesting an injunction against the Mayor's Safe Sleep policy, which resulted in Josh Alpert and the Portland Police pulling out of the forum shortly before its scheduled start time.

The meeting was well attended and it was clear that many of the attendees were very frustrated by the Mayor's staff and the police canceling their presentations. There was a problem with the facilitation and the forum immediately switched from a presentation to a Q&A session with Marc Jolin and the NWNW President, Felicia Williams, in which many attendees expressed anger and frustration over the daily livability problems they were experiencing. A large number of attendees were also very interested in how they could help with this situation; the small group sessions made it easier for them to convey their ideas in an effective way. Quite a few people spoke directly with Marc Jolin after the Q&A to find out more about how they could help.

The biggest observation from the forum was that the lack of public information about efforts to resolve issues surrounding homelessness has resulted in an underutilization of available resources and created a justified amount of anger among Portland's residents. To quote C.E.S. Wood, "Good citizens are the riches of the City," and it is very clear that not enough effort has been made to engage Portland's good citizens in this process.

Resources:

Homelessness Toolkit: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/toolkit/>

A Home for Everyone: <https://multco.us/housing-and-homelessness/partners-fighting-homelessness>

Reporting Camps:

Portland Parks & Recreation Property: <http://www.parkscanpdx.org/>

City Property (other than Parks): 503.823.4000

ODOT Property: Ask.odot@odot.state.or.us or call 888.275.6368

The following is a summary of information provided and questions that were addressed by Marc Jolin at the April 20th NWNW Houselessness Forum.

Q: What does Home for Everyone do?

A Home for Everyone is an alliance of everyone who is working on these issues. This is an integrated approach that we have never had before. Home for Everyone works on the ground to add shelter beds, but we need support from the community. We are looking for solutions as quickly as possible, but the city went a decade with no expansion of services, so we are now trying to double it in just two years. Shelters aren't enough to improve livability concerns. The lack of permanent housing is the bottleneck and is what is causing all of those people to be on the street. I hear your frustration and hope that concerns about Safe Sleep guidelines can be addressed. The Home for Everyone plan is posted online at homeforeveryone.net. We have plans related to housing, healthcare, employment, and safety on the streets. We have already housed 695 veterans in one calendar year, twice as many as the year before. We are available to give direct presentations at public meetings.

Home for Everyone has increased the emergency shelter commitment by 500 beds. These beds are targeted to women and the chronically homeless. We need more low barrier shelters.

Q: What is the strategy for dealing with service-resistant people?

There is a small group of outreach workers to try and bring in those who are resistant to services. This requires intense sustained engagement. City Council approved this work in their 2014-15 budget and it is believed they will increase money in the coming budget. There are 900 people who are chronically unhoused. We need to adjust the shelter style. For example, San Francisco's Navigation Center model if adopted would allow us to work with approximately 100 people at a time in a manner different than the current shelter system (working with groups of people, couples/partners, people with pets, etc.).

Q: How does Home for Everyone address "hospitality" services provided by private organizations? Is there any permitting required? Doesn't this attract more travelers?

Faith-based groups are legally allowed to do what they want to do. Marc will take it as a task to do more with those groups. From the data collected: of permanent people (not summer visitors) who are homeless only about 20% are from somewhere else, including Metro area. Only about 13% of them came because of services.

Q: There seem to be a lot of traveling homeless individuals. Where have people come from and why did they come to Portland?

The count shows the percentage of people who travel to Portland is small. Of that number 20% of the individuals were already homeless when they arrived. 13% of that number indicate they came because of service availability.

This is a list of questions, comments, and personal testimony in regards to the current situation, as presented at the NWNW Houselessness Forum on April 20, 2016. This will be sent to the Mayors Office in hopes of getting further explanation.

Questions

City & County Structure

- In your experience has having an elected official in charge of this complex issue made a difference in competent coordination of funds and services?
- What are we learning from other cities and how are we using this information?

Informational

- Can you provide a better understanding of the statistics vs. myths about the homeless population? If there are two types of populations (year round vs. summer), can you provide more statistical information about the differences?
- Do people tend to stay in the areas where they once had a home?
- What is the strategy for dealing with service-resistant people?
- How is rent assistance distributed? Is it based on need or does it require the applicant to be able to pay some portion?
- How much rent assistance is available?
- How does Home for Everyone address “hospitality” services provided by organizations who travel into Portland? Does the City require and/or enforce permits for these groups?
- Is there a legal process for the state to take custody of people who cannot care for themselves? What’s the definition of a “danger to themselves?”
- What is the process for cleaning up camps and holding the campers possessions taken during the clean up?
- Do other cities’ houseless populations align with Portland’s (majority are from the city/region)?
- Does providing more services to homeless people just cause more homeless people to come here?
- What resources does the federal government provide that can help with this issue?
- How can we assure that the policies we are crafting are not dominated by special interests?
- How do people get involved in being part of the solution to this problem?

Housing Policy

- How will the Housing Bureau interpret inclusionary zoning? Will it be a requirement for developers? How can we ensure that it is used to its fullest extent?
- What if inclusionary zoning is not the answer? Is it better to help people with direct rent assistance? (See a recent OPB discussion between an economist and housing advocates for background info)
- What about spending urban renewal (PDC) money for housing for the homeless?
- The MULTE program uses the Median Family Income (MFI) of the zip code where the building is being constructed to set the “affordable” rate at 60-80% of MFI. Why not use the MFI for the four counties making up the Portland metro area and establish a consistent MFI?
- The greatest need for housing is at the 0-40% MFI range, but none of our current policies incentivize private development for those who need it the most. How can we create a housing fund that would be used to build housing for those in the 0-40% MFI population?

Camping/Camps

- How does the City feel about the Right to Dream 2 model for camps? The discussion group agrees that R2D2 seems organized and has a sense of accountability. The livability concerns associated with this camp are low compared to the camps that emerged in the last few months.
- Where are the campsites on the list of priorities?
- Where do/will people go if their camp is swept?
- Can we have more cleanup of graffiti and trash so that at least the people in neighborhoods can tell that our leaders are aware of what's going on and care what's happening?

Enforcement

- What is the police role in enforcing the Mayor's Safe Sleep guidelines?
- What is being done about the Springwater Corridor?
- Why doesn't Portland try the NYC "Broken Window" model? (Police arresting/detaining people committing low level crimes)
- When will policing efforts get the support they need? The police are frustrated and can't do anything.
- Is there a plan to train and put more officers on the streets? Where can money that can't be used for these vacant positions be utilized to address public safety concerns?
- What happens when a "one point of contact" report is filed?
- How to give "road warriors"/lawless vagrants an impression that enforcement of criminal laws are carried out?
- Is there a short-term plan for dealing with camping-related behavior that is either criminal (e.g. theft) or very detrimental to livability (e.g. feces and syringes on sidewalks, prostitutes in tents)?
- What is being done about transient boaters?

Revenue

- Why was the homeless navigation center put in (for \$50 million) instead of using open vacant spaces that we have available?
- What is the strategy for generating revenue sources to address housing very very low-income individuals and families?
- The money is there – if you can send Charley to the Vatican – why can't we afford to do more?
- Why doesn't Portland enforce traffic violations to raise funds for more policing?
- What programs will the additional funding will be used for?

Feedback/Comments/Concerns

Suggestions for moving forward

- Raise taxes on the rich and use \$ to expand services.
- Donate/tax % of real estate profits to houselessness.
- Buy vacant property on outskirts of the city and create a rest area (i.e. expand Dignity Village & R2D2). Provide services and staff on site.
- Mandate certain areas to be zoned for houseless camps.
- We would like to have a census done in the summer so that “road warriors”/“travelers” are present. These individuals should be documented.
- Keep track of houseless people and monitor if they’re criminal, taking drugs, etc., and provide them with customized resources for their situation.
- Create a community ambassadors program of civilian staff “patrolling” the neighborhood to help enforce law – paid, trained, but not as long a process as police training.
- Outreach to owners of empty private properties for their use as a shelter.
- We want to see a clear new plan for getting the police force fully staffed. Better recruiting options and transparency.
- Why can’t we create a work-for-service system where individuals help improve the community as well as get the services they need?
- Organized outdoor shelters like they have in Eugene. Trying to be open and flexible and be innovative.
- What about sending PDC money into housing for homeless people?

Safety and Livability Concerns

- Safety and livability issues must be separated from the true homeless issues.
- Law enforcement – people are engaging in profound negative behavior – how do we address that.
- Move on issue of criminal behavior & “service resistant” individuals.
- What role do the Park Rangers play in addressing the homeless in the Parks?
- We need officers without guns who are more peaceful.
- The tents feel unsafe and create a barrier between the housed and unhoused populations.
- Economic impact of homeless individuals and panhandlers on tourism and locals visiting downtown is concerning.
- Cleaning up graffiti and trash would add to the impression that something is being done.

What can citizens do to help?

- List of things a person can do
- Mobilize community to be active
- Create a sense of partnership with the community through systems of accountability

Desired outcomes

- Provide clear, up-to-date information about current policies, enforcement, and plans
- Communicate with all community partners about opportunities for involvement
- Transparency in the reporting process

Personal Testimony

“City has an obligation to hear community concern. People are irate at lack of concern by city representatives, demonstrated by their absence here tonight.”

“Safety is a huge concern. One participant does not feel safe on the Springwater Corridor alone unless she is in Gresham.”

“There seem to be more people visibly living outside now than a few months ago.”

“There seems to be ongoing reporting yet no results.”

“There seems to be a policy of discrimination – if you are homeless there is less enforcement.”

“I can’t handle all of this.”

“There is an idea that reduction in services or choosing the appropriate services is productive (although might seem to be counter-productive) For example: handing out tents had unintended consequences (although a noble idea at its intent).”

Get to the root of the problem and address that. Most houseless people are struggling with addiction or mental illness.

“What is Marc Jolin’s view of JOIN employment placement program? Is it effective? Does it need additional support?”