

Spring of 2019--An update since my summary was written:

In addressing homelessness in Albany, we seemed to have all the pieces together by being proactive in seeking housing for people experiencing homelessness. In the winter of 2018, there was a handful of homeless people who resisted working with agencies or shelters and started hanging out in public spaces. At the request of a homeless person, I met with seven homeless individuals at City Hall. They wanted to know if there was a piece of city land on which they could legally tent camp. After a long discussion with their situations, I was able to get them to understand the choices they need to make are to follow the path towards housing.

After the meeting, I felt the majority understood it was their responsibility to work with our local agencies, as living on public property was not a solution to their housing problem. One person had been in and out of the shelter and it was several months later he passed away, due to his lifestyle. I have not come across the young woman who was there, which hopefully is a good thing, but her young friend at that time I saw a few months ago standing in the road under the Jackson Street overpass. I was shocked he looked like he had aged twenty years. It is so sad to see what drugs do to a person's body and only if they could understand for themselves what is happening.

During this time, a local church became more involved with assisting individuals with their current homeless situation and this group of homeless sought their help. We welcome as many homeless advocates as there can be to help this vulnerable population, but the efforts need to be helping and not harming a homeless person by hindering them from staying focused on following the path toward housing. Unfortunately, once one person has found housing there seems to be more seeking help. I'll touch base later over the church's efforts.

Last winter throughout Oregon and mostly in the larger cities like Portland hit their peak with frustrated residents that have dealt with the issues surrounding thousands of homeless people throughout their community, which is the result from turning their heads away when someone was tent camping by enabling that lifestyle. Hundreds of camps sprung up within public right of ways even along the freeways. The trash and unsanitary green spaces were becoming a health hazard. Portland got proactive in removing those camps, but what happened is it shifted some people to other public spaces within Portland and other communities and added more costs for all levels of government.

By summer of 2018, it seemed Albany was seeing a rise with people arriving in our community for assistance. This is great in how Albany is proactive in addressing homelessness, but it does bring on challenges. Signs of Victory finalized the renovation of its shelter to provide beds for 100 people in July 2018. One week afterward there were nine homeless people who arrived from Portland and Washington. By summer's end, there were many arriving from out of state and the shelter was quickly becoming full. Early March 2019, I met a visitor at one of our meal sites who just came to Albany a few days prior from Montana. This is frustrating to the many advocates helping the homeless, because they can't reduce homelessness when people are continually move here to seek assistance because of their lack of housing.

The past year the sentiment with the frustrated residents has shifted with the majority of people in Oregon. They realized their efforts to help the homeless are heart-warming, but there is a point when the homeless need to accept that they need to follow the path toward housing and not maintain their homeless lifestyle. Also, many citizens have been discouraged to see the behavior of some homeless

individuals with their disrespect of public and private property. This has generated a decline in support to the homeless who live outdoors and do not have the desire to move toward a goal of housing. The homeless in the shelters have a better chance of getting into housing. Our two homeless shelters are seeing a rise in financial contributions, which shows our community wants to invest in programs that truly help move the homeless forward in their life.

This disrespect of public and private property brought the Albany City Council in May 2018 to adopt an ordinance to provide a tool for our police department to help change individuals behaviors. We adopted a 'no tent camp' ordinance and a 'law enhancement area zone'. In the zone ordinance, if anyone commits three code violations then the court could ban them from visiting this zone. The ban would not prevent them from seeking services from agencies in the zone. The court can put every agency that a person needs to seek help from into their court order. This may include meals from local soup kitchens to mental health services.

Before the ordinances were adopted, the City Council received quite a bit of push back from a local church and some social service agencies. They accused us of criminalizing the homeless. I take offense to that because my goal has always been to strive for housing for the homeless and not enable them to stay homeless. What the persons opposing our ordinance were basically asking us was to turn our heads away from criminal behavior at the expense of businesses and families trying to live in their homes peacefully. At this meeting there were numerous people in support of the ordinances as they had enough with people's disrespectful behavior of their private property. One homeowner said she found numerous times drug needles in her yard and people using her yard as a bathroom. She also saw a homeless person looking in her window at her children. She said something has got to be done or we will have no choice but to move. How could some people expect the City Council to not support the needs of someone wanting to live peacefully in their home and to allow disrespectful behavior to continue?

Many people were pleased with the ordinances and way less in opposition. I admire the people in caring about the homeless, but there is a point they need to realize it is their caring that actually is harming them by hindering a person from following the path to housing. If they truly believe their approach to help the homeless find housing is the right direction, then they need to evaluate if their efforts are working or not.

I myself have the whole community to please and I have learned over my years in addressing homelessness, that enabling homelessness only increases the homeless population at the expense of the community in enjoying their public property. It will come to a point in society that if we do not start decreasing the numbers of homeless persons, then communities will be faced with decreasing their supply of public parks and open spaces because they no longer will be enjoyed by the public, as they are becoming some people's personal living room and bathroom.

Another shift over people's lack of sympathy toward the homeless is the job market. Every employer in every industry struggles to fill all of their vacant positions. You have many businesses seeking entry level positions to even fast food restaurants that cannot fill their job openings with quality workers or people even willing to work. When you have a hard-working employee at a fast food restaurant doing the job of two people for minimum wage in order to provide a roof over their head they have lost sympathy toward people who want to live off of others' generosity and public property. Every morning when this worker gets up and looks at himself in the mirror while he hates to go to work, but he does it to support

his housing. Yet his hard working paycheck pays the taxes that support the parks and open spaces that many homeless want to use for their personal use just because they do not want to follow the rules of a shelter. Is that fair to a hard-working person? No it isn't and I have to take into strong consideration that workers' life versus enabling someone to stay homeless.

We are at a time in society that the homeless need to realize they are taking advantage of many hard working peoples' tax dollars in supporting their choice in life. If someone can ride a bike or walk they can find a job that will fit them. If someone is not capable of working, then they have more opportunities to seek housing than others who are capable of working.

Of course there are challenges for some homeless and that is most often substance abuse and some have mental health issues. But as I have stated in my first summary, they can still reach the path to housing.

In December 2018, we held a housing affordability forum as a survey was done and about 4000 Albany residents were experiencing rent burden, where more than 50 percent of their household income was going towards their rent. This is an issue that is a difficult one to solve because we cannot tell a business how much to pay their employees and we cannot tell a landlord what to charge for rent, or what price a homeowner can list their house for sale.

But what was not stated in this meeting, was acknowledging a big part of this population would prefer to pay a higher percentage of their income on rent than be homeless. As stated in my first summary, I have always told a person who was homeless that their income must first pay for their housing and next for their electricity. All of their other daily living needs they can find assistance to support, just like they did when they were homeless. So the 4000 residents (which is not households) was not factored in to how many were homeless before and it is better to be in housing than being homeless again. Also, how many of these households utilized a housing voucher, which requires a very limited income.

As of early 2019, Albany had hundreds of new apartments built, which opened up more affordable housing. Albany has a large variety of housing but has no control over what prices for a home or what a landlord charges for rent. Even if the whole Willamette Valley were filled with housing, there is no guarantee a place would be affordable and mostly for someone who is at the poverty level for income. But no matter what in order for anyone to rent, they need an income, which comes by having a job or receiving public assistance. Living on the streets will only prevent someone from being presentable for employment or to find housing. This is a major reason why people who are homeless need to stay at the shelter to be presentable when seeking and retaining a job.

In the spring of 2019, a downtown local church wanted to provide an outdoor portable restroom along the side of their building. Our city code does not allow outdoor restrooms unless it is for temporary construction or in one of our parks during the summer.

This church provides a meal once a week to serve low-income individuals and the homeless. They discovered some homeless started sleeping indoors and around their building, which resulted in people using their outdoor space for a bathroom. So the church brought in the portable restroom and members were very adamant they wanted to keep this restroom, yet it disobeyed our code. I asked to have a meeting with them to discuss the issue and they refused unless I attended their meal site. I guess they

figured I had never been around a meal site, yet as a St. Mary's parishioner I have seen our Soup Kitchen many times this past forty years.

So I attended the meal site and the person who reached out to me about their restrooms sat with me the whole time, as I appreciated he listened to the conversation. There were two homeless persons at the table and I asked where they were from and one said he arrived a few days prior from Montana. As I stated above in this update, we can build and build more housing and we will never get caught up if people keep moving here for our services.

I chatted and discussed homeless issues and the problem with the church restroom for almost two hours. This was not productive for me, as some church members came and listened for a bit and went, so they never heard all of the issues that were addressed. I felt most did not want to hear anything negative over the outdoor restroom. I believe they feel in their hearts they are helping the homeless. I explained to them St. Mary's has had a soup kitchen for almost forty years serving meals three times a week. Their guests can use their indoor restroom during the hour of the meal site, but they are not to hang out before and after the meal time. St. Mary's provides security to make sure everyone leaves the premises. They never allow anyone to hangout or sleep overnight which prevents the need for an outdoor restroom.

The downtown church that feels an outdoor restroom is a solution to their problem with the homeless using their space as a bathroom, would not be needed if they managed their church's once-a-week meal site in a manner that did not promote their church as an outdoor shelter.

Why should the City allow outdoor restrooms and open a Pandora's Box by changing its policy when the church can look at their own management practices?

Several weeks after this meeting at their church and the City Council meeting where the church requested a policy change, I saw on a Saturday afternoon three homeless folks living in the church doorway. They had enough belongings piled up that it was obvious they had been living there for a few days. Two of these individuals have been homeless for a few years and receive services from the church.

The following week a friend and I after a council meeting drove around the church about 10 pm and we counted ten people sleeping outside of the church. It proved my point. If you allow an outdoor restroom then you will have people hang out all night by this restroom. Two of these people are using a substance and the young woman (who I have seen around many times over the past few years) looks like she has aged twenty years the last two years. What services people have been providing for her to live outdoors is destroying her body. This is very sad for me. I have tried to encourage her to work with Chance (a drug and alcohol recovery resource agency) and she will come up with every excuse you can imagine to not work with them.

The other person is a registered child sex offender and I am so amazed the church allowed him to live outside of their premises, when the church has a preschool on site.

But the bottom line, is the church's efforts actually helping the homeless or harming them by turning their heads away from their substance abuse.

During this time, I came aware of a well done video by KOMO News in Seattle over the issues surrounding homelessness. The You Tube video is called "Seattle is Dying" and I encourage everyone to

watch this video and as it is well worth an hour of your time. It clearly shows why I am adamant about not enabling homelessness and what happens when you turn your head away from the issue as the problem keeps growing. It has changed Seattle's landscape as law enforcement is leaving their profession and businesses moving out of Seattle. What was good about the video instead of just identifying the problem was finding a solution. In Rhode Island, they are utilizing their state correctional facilities as drug rehab facilities. Seattle has a huge drug addicted homeless population and even if there was plenty of housing the addicts would not be accepted into housing. They need to overcome their addiction and our nation needs to divert funds toward rehab. Seattle spent \$1 billion dollars last year in dealing with homeless issues.

Also, many times I hear from Albany residents accusing myself and our local government of not reducing homelessness. People need to realize Albany does not have the level of homeless issues compared to many communities and mostly our size of population. But this is not just an Oregon or Washington issue, this is everywhere across our nation and most people do not realize it is even global. Every country has homeless and some countries refer to homeless as street people because families live on the streets.

Housing crisis and tiny homes:

Since the end of the Great Recession resulted in a large amount of population migrating to Oregon, this has brought on a huge rise in housing costs for homeowners and renters, plus a lack of housing. There has been an enormous amount of housing inventory added throughout the state, but as I mentioned before government has no control over that cost. The market demand is what sets that price for a home or how much for rent.

We have a local effort by some homeless advocates in wanting to address the housing crisis and high cost of housing by exploring the new trend of tiny homes as a viable solution to the lack of housing. I toured some tiny home shelters in Portland and in February I toured Emerald Village in Eugene, which has fourteen tiny homes on a lot, with an outdoor gathering area.

I believe this trend toward tiny homes will fade away over time, so it is not a long term solution. I have higher hopes in wanting to provide housing for people that uphold a higher standard of living than in such a tiny space of 150 square feet. We could build 1000 tiny homes and you have no guarantee a homeless person would qualify for the housing and if they are using a substance they would not qualify. I believe with my experience of housing issues in Albany and what could be doable, I think supporting studio apartments would be more sustainable and provide a better standard of living for a homeless individual.

Tiny homes also do not support public services through taxes. I am attaching a PowerPoint presentation to my web site which lists our city budget. There is a section about tiny homes with some pictures for people to ponder to see whether they feel this is a direction for Albany to seek or not.

I can see now I might need another story to write in regards to tiny homes!!

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