

The Oregonian

Portland Proposes to Help Renters Expunge Convictions

By Elliot Njus

June 19, 2018

For more than a decade, two felony convictions have followed Rosalee Anderson every time she's tried to rent an apartment.

Most of her applications were rejected. The places that would rent to her anyway did so for a reason -- the apartments were in rotten shape, she said, with mold that sickened her daughter. Even the housing authority Home Forward initially rejected her application to live in public housing on the basis of the felonies, one for identity theft and one for delivery of heroin.

That despite Anderson's clean record in the years since, many of which she's spent as a gang outreach worker helping to keep others from making similar mistakes.

"I've changed my whole life around," she said.

The city of Portland has a plan to help low-income renters wipe some criminal convictions from their record with the goal of removing a barrier to housing. The proposal, which Mayor Ted Wheeler is bringing before the city council on Wednesday, is expected to cost \$50,000 for one year, and it's expected to reach about 300 households.

In Oregon, violations, misdemeanors and low-level felonies can be expunged, according to the Oregon State Bar, and only after 10 years without another conviction. Prosecutors and victims may object to the expunction.

The Portland Housing Bureau would contract with Metropolitan Public Defender, a local public defense firm, to comb through renters' criminal history for convictions eligible for expungement. The firm would also hold six legal clinics to find during the year where renters can meet with attorneys.

The attorneys might also help wipe other blemishes from their records, including charges that might have been dropped, outstanding warrants, debts or pending evictions.

"We get more people than you could possibly imagine with just traffic stuff, but they missed one court date," said Aliza Kaplan, the interim director of the Community Law Division at Metropolitan Public Defender.

A similar program at Home Forward is in its second year. It began when the housing authority found past convictions prevented some of its clients from using Section 8 vouchers in a competitive rental market. In other cases, it left residents no choice but to remain in public housing after they might otherwise have been able to move on, freeing up space for others.

"They're stable, they're ready to find employment, get in a higher skill level or a higher paying job, and their criminal background can get in the way," said Executive Director Michael Buonocore. "There's a lot of ways, big and small, that it affects people's lives."

Ron Garcia, president of the Rental Housing Alliance Oregon, a group of rental owners, said the proposal feeds into a narrative that landlords are the cause of the region's housing problems.

And, he said, it will do little to relieve the broader shortage of affordable homes.

"Those that would otherwise qualify are left looking for still other vacancies," he said in an email. "It seems to follow that this policy does nothing to solve the housing crisis, but in fact

creates additional demands that pressure the market even further into an upward cycle of rent hikes."

Though not included in the current proposal, the city is also considering a "ban the box" approach to rental applications, said Wheeler spokesman Michael Cox. Portland in 2016 banned many employers from asking about an applicant's criminal history until after making a conditional job offer. Similarly, landlords could be prohibited from asking about criminal background on applications.

Anderson, now 34 years old and 11 years removed from her last conviction, is in Home Forward's program. She's had outstanding fines waived with the consent of prosecutors. Fines must be paid or waived before a conviction can be set aside, and that's often a significant barrier for low-income offenders.

Her past gives her credibility in her work, which includes mentoring gang-impacted youth in Gresham and intervening when gang violence breaks out to try to prevent retaliation.

But she worries that her employer, a nonprofit that was willing to look past her record, could lose funding for the gang outreach program, putting her out of a job. And she's in a program to prepare to one day buy a home, but mortgage lenders also don't look kindly on felony convictions.

"It's like having a shackle on me," she said. "I can go so far, but it still comes back. It stops me from moving on with my life."

Audit Recommends Consistent Scenario-Based Training for Portland Police

*By Maxine Bernstein
June 20, 2018*

The Portland Police Bureau does not consistently put its officers through scenario-based training although its four-year-old training center includes a large mock village that allows the bureau to simulate real-life situations that officers may encounter on the street, according to a city audit released Wednesday.

Though officers have indicated they want more scenario training, bureau managers have said that it's time-consuming to plan and put in place. Instead, they've focused on providing other training required under the city's 2014 settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, the audit says. The settlement resulted from a federal investigation that found police used excessive force against people with mental illness.

Compared to 2015, when 11 hours of officer training was scenario-based, officers received 5 hours of such training in 2016. It increased to 18 hours in 2017.

The bureau also should spend more time reviewing actual police encounters as part of their training and repeatedly remind officers not to use profanity, demeaning language or labels on the job, often the leading cause of citizen complaints, the audit said.

The recommendations were part of the city auditor's follow-up review of police training since an initial training audit in 2015.

"Any changes need to be sustained over the years," said Drummond Kahn, the city's director of audit services. "It takes continued emphasis to internalize any changes across the organization."

Police managers told auditors that it's been challenging to include real police encounters as part of bureau training due to ongoing litigation or disciplinary considerations. They also said they don't want to embarrass the officer involved, and therefore, are more likely to examine a case involving another police agency.

In a written response to the audit, Chief Danielle Outlaw and Mayor Ted Wheeler, who serves as police commissioner, said the bureau plans more scenario-based training this fall, and will strive to find actual cases to recreate in the training complex's scenario village and examined for table-top discussions. The training division continually evolves to find instruction that's relevant and impactful for officers, the chief and mayor wrote.

Among the other findings in the audit:

- The bureau bought a new software system this year to monitor training of officers and supervisors. But it has its challenges, as it wasn't designed for police training and is not easy to customize. For example, the bureau is still working to track officers' qualifications in use of their weapons and record test scores.
- The bureau has improved its evaluations of training courses and assessments of what training should be offered. For example, the bureau has completed an evaluation of its partnership between mental health providers and police in its Enhanced Crisis Intervention training. The chief has asked the division to conduct more evaluations of its trainings.
- Each of the bureau's precincts have adopted procedures for officers to sign out non-standard weapons.
- After an officer in 2011 mistakenly loaded lethal buckshot into a less-lethal beanbag shotgun and critically wounded a man, a 2015 audit urged the bureau to improve how officers store different ammunition. Others urged the bureau to discontinue use of the shotgun because of the different types of ammunition that it can hold that could lead to such a deadly mix-up.

This year, the bureau did away with the less-lethal shotgun, and transitioned to a 40mm less-lethal launcher weapon, which fires a sponge-tipped rubber round. Live ammunition can't fit into the 40mm launcher, eliminating that problem.

The Portland Tribune

Portland Building Owners to be 'Large and Loud' on Quake Prep

*By Nick Budnick
June 19, 2018*

As city develops details on seismic retrofit requirements, assistance, critics will stay engaged.

Unhappy Portland property owners say they will step up their efforts in the wake of the City Council's approval last week of a resolution requiring seismic retrofits for more than 1,600 buildings.

Angie Even, a leader of the loosely organized group calling itself Save Portland Buildings, said Friday that the building owners intended to take a few days off after the council's Wednesday

vote, then consider next steps. She said once the effects sink in, the critics will get "large and loud."

"I think everybody's in shock," she said. "We're going to regroup next week."

The council resolution called for requiring retrofits to unreinforced brick and masonry buildings, those that are considered most likely to collapse in an earthquake.

Some criticized the city's approach as too weak on safety, a concern echoed by Commissioner Dan Saltzman. But opponents note the retrofits will be costly, and argued that even the compromise timeline of 20 years that the city adopted for most commercial buildings will be prohibitive for many people.

The resolution frames the outline of the city's intended approach, including a requirement that by next year unreinforced masonry buildings bear placards informing people of the risk.

Other than that, many of the details of the city's approach are to be worked out over the coming year.

The council instructed staff to set up one work group to explore implementation and the financial assistance available to different types of building owners. Another will focus on nonprofits, including churches, after some church leaders spoke in opposition to the retrofit plan.

"We've heard loud and clear that building owners need additional support to do the work," said Dan Douthit, spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management. "We want very much to preserve the historic nature of this city and preserve the nature of these buildings."

But he also called the vote a "milestone" for the bureau's safety efforts, in light of estimates that the city faces at least a one-in-four chance of a significant earthquake in the next 49 years.

"I think this will give us some momentum," Douthit said.

In March, a state study predicted tens of thousands of people would be injured or killed in a magnitude-9 subduction earthquake, many of them due to collapsing unreinforced-masonry buildings. Experts predict a 10 to 15 percent chance of that large an earthquake happening in the next 50 years, but note that other types of earthquakes also are possible — and those can be just as damaging, depending on where they are centered.

City officials aim to set up a revolving-loan program to help fund the retrofits, as well as a property tax-exemption program authorized by Senate Bill 311.

There's been talk of asking the state Legislature for help with retrofitting unreinforced masonry buildings, and the council intends to make that part of the city's legislative agenda for 2019, Douthit noted. "We're not the only city that has them."

Even, who owns a building on Southeast Woodstock Boulevard, said the owners she's been working with will be watching closely. And she said many building owners haven't yet learned of the requirement.

"They're [living] their lives, and they have no idea that this has been going on or that this just happened to them," she said. "If you want to light a fire under a bunch of people, just pass something and show the intent that they're threatening your property and your livelihood."

She is concerned that banks won't want to make loans to help with retrofits, and the tax-exemptions won't go far enough. As a result, some buildings will be sold, prompting gentrification, while others will go into blight and disrepair, she predicted.

"Nobody's against safety," she said. "It's not about not doing it. It's about how do we do it."

Water Bureau to Begin Using Groundwater Well Wednesday

*By Jim Redden
June 19, 2018*

Supply to be blended with Bull Run water to ensure supply until fall rains refill reservoir in the watershed.

Beginning on Wednesday, June 20, the Portland Water Bureau will begin using its groundwater wells in the Columbia South Shore Well Field to ensure adequate water supply to its customers.

Due to the dry spring weather, above average temperatures, and in consideration of available long-term weather forecasts, the PWB will use the well field to supplement the supply from the Bull Run Watershed until the return of significant fall rains.

"We deliver safe and reliable drinking water to almost one million customers," PWB Director Michael Stuhr said in a Tuesday press release. "At the end of a dry spring, it's tremendously comforting to know that we can turn to our Columbia South Shore Well Field and supply all our customers' needs."

According to the bureau, the average contribution of groundwater to the system will be approximately 25 to 35 percent of the average daily water supply, and may be increased if above average demands and dry weather continue. Due to the low percentage of groundwater being blended with the Bull Run Source, the bureau says it does not expect there to be a noticeable change in water chemistry.

It can take up to two weeks, depending on location and overall water demand, for the blended water to make its way through the distribution system to homes and businesses.

According to the bureau, the Columbia South Shore Well Field is a high-quality water supply that meets or surpasses all federal and state drinking water regulations. As a result of careful planning, Portland is fortunate to have access to two excellent water sources that allow us to be prepared to meet the range of supply and demand conditions that occur in the Portland water system, the bureau says.

Although public notification is not required, the bureau traditionally informs the media and sensitive water users when it activates groundwater and when it has significant operational changes.

Supply updates will be posted to www.portlandoregon.gov/water/summersupply. For more information about Portland's drinking water quality, call the Water Line at 503-823-7525.

Customers with questions are encouraged to call the Water Line at 503-823-7525

Willamette Week

North Portland Residents Fear the Latest Plan for Highway Tolling Would Divert Rush-Hour Traffic Onto Their Neighborhood Streets

By Rachel Monahan

June 20, 2018

The tolls could start right at a highway exit leading into the Overlook neighborhood.

Most Portlanders know the Overlook neighborhood for its Adidas sportswear campus, bluffs above Swan Island, and motel neon along North Interstate Avenue.

But residents say it's also a cozy residential neighborhood where children can play in the streets. They fear commuters will soon view Overlook as something else: a route home that dodges highway tolls.

"I see some frantic drivers getting to work and going home," says Fred Brewer, 58, an Overlook resident for the past 18 years. "They're going to hit some people."

The Oregon Department of Transportation is evaluating a sprawling plan to add tolls to some segments of Interstates 5 and 205.

The leading contender? A plan that wouldn't toll all Portland-area interstate highways, but instead limit the tolling to segments of I-5 only—right at a highway exit leading into the Overlook neighborhood.

As the state weighs how to address tolling to relieve congestion on Portland's highways, the fears in Overlook center on a possible drawback of that policy: more car traffic fleeing I-5 and taking to local streets.

"It's going to be a problem," says Overlook Neighborhood Association chairman Chris Trejbal. "If people don't want to pay the tolls, they're going to get off the highway."

Wherever tolls get implemented, there's likely to be an impact on nearby surface streets.

"We share the concerns that neighborhoods in North Portland have expressed about the potential for traffic diversion into neighborhoods that could result," says Portland Bureau of Transportation spokesman Dylan Rivera. "We want to see further evaluation of the best starting and ending points if there were to be an I-5-only option."

State transportation officials are considering several options for how widely to launch so-called "congestion pricing." The proposal favored by Portland City Hall would toll the entirety of I-5 and I-205, from the Washington border to Tualatin ("For Whom the Road Tolls," WW, July 12, 2017).

But in a May 7 report, an outside consultant recommended to an ODOT committee that the state limit its initial tolling to I-5 in Portland, starting at Southwest Multnomah Boulevard and ending at North Alberta Street (see map).

For local residents, that could mean trouble. If southbound drivers face tolls just as they reach the Going and Alberta Street exit, commuters might use North Interstate Avenue or Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard as toll-free loopholes.

The ODOT committee will choose a plan to recommend to the Oregon Transportation Commission on June 25. That's the first step in implementing tolls approved by the Oregon Legislature last year as part of a statewide transportation funding package. (Any tolling plan will also require approval by the federal government.)

There are technically five proposals under consideration, but the consultant's recommendation is considered the favorite.

The consultant also recommends using the central segment of I-5 as a pilot project to study the issue and then phasing in other stretches of highway, in part based on hopes it would reduce the number of places where drivers can flee tolls into residential neighborhoods.

The consultant's report admits there would be "diversion" onto the streets under the option that the Overlook neighborhood fears. But it says not to worry.

"Diversion impacts during peak conditions are expected to be minimal, as I-5 may be able to move more traffic," the report says. "The application of tolls during off-peak conditions could divert vehicles off the freeway during those times, but tolling through dynamic pricing could minimize this effect."

(Dynamic pricing means raising or lowering the tolls depending on how heavy traffic is.)

But the report also argues that the tolling plan favored by the city would lead to even more cars seeking alternatives to tolls and more safety concerns as a result.

In other words, the consultant says, the best way to reduce traffic on neighborhood streets is to impose less tolling.

But ODOT officials maintain that, at least at some hours, tolling could relieve congestion on local streets.

"People already divert to the neighborhoods [when] the freeway is jammed," says ODOT spokesman Don Hamilton. "A more reliable, faster trip on I-5 through value pricing would potentially draw people back to the freeway."

But some Overlook residents say the department is caving to the politics of tolling rather than to local needs.

Washington 3rd District Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler (R) has opposed tolling because it could affect her constituents who commute into Portland.

Because the consultant's recommendation would mean no tolling at the Washington state line, Oregon could face less opposition from Herrera Beutler. She's a loyalist to President Donald Trump, so ODOT might have an easier time getting the required approval for tolling from the federal government.

Hamilton says that's not true. "The consultant made its recommendation based on what best meets the objectives of the project: using value pricing to manage congestion and/or finance bottleneck relief projects," he says. Yet tolling the whole highway system would raise more money—\$300 million a year—than just a segment of I-5, which would raise \$50 million.

At the same time, elected officials in East Portland are skeptical of ODOT's ability to address the effects of tolling on low-income drivers displaced from Portland by higher commuting costs.

That distrust of the agency is shared in Overlook.

"ODOT appears narrowly focused on the interstate; they're not focused on our streets," says Trejbal. "They are building a plan without thinking through all the implications."

The Portland Mercury

A Safe Place to Sleep

By Alex Zielinski

June 20, 2018

How an Experimental Village for Homeless Women Defied Portland's Expectations

Jan has spent so many nights sleeping on pavement that the cushion of a thick twin mattress feels foreign.

Standing in her new home—an eight- by 12-foot hexagon-shaped building—she hesitates before spreading a brown blanket over the bed's crisp sheets. Since moving in over a week ago, Jan has been falling asleep tucked inside her familiar sleeping bag over a thin camping pad. Tonight, she says, she thinks she'll sleep under the covers.

“It's the decompressing that gets to a person,” says Jan, 58, who spent the last year sleeping under an Interstate 405 overpass in Northwest Portland, and who asked to be identified only by her first name. “It takes a while to get used to the fact that I'm inside a place—that I have a bed, that I don't have to keep my eyes open all the time. You gotta learn how to be around people again.”

Jan's cautious acceptance of her new home is a transition that her neighbors, members of her new community, Kenton Women's Village, are all familiar with.

The village, a collection of 14 tiny buildings (with enough space for a bed, shelving, and a solar-powered electrical outlet) in a secluded lot just north of Kenton Park, is meant for cis and transgender women transitioning out of homelessness—and the trauma that comes with it. When it opened in June 2017, the village was meant to test the efficacy of a women-only “pop-up” shelter that would serve as a stepping stone between homelessness and permanent housing. The pilot program, backed by both public and private dollars, wasn't meant to last longer than a year.

But the village has exceeded its founders' cautious expectations. Of the 23 women who've lived in the village, 14 have successfully moved into permanent housing with the help of on-site case workers. All current residents are enrolled in a health insurance plan—allowing many to be treated for chronic health issues—and all have replaced missing or lost identifying documents that have kept them from finding work or applying for housing aid. While four residents have been asked to leave for violating village rules, the Kenton village hasn't brought with it an uptick in crime in the North Portland neighborhood, nor an influx of other homeless camps in the area.

The village's success has convinced both the city and the Kenton Neighborhood Association (KNA) to allow the village to stay open after its one-year anniversary on June 10. The city has no end date to the village's lease, and the KNA gave informal approval for a year-long extension in a 119-3 vote on Wednesday, June 13.

But this project doesn't exist in a vacuum. The Kenton Women's Village (KWV) sprung up in the midst of a housing crisis felt throughout Portland—and across the entire West Coast—that has given way to a new crop of urban homeless villages built in lieu of affordable housing. Many of Portland's villages have fallen prey to massive city-directed sweeps, while a number have managed to stay afloat.

KWV, however, is the first intentional homeless community in Portland that had government and neighborhood buy-in from the beginning—and continues to run, in part, on public dollars. Its early success marks a new chapter in Portland’s mission to alleviate homelessness, one that forces politicians to look beyond the traditional models and adopt untraditional, grassroots ideas taken from the housing activist toolkit.

But as the pilot program breezes past its one-year mark, questions remain: What makes the KWV succeed where other transitional camps have failed? What can Portland learn from the KWV, and how can other villages like it fit into Portland’s growing portfolio of homeless solutions?

The idea for the Kenton Women’s Village began about 14 miles southeast of its current home, in the former center of Portland’s homeless community: the Springwater Corridor.

In 2015, the bike-walk corridor was dotted with homeless campsites, a response to then-Mayor Charlie Hales’ “safe sleep guidelines,” which allowed homeless Portlanders to spend the night on sidewalks and certain city lots as long as they abided by certain rules. It was then that homeless advocate Lisa Lake heard from a number of single female campers—some of them victims of domestic violence—that they felt unsafe camping alone. With donated funds, Lake was able to construct six wooden platforms, each topped with a new tent and set aside for women, at Southeast Woodstock and 93rd in May 2016. The camp was taken down by the city the next day—the first of many campsite sweeps that would take place along the Springwater Corridor that summer.

Lake and other members of the Village Coalition, a group of representatives from the region’s various homeless communities, then negotiated with Hales’ office to find a city-sanctioned piece of land to house the women’s village.

The mayor’s office suggested an empty industrial lot on North Argyle Street owned by the Portland Development Commission (now called Prosper Portland). The property had been bookmarked by the housing nonprofit Transition Projects to hold a new low-income housing complex—but the group knew it wouldn’t be able to secure construction funding for at least a year. So Hales married Lake’s women-centric program with another project from the Village Coalition called Partners on Dwelling (POD). POD, made up of local architects and Portland State University design students, had already been given \$35,500 in city funds to experiment with prototypes for small, portable structures (called “pods”) for houseless Portlanders.

At the same time, a number of regional governments had approved new agency standards for temporary “pop-up shelters” for people experiencing homelessness—and Multnomah County’s Joint Office on Homeless Solutions was looking for a place to test it out.

In his last month before leaving office, Hales met with the Kenton Neighborhood Association with a pitch: The city would help drop 14 pods onto the vacant industrial lot in Kenton, where the county would run a pilot housing project for homeless women.

On March 8, International Women’s Day, KNA informally approved the village with a 178-75 vote, after ironing out a number of rules with Catholic Charities, the organization plucked by Multnomah County to manage the city-owned property.

By June 10, it was open for business.

“Z-I-R-K-L-E,” says Karen Zirkle to KWV manager Bernadette Stetz, who’s employed by Catholic Charities. Stetz is holding a phone to her ear as she speaks with a rental agency, helping village resident Zirkle apply to live in an apartment complex.

Zirkle, 56, has lived at the village since it opened last year, but hasn't been interested in moving out until recently. After spending the previous three years living out of her car, she says she needed time to adjust to the possibility of what she calls a "normal life."

"When you're homeless, you don't have time to think about your long-term plans," Zirkle explains. "You're thinking about how you're going to get gas money, how you're going to get a shower, where you're going to get your next meal. You're in a constant state of anxiety."

Jan, the village's newest tenant, says she knows of a few people who've gone directly from sleeping on the street to living in their own house, without any time to transition. Without guidance, she says, many of them end up homeless again.

After moving into KWV, women are allowed 30 days to recuperate and settle into their new environment. Only after that period of time are they asked to start helping with the village's upkeep and meet with a case worker to begin planning their next step. Each resident has their own set of goals, says Stetz, and they're given no deadline to move out.

Over the past year, Zirkle's released her years of stress by managing the village's garden—a project that's yielded enough produce to feed both the village's residents and trade with local food pantries.

"Gardening saved me," she says. "I needed to be able to nurture something."

Before moving to KWV, Zirkle says she had mentally "shut down" after a series of tragedies. It began when her boyfriend shot her, forcing her to move into her parent's house for a year of recovery. When she finally moved into a room in a rental house, the building burned down in a fire, destroying most of her possessions. That's when she moved into her car.

"It just got harder and harder and harder," she says. "Then I came here, and I got my self-respect and hope back. I don't have to struggle to live anymore. I know I'm a survivor."

Along with help in navigating the housing market, Catholic Charities case workers connect residents to substance abuse treatment programs and mental health care. Stetz says nearly every woman who enters the village has mental health needs that have been intensified by their unstable environment.

"They're carrying a lot of trauma," Stetz says. "We do everything we can to get the ladies the help they need."

Mental health isn't the only condition that's impacted by years of homelessness. Spending the winter sleeping under the I-405 overpass left Jan with swollen eyes from car exhaust fumes and a bad back from sleeping on the hard pavement.

"It was just tearing me apart," Jan recalls. Catholic Charities has been able to connect her to a primary care physician to help her with other ailments, like arthritis, glaucoma, and a broken rib.

In their intake process, residents are asked how frequently they go to the emergency room—a fairly common trip for those who can't afford preventative care. On average, Stetz says, the women had visited the ER around twice a year before moving to Kenton. The bill for each uninsured visit, which can average \$2,000, is often footed by the city.

Now that all KWV residents have health insurance, there's only been one trip to the ER and no ambulance trips.

Jan says her current medical issues have kept her from finding a job. While she originally moved to Portland from North Dakota to take care of her ailing great-aunt, after that woman's death, Jan slid into homelessness. She'd like to return to a job where she takes care of vulnerable people.

“I’m a caregiver by nature,” she says. “But I want to be able to centralize on taking care of myself for once.”

For Jan, it was her great-aunt’s death. For Zirkle, it was her house fire. For another resident, it was an abusive relationship. And for another, it was an abrupt end to her job. Each woman who enters KWV can pinpoint the exact crisis that left them without a home.

Many who end up homeless lack the support of friends and family who can help when a crisis arises, says Village Coalition co-founder Vahid Brown.

“The secret sauce to these villages is the social infrastructure. That’s the key piece that’s really provided in these communities,” says Brown. “Villages create those safety nets for people going forward.”

That’s how Lisa Larson, a longtime member of Portland’s only other city-sanctioned community for houseless people, Dignity Village, sees her community.

“We become a family,” Larson says with a laugh. “Maybe a dysfunctional family.”

Dignity Village, a nonprofit community that houses up to 60 in tiny homes west of Portland International Airport, was built by activists in 2000. The Portland City Council signed a contract with Dignity Village in 2007, allowing the nonprofit to manage the city-owned property. Larson’s lived with her husband on the property for more than 8 years.

“In your neighborhood, how many people do you truly know?” Larson says. “We all know each other here. If something happens, we’ve got each other’s back.”

There’s a marked difference, however, between Dignity Village and the KWV: While Kenton residents must run community decisions past Catholic Charities, the village manager, Dignity Village is entirely self-governed. Larson says it’s an important distinction.

“For [residents] to not get the final word on decisions... it’s just not fair for them. It affects their self-worth,” she says. “They’re still underneath someone’s thumb.”

Shortly after KWV began operating, Larson met with some of the residents to help them facilitate weekly, self-governed meetings. Any decisions that come from those meetings, however, must be approved by Catholic Charities’ village staff.

“There are some natural leaders in the group,” Larson says. “I believe they could govern themselves.”

There’s another major element to what makes KWV uniquely successful: Unlike other pop-up villages and homeless shelters, it has neighborhood support.

In the past few years, Portland neighborhoods have reacted to homeless villages with immediate disdain; even more formal homeless shelters, such as the one the county has proposed for Southeast Foster, have been met with stiff opposition from neighborhood groups. That’s why so many villages, like Dignity Village and the newly relocated Right 2 Dream Too, have ended up in industrial areas or on property at the outskirts of town. After an initial embrace by the city, North Greeley’s Hazelnut Grove village has faced harsh opposition from the Overlook Neighborhood Association—opposition that inspired Mayor Ted Wheeler to threaten the village’s future last October.

Kenton Neighborhood Association (KNA), meanwhile, has embraced the village. During the Wednesday evening meeting to vote on the future of the village, some area residents teared up watching a video about a village resident who had moved into her own apartment. They cheered when the overwhelming vote to keep the village rolled in.

According to KNA Chair Tyler Roppe, that's because his neighborhood had an "unprecedented" amount of leeway over the village from the beginning. Not only was the KNA granted a vote by the city—one that could effectively extinguish the entire project—but neighbors were allowed to impose rules on the village that women must agree to before moving in.

Women couldn't have overnight guests, for instance, and couldn't make too much noise past a certain hour. No violence, drug use, or open containers of alcohol, either. Another thing he admits helped win neighbor's approval: That the village was only for women.

"This project really didn't want to go forward without neighborhood support," Roppe says. He sees the village as a crucial part of solving the city's housing crisis—but he's also concerned that affordable housing options don't exist for women wanting to move out of the village.

Longtime KVV resident Ruth Lockwood, 57, has felt the reality of that housing gap. She calls herself "not homeless enough," since she has too many resources to qualify for certain housing programs, yet not enough to reliably afford her own housing. She's tried to apply for a Housing Choice Voucher (a federal program, formerly known as Section 8, which helps subsidize rent for low-income tenants) to get federal assistance on rent. But in Multnomah County, the high demand for rental assistance has temporarily closed that waiting list. According to a report by Metro, the estimated waiting time to get into a public housing complex in Multnomah County is 14.5 years.

"It's a letdown," Lockwood says. "If this village closes, I'll probably go back to living in my car."

Roppe says there's a number of low-income housing projects in the neighborhood that have been put on hold due to lack of federal funding. One of those pending projects is a Transition Projects low-income apartment complex that was expected to replace the KVV by this June. According to Transition Projects Director George Devendorf, that development has been stalled until early 2019.

In the meantime, Roppe wants to know what the city has learned from KVV.

"Originally, this pilot project was supposed to plant a seed for other homeless communities to pop up around the city," Roppe says. "But I don't know of any. Wasn't the city's purpose to demonstrate it works and then replicate it across other neighborhoods? What's next here?"

Marc Jolin, director of the county's Joint Office of Homeless Services, says that question can't be answered—yet. Catholic Charities is in the midst of its own internal evaluation of the program, and then will meet with the agencies involved to discuss the KVV's strengths and weaknesses and decide if the model should be replicated elsewhere in Portland.

But, Jolin warns: "This model doesn't work for everyone. For some people, a large shelter may work better. It's important we keep serving different people in different ways."

Kenton fits the exact needs of its residents. Many Kenton tenants say that when they were homeless, they'd rarely opt to spend the night at a large city shelter—the packed rooms only increased their anxiety. But the Kenton model, however, wouldn't work for families or people with certain disabilities that would make it difficult to access the pods.

Mayor Wheeler, who serves as the head of Portland Housing Bureau, says he's "awestruck" by the work Catholic Charities and village residents have put into the project. In a statement sent to the Mercury, Wheeler echoes Jolin's thinking—but doesn't say if they will be replicated anywhere else.

“As we work to house thousands of our neighbors every year, each traditional shelter, alternative shelter, or housing placement will be different, with a unique set of circumstances to consider,” Wheeler writes.

The city’s lack of clarity about the future of villages like the one in Kenton hasn’t kept other communities from replicating the model. Clackamas County is in the final stages of constructing its own village for homeless veterans; the first 15 residents will live in KWV’s most popular pod model. The village is slated to open by the end of the summer.

Todd Ferry, a fellow at PSU’s Center for Public Interest Design and the head architect behind the POD model, has spent the past year gathering feedback from KWV residents on their unique structures. He says the Clackamas village will reflect lessons learned from the Kenton pilot project, such as better ventilation and increased storage space.

“The first model is never going to be the silver bullet,” Ferry says. He’s also heard from a number of religious organizations interested in hosting their own pod-centric village. Instead of spurring more publicly-backed villages across Portland, Ferry says the KWV may instead act as an example for private organizations, churches, and nonprofits to replicate.

Ferry partially credits KWV’s success to its timing—the POD project was propelled forward with funds made available after Portland declared a housing emergency in October 2015. But he also sees it as a lesson for local agencies who’ve tried to patch the growing housing crisis with outdated, tired solutions.

Or, in his words: “The city’s realizing there’s an inherent wisdom among the houseless community.”

The Kenton Women’s Village is a clear product of Portland’s housing crisis. While it may not be the end-all solution to the region’s skyrocketing rents, the village plays a vital role for some of Portland’s most vulnerable women stuck in the debilitating cycle of houselessness.

Before the Wednesday KNA vote, Jan leans on her cane near the front door, sipping on seltzer and chatting with Kenton neighbors who’ve stopped by.

“Thanks for voting!” she calls out as people drop their ballots. She smiles, looking out at the crowd, and inhales. Asked how she’s feeling, Jan replies: “Good. You know what—I finally got a good night’s sleep.”