

The Portland Tribune

Portland takes page from Eugene on homelessness

By Lyndsey Hewitt

October 24, 2017

City taps into solutions based on proven models, while local nonprofits and faith-based organizations figure out how to help.

On the surface, Eugene's not much different from Portland.

Its leaves are falling, just like in Portland; its residents are enjoying post-work beverages on a Friday afternoon, just like in Portland.

And, just like Portland, Eugene is enduring a housing and homelessness crisis.

But over the past decade or so, the city, just a two-hour drive south, has been working diligently on some particularly creative solutions for those without shelter. Solutions that some in Portland have been looking at lately as a model for its own crisis.

While Portland recently passed the framework on how to spend its sorely needed \$258 million affordable housing bond, those units will take some time to come online. A growing number of people are living in their cars, RVs and sleeping on the streets, demonstrating a need for legal places to stay until more housing is available.

In both cities, nonprofits and faith-based organizations are banding together and working with local government to install things like villages and other temporary housing.

However, in Portland, it's more of a rumble, while in Eugene, it's a well-oiled machine.

Steps taken

In Portland, the group Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good, known as MACG, has been hard at work pushing for more affordable housing.

The group successfully lobbied Portland city officials in 2015, around the time of the housing emergency declaration, to direct 45 percent of tax increment financing dollars to the Housing Bureau for affordable housing projects in urban renewal districts.

While construction of housing slowly comes to fruition, the group now is focusing on Clackamas County projects, including a large-scale tiny-house project that will house veterans — modeled after Opportunity Village in Eugene.

"It's just as bad in Clackamas County as in Portland," said MACG organizer Mary Nemmers. "If you look at zoning laws, they are just as prohibitive."

Nemmers said they launched efforts there after the Springwater Corridor Trail was swept last year, displacing hundreds who camped there.

In Multnomah County, a smaller-scale tiny-home project was started this summer in North Portland's Kenton neighborhood, for 14 homeless women. It is a pilot project that is scheduled to end after a year.

Additionally, the county began a pilot project where they would install a handful of small Accessory Dwelling Units for homeless people in willing residents' backyards, but those haven't come online yet.

Although projects are taking some time, Nemmers said, she thinks things are accelerating and organizations are getting in gear, especially ahead of winter. Last winter, four homeless people died of hypothermia in Multnomah County.

"I think there's kind of a rumbling," Nemmers said. "I think momentum is growing."

Not time for reinventing wheel

Recently a faith-based organization called Leaven Community worked to push the city's Bureau of Development Services, overseen by Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, to relax code enforcement for people living in vehicles — modeled after a long-standing car camping program in Eugene.

Eudaly announced Oct. 8 that the bureau would deprioritize her bureau's enforcement of complaints against people parked in cars, RVs and tiny houses on wheels on private property.

"We just borrowed from (the city of Eugene)," rather than reinventing the wheel, said Marshall Runkel, Eudaly's chief of staff. "They did a bunch of work with figuring it out."

Eugene's rules, he said, "seemed reasonable and seemed like a great place (to start), at least for a get-go. It's just a common-sense thing — we're in the middle of a housing emergency."

Anne Williams, director of housing programs at St. Vincent DePaul in Eugene since 1992, said: "This is a very large problem, and we all need to be participating. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Nobody has time for that." (She said one person died in Eugene last winter, but not during the time their emergency winter shelters were activated.)

The Leaven Community is part of MACG.

"We are meeting, and we're working to build relationships with financial institutions and developers for creating this," said LaVeta Gilmore Jones, the co-director and organizer at Leaven Community. "We know that more will have to be done, but this is the starting place, the beginning place to look at the different ways affordable housing can be created in Portland, or spaces for housing can be created in Portland."

One of Leaven Community's first projects is working with Portsmouth Union, a North Portland church, to construct a multifamily complex on its property.

Deep roots

It's not to say that Portland is behind Eugene — the focus just has been on getting money for larger-scale, long-term housing projects.

St. Vincent DePaul, a nonprofit organization that provides food, clothing and shelter for the needy, has deep roots in Lane County.

It has one location in Portland that mainly focuses on food boxes. But in Eugene, the organization has its hands in just about everything to do with homelessness.

"Ultimately, if you're on the street (in Eugene), you'll run into St. Vincent DePaul," said Keith Heath, the manager of the city's overnight parking program and of Eugene Service Station, a day center for the homeless.

Terry McDonald, St. Vincent DePaul's executive director, cautions that although Eugene has lots of short-term and transitional programs — a car camping program, rest stops, one tiny home village and another in the midst of construction — they have not addressed the idea of housing-first, meaning placing homeless people directly into permanent housing. And a large housing bond is seemingly out of reach.

"We have trouble just getting the police budget passed every year ... so that's why we have to get creative. Passing a bond is unthinkable," he said.

Like MACG and others rising up, he's relying more upon the "common good," something he worries, these days, is in short supply.

"The mood in the country is dark — there is a me-first mentality now. If we have no common good, then we aren't a people; we're a collection of individuals. The common good is the fabric that pulls us together," he said.

Here's a look at some of the programs to address homelessness in Eugene:

Opportunity Village

The Eugene City Council approved establishment of this 30-unit, self-managed "micro-housing site" in 2012, for space up to 45 people. The site was built in 2013, and has a mixture of tiny homes and Conestoga huts. There's a year-to-year lease for the land with the city.

It's a "transitional" village, meaning each resident must be actively working to move on, although there is no set deadline.

Of the 22 people who departed the village in 2016, seven did so after residing there more than two years.

Opportunity Village provides water, electricity and internet service for communal purposes, but individual homes don't have those amenities.

People who apply to be in the village must go through a vetting process, and then are placed on a waitlist. Once they're on the waitlist, they can have access to some of the site's amenities, including paying one dollar to use Opportunity's shower facilities.

There's also a seniority system where people get access to a Conestoga hut and then move up a tier to a tiny home.

It's operated by the nonprofit SquareOne Villages, which is now in construction on its second tiny-home project in Eugene called Emerald Village, which are permanent low-income units rather than transitional.

The program has helped Alice Gentry, 66, a lifelong Eugene resident who retired from working in the Fred Meyer Garden Center and then realized she didn't have enough Social Security money to live on. She then ventured into the woods for five months, she said, then slept in her car for nine months before getting into Opportunity over a year ago. Now she's getting a home at Emerald Village.

She's excited to have something permanent.

"Ever go to the pound and find a puppy, and they were so excited because they found their forever home?" she said. "That's me."

Conestoga huts

Conestoga huts are sprinkled throughout Eugene at different designated sites for homeless folks, including the city's "Rest Stops."

They can be found in numerous little nooks of the city, easily identified by their dome shape that resembles the back of a covered wagon. They're sort of a step below a tiny house, considered a vehicle by city code, and are constructed using very basic materials. The inside resembles a long closet, with just enough space for a bed.

They're constructed by Eugene nonprofit Community Supported Shelters, which also helps operate the city's Rest Stops.

Rest Stop

In 2013, Eugene passed an ordinance creating the Permitted Overnight Sleeping Pilot Program, which allows up to 20 people to sleep in tents, trailers or Conestoga huts at designated, council-approved sites.

The city enters into an agreement with a third party — such as a church or business — that operates and supervises the site.

The four rest stop sites are all operated by Community Supported Shelters, and also operate as a transitional program.

On Feb. 27 of this year, the Eugene City Council removed the sunset date for the program, allowing it to continue.

Rest Stops and Opportunity Village together served 296 people in 2016.

Sixty-five percent of Rest Stop participants were from Lane County.

Portland has one sanctioned rest stop, Right 2 Dream Too.

Car camping, or permitted overnight sleeping program

St. Vincent DePaul oversees the city's Overnight Parking Program, a program tied to the city's permitted overnight sleeping ordinance adopted in 2002. The Rest Stop program also operates under this umbrella.

These rules were a model for Portland Commissioner Chloe Eudaly's recent announcement regarding deprioritizing enforcement of complaints against people living in RVs and tiny homes.

There are 44 sites for vehicles in Lane County, with more than 100 total slots. There are sometimes one or two people in a slot. There are 100 people on the car camping wait list.

The program is year-round, while St. Vincent provides sanitary facilities, camper screening, placement and linkage to services.

Instead of commissioning its transportation division to enforce illegal car camping violations, St. Vincent DePaul staff agreed to be first responders in attempts to find people a legal spot to sleep.

Numbers

Portland population: 639,863

Portland's most recent homeless count: 4,177

Eugene population: 166,575

Eugene's most recent homeless count: 1,529

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 HUD Point in Time counts

While Eudaly's announcement allows for up to three vehicles in parking lots of nonresidential structures, including a religious institution, business or public entity, Eugene's allows for six.

Dusk to Dawn program

The Dusk to Dawn program — started in 2015 to address even higher numbers of people needing a place to sleep at night — is essentially multiple military-style tents at certain spots in Eugene that only operates for the winter. Last winter it served 360 people, starting on Nov. 1.

TriMet warned against housing money before Wheeler asked

*By Jim Redden
October 24, 2017*

'After a review, we believe we are not authorized to include affordable housing in the bond measure,' TriMet wrote in an email Wheeler did not see

The day before Mayor Ted Wheeler announced he wants TriMet to include \$100 million for affordable housing in its upcoming transportation bond measure, the regional transit agency said it cannot legally do so.

However, Wheeler was not aware of TriMet's statement when he spoke at an Oct. 14 forum on affordable housing needs in the Southwest Corridor between Portland and Tualatin. At that time, Wheeler said the money was needed to help mitigate the displacement expected to be caused by the new MAX line being planned in the corridor.

"It's a big ask, but we have to make sure money is available for affordable housing," Wheeler said.

The \$1.7 billion measure is being considered by TriMet to help finance the line and a variety of other transportation projects in the region. It is tentatively being planned for the November 2018 ballot.

TriMet's statement was made in an Oct. 13 email from David Unsworth, the agency's director of project development and permitting, to a number of city, TriMet and Metro staffers working on the Southwest Corridor Plan project. It was not sent to Wheeler or his office directly.

In his email, Unsworth said TriMet's legal staff has determined the agency cannot legally spend money directly on housing — or on anything not related to transit and transportation projects.

"One idea that had been raised is the potential of including affordable housing in TriMet's potential 2018 bond measure. We asked our legal staff to examine whether TriMet's legal authorities allowed this under our state authority to levy or expend funds. After a review, we believe we are not authorized to include affordable housing in the bond measure," Unsworth wrote.

Ironically, Unsworth sent the email on Friday because he thought some of the staffers would be at the Saturday forum, where people might ask about TriMet including housing funds in the measure. The email says the idea had been raised in previous meetings of the committee advising Metro on affordable housing needs and opportunities in the corridor. No one knew Wheeler would announce his request then.

Even after learning of TriMet's opposition, Wheeler is not yet prepared to back down.

"Our position is that we need to consider housing infrastructure alongside transit infrastructure, particularly in this case, since dense, affordable housing is ideally suited to public transit corridors. We continue to believe that affordable housing must be a key part of any successful plan, and that there is a solution to be had," said Wheeler's spokesman Michael Cox.

TriMet's concerns are also political. As Unsworth said in his email, "A bond measure will be heavily scrutinized by opponents and will likely face legal challenges. We believe that a court would find a tax or bonding specifically for affordable housing to be outside our legal authorities

and therefore invalid. Inclusion of affordable housing into the bond would delay and/or cause the results to be overturned."

Even a legal challenge that delays TriMet from putting the measure on the November 2018 would have serious consequences for the project. According to documents distributed at the forum and available online, TriMet hopes to secure a commitment from the federal government to fund half the estimated \$2.4 billion project in 2019.

To do that, the agency must show it has commitments for the remaining 50 percent by then. The measure is currently expected to raise half that match — \$750 million, with the remaining \$950 million available for regional congestion relief and safety improvement projects.

TriMet wants to help meet need

TriMet public affairs director Bernie Bottomly says he understands why Wheeler or anyone else might think TriMet could help fund needed affordable housing projects in the Southwest Corridor. The agency has an admirable record of completing complex and costly projects on time and under budget, including multiple MAX lines in the region.

TriMet has also supported affordable housing projects along the MAX lines, by selling properties it acquired during their construction to nonprofits for affordable transit-oriented developments at a discount.

One is the Stadium Apartments at Southwest 17th and Yamhill, along the Westside MAX track directly east of Providence Park. TriMet bought the site for the project and later sold the unused portion for the housing, in compliance with rules for such partially federally funded projects.

TriMet also partnered with Reach, a nonprofit affordable housing organization, to build the Patton Park Apartments along the MAX Yellow Line at North Interstate Avenue and Killingsworth Street. The two organizations are working together again to build 200 units of affordable housing on just over two acres of land TriMet owns in the Kenton neighborhood at the corner of North Argyle Street and Denver Avenue, which is also near the Yellow Line.

"We're gratified by the confidence people have in us. We agree with Mayor Wheeler's goal of providing more affordable housing," Bottomly said.

Bottomly also said TriMet completely agrees with Wheeler that funds need to be secured for affordable housing projects in the Southwest Corridor to mitigate the displacement likely to occur. He insisted the agency is committed to working with Portland and other governments along the proposed line to figure out how to pay for them.

"We need to work on how, not what," Bottomly said.

That includes working with Tigard, which was represented at the forum by Councilor Tom Anderson, who said his city has lagged behind in building affordable housing.

"There only 690 units of affordable housing in a city of 50,000 people, and only 49 have been built since 2013," said Anderson, who noted that the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Tigard has increased from \$800 in 2006 to more than \$1,200 today.

According to Anderson, there are numerous opportunities for affordable housing projects along the proposed MAX line in the so-called Tigard Triangle that includes underdeveloped properties in the area of Highway 217 and Pacific Highway. That's where the line is likely to travel from Portland when the final alignment is decided early next year. But Anderson admitted that financing such projects is a challenge, with the Tigard City Council currently considering such

options as waiving system development charges that pay for infrastructure improvements to not requiring on-site parking for every unit, which can cost up to \$35,000 each if built underground.

"Tigard wants affordable housing, but it's hard to do," Anderson said.

TriMet has asked cities and counties within its boundaries to submit potential transportation projects to be funded by the local portion of its potential measure. Portland has yet to disclose any. The Clackamas County Commission has asked for funds to help extend the Sunrise Corridor road project into the eastern part of the county.

City Hall Watch: Snag doesn't derail Central City plan

By Jim Redden

October 24, 2017

Plus, Streetcar ridership grows with housing and Overflow-related pump to be replaced

The City Council chose not to restart the Central City planning process after reviewing a map showing where some members of an advisory committee owned properties they did not disclose as completely as state law requires.

After briefly discussing the situation during a Wednesday hearing on updating the existing Central City Plan, the council continued working on the proposal, which is intended to govern growth in downtown and adjacent neighborhoods until 2035.

Perhaps the most controversial property discussed was at the west end of the Morrison Bridge. The maximum allowable height currently is 75 feet. The proposed update would increase that to 250 feet to encourage redevelopment. Commissioner Amanda Fritz has submitted an amendment to maintain the limit. The council will consider it on Jan. 18.

Streetcar ridership grows with housing

Portland Streetcar ridership is increasing as more and more housing is being built within easy walking distance of the line that circles the inner city, according to a study released Thursday. The ECONorthwest study commissioned by the city-owned system says riders took 4.7 million trips in 2016. That same year, 3,130 new multifamily housing units were built within one-quarter mile of the line. Since 2001, nearly half of all multifamily housing in Portland has been built along the line. Over one-third of all regulated affordable housing units also are located along the line.

The study predicts such growth will continue. It says another 5,600 units are either planned or under construction along the line, including 645 affordable ones.

Overflow-related pump to be replaced

Heavy rains caused a combined sewer overflow into the Willamette River on Thursday from an outdated pump station that is scheduled to be replaced.

According to the Bureau of Environmental Services, about 23,000 gallons of stormwater mixed with sewage was discharged into the river from the Southeast Alder Pump Station at Southeast Alder Street and Water Avenue. It is scheduled to be taken offline soon to expand its capacity. According to BES, work will include replacing the existing pumps and control equipment.

Crypto detected again in Bull run Watershed

By Jim Redden

October 23, 2017

Portland officials say water is safe to drink but advise those with compromised immune systems to consult their doctors

A potentially deadly microorganism was detected once again in the Bull Run Watershed in a sample collected on Wednesday, Oct. 18.

Portland officials continue to insist the primary source of the much of the region's water is safe, but advise those with compromised immune systems to consult their doctors.

Many of the positive results have followed heavy rains, which could have washed animal feces, where crypto is found, into the city reservoir there.

The reservoir provides water to Portland and many surrounding communities. Although it has historically been very clean, beginning earlier this year, *Cryptosporidium* has been repeatedly detected in the water there.

Because of that, the City Council approved the construction of a filtration plant that will remove crypto — as the microorganism is commonly called — and other contaminants from the water. It will cost up to an estimated \$500 million and not be completed for another 10 years or more.

According to the Portland Water Bureau, a one oocyst (indicator of crypto) was detected in the 10-liter sample. This detection follows other low-level detections from January through March and again in September of this year.

Exposure to crypto can cause cryptosporidiosis, a serious illness. Symptoms can include diarrhea, vomiting, fever and stomach pain. People with healthy immune systems recover without medical treatment. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), people with severely weakened immune systems are at risk for more serious disease. Symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness. Examples of people with weakened immune systems include those with AIDS; those with inherited diseases that affect the immune system; and cancer and transplant patients who are taking certain immunosuppressive drugs.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that a small percentage of the population could experience gastro-intestinal illness from crypto and advises that customers who are immunocompromised and receive their drinking water from the watershed consult with their healthcare professional about the safety of drinking the tap water. To learn if your drinking water comes from Bull Run, please contact your local drinking water provider.

Public health surveillance during and after a similar series of low-level detections from January through March of this year did not see an increase in crypto-related illness. The general public is not advised to take additional precautions.

The public is encouraged to view all sampling results posted to the City's website at www.portlandoregon.gov/water/cryptoresults.

Customers with questions regarding water quality can call the Water Line at 503-823-7525.

Willamette Week

Former Oregon Public Broadcasting Journalist Enters City Council Race

By Rachel Monahan

October 23, 2017

Spencer Raymond, until recently a newscaster with Oregon Public Broadcasting, officially announced he's running for City Council today.

Raymond, who appeared regularly during OPB's broadcast of All Things Considered over the past three years, will join the growing field seeking the seat vacated by Commissioner Dan Saltzman, according a news release Monday.

The release says he resigned his job last week. OPB confirmed his last day was Friday.

"I've been talking on the radio for years," Raymond said in a statement.

"Now I want to listen. I'm excited to start a listening tour and hear from people and communities all over town. I want to use these conversations to create policy that has its roots in the community and neighborhoods."

Raymond did not respond to a request for further comment.