

Houselessness/Cleanliness Discussion Topics

3pm 1/31/2022

SFA Notes Revised 1-31-2022 1:44pm

My team works to help the mayor lead citywide efforts to clean up Portland and assists the city's housing commissioner in helping those who are houseless and living outdoors. After a year at these tasks, I offer some ideas and contextual observations on which they are derived. They are just my own and skew towards the city perspective.

I look forward to learning from others today at 3 pm.

The theme of these notes is creating better places for those houseless Portlanders living outdoors. Often living in camps with horrible conditions and sited in hazardous locations. Without more and better places for the houseless to live, we are just moving them around. For example, move them off freeways, and many will go to the closest neighborhood or business district. Move them out of the neighborhoods and business districts, and, without somewhere else to go, they will be forced to go to the next one over.

For our G4 (working name for state, metro, county, and city government partnership) staff group meeting at 3 pm, Monday, tomorrow, to help start the process of creating a coordinated effort to address these issues, I offer these observations and suggestions.

I understand my suggestions are big ideas. I imagine it will startle some. Only these four governments working closely together, and we solve these issues. Our work so far, mine included, has been failed to produce the sought-after results.

I look forward to learning about your ideas.

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Outcomes

Phased-in launch of elements starting June 1, 2022, and with a project life of three years:

- Create shelter occupancy for 3000 houseless (number fine-tuned by 2022 count underway).
- Make a face-to-face to every unhoused Portlander, who has resided in Portland for a year, and actionable offer of a warm place to sleep, needed services.
- End need for unsanctioned houseless camps in Portland
- Clean up the local right of ways and public lands.

Esprit de Corps

To achieve tangible and visible progress for those suffering houselessness and for a clean city; we are all going to have to change and improve upon what we are already doing, how we are doing it, and do more of it together in a new coordinated manner called the "G4 Partnership" (working title).

Key Decision-Making Tools

To launch a new coordinated effort by June 1, 2022, led by the Governor, Metro President, Multnomah County Chair, and Mayor of Portland, use currently available executive and/or emergency powers to enact agreed-upon elements of a G4 Recovery Plan to end unsanctioned camping and clean up the city.

Engaging the political leadership of adjacent municipalities (e.g., City of Gresham, City of Milwaukie) and counties (Clackamas, Washington) would add regional support while potentially complicating our ability to act quickly. Governor makes a FEMA disaster request¹ for Portland and statewide assistance for governments, individuals, and businesses.^{2 3}

Approach

¹ <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/how-declared>

² <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public>

³ <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual>

- Hire G4 Partnership staff to assist in planning, startup actions, implementation, monitoring, and management of this three-year project.
- Houseless Service Centers (HSC): Build one to three sites with total shelter occupancy for 3000 (number will be fine-tuned by 2022 houseless count underway) that would be developed to exist for three years when the Metro housing services measure is fully funded.
 - At the state level, for inspiration, draw on Governors Newsome^{4 5} and Inslee's ⁶ recently announced statewide houselessness reduction plans.
 - Use lessons learned from other campus-based houseless service models.
 - Staffing includes assigning unarmed Oregon National Guard security specialists and medical corps and PSU social work graduate students.
 - Providing its own land or using eminent domain for privately owned land, the city offers the site(s) served by light rail MAX or frequent bus service.
 - The county is provided funding to provide mental health and substance abuse outreach recovery services and oversees the contracted or county-run shelter(s) manager.
 - Build out a planned number of Safe Rest Villages (SRV) and coordinate their use with HSC and other County houselessness-related services.
 - Using a phased-in no camping approach, the city prohibits all unsanctioned camping. Starts removing camps that have the highest community safety impacts, such as all schools, medical facilities, shelters, ADA violators, and in camps located higher-speed transportation locations.
 - Create a multi-state, county, and city coalition to ask for federal recognition of houselessness disaster. Governor, Chair, and Mayor invite their west coast counterparts to join in making official and simultaneous requests for FEMA to declare houseless a federal emergency eligible to federal funds.

Context

Request for Houselessness Clean Ups Far-Outpace Current Services

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<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2021/05/11/california-roars-back-governor-newsom-announces-historic-12-billion-package-to-confront-the-homelessness-crisis/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HOMELESSNESS-CRISIS-FACT-SHEET.pdf>

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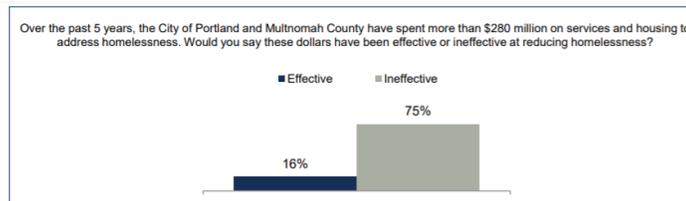
https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Homelessness_PolicyBrief_Update.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

In 2021, the city received 78,573 houselessness-related complaints and requests for services (2021) relating to 250 observed active encampments.

The city has increased its houselessness-related clean-up and removal funding four-fold in two years.

But the existing encampments have been on-site longer, with more debris residents in rougher shape than the pre-pandemic cohort. Each campsite, on average, takes longer to remove. The city is removing only an average camp clean-up of 5-7 camps per week last year compared to 30-40 per week pre-pandemic.

Metro residents' rate houselessness efforts as ineffective



Reasons Spending is Effective

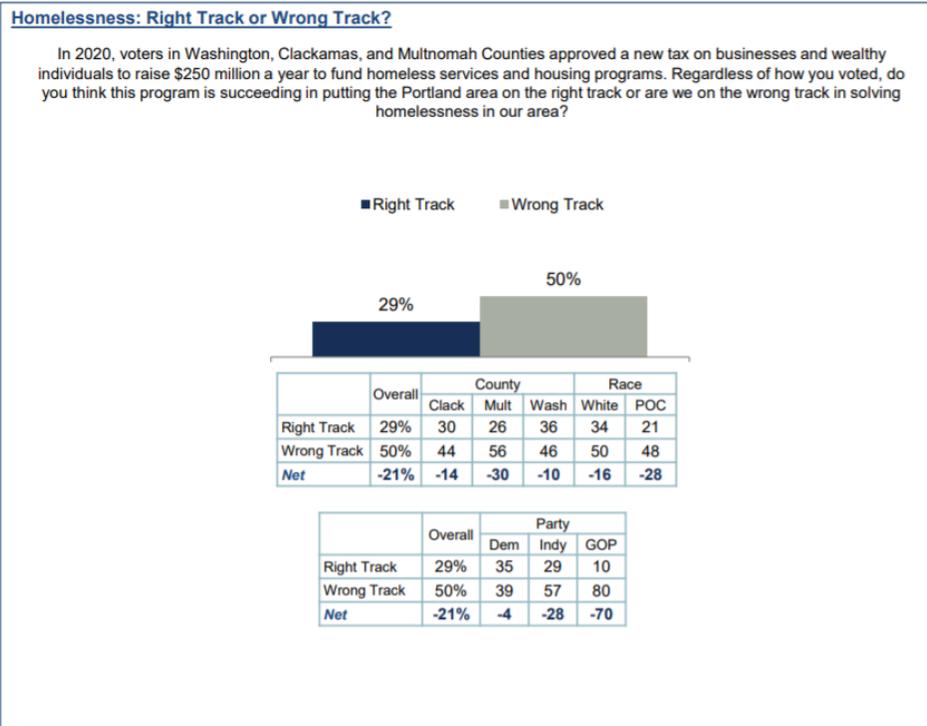
What specific changes or improvements have you seen that make you say that? *Asked of 'Effective'	Overall
Can't name any specific improvements	18%
More housing for the homeless	15%
Without spending it would be worse/assume money is helping/the money is needed	14%
Removing/cleaning up of encampments	9%
More homeless services downtown	4%
More street response/support to homeless	4%
From what I've heard on the news	4%
Response to mental health issues	3%
Sanitation has improved	3%
Designated areas for the homeless	3%
Seeing fewer homeless on the streets	2%
Other	5%

Reasons Spending is Ineffective

What specific problems have you seen that make you say that? *Asked of 'Ineffective'	Overall
Homeless camps/tents/more/large homeless camps	20%
Homelessness has increased/gotten worse	18%
Trash/garbage/unsanitary conditions	9%
More crime/violence/concern for safety/fear of being attacked by homeless people	9%
Number of people on the streets/amount of homeless on streets	8%
See no difference/not getting better	6%
Housing services inadequate/not providing alternatives/rent increases	6%
Drug use/worsening drug abuse/needles on the ground	5%
Homeless people in residential areas/on my property	4%
Not helping with mental illness solutions for homeless	3%
Amount of money spent/money spent not producing the needed results	3%

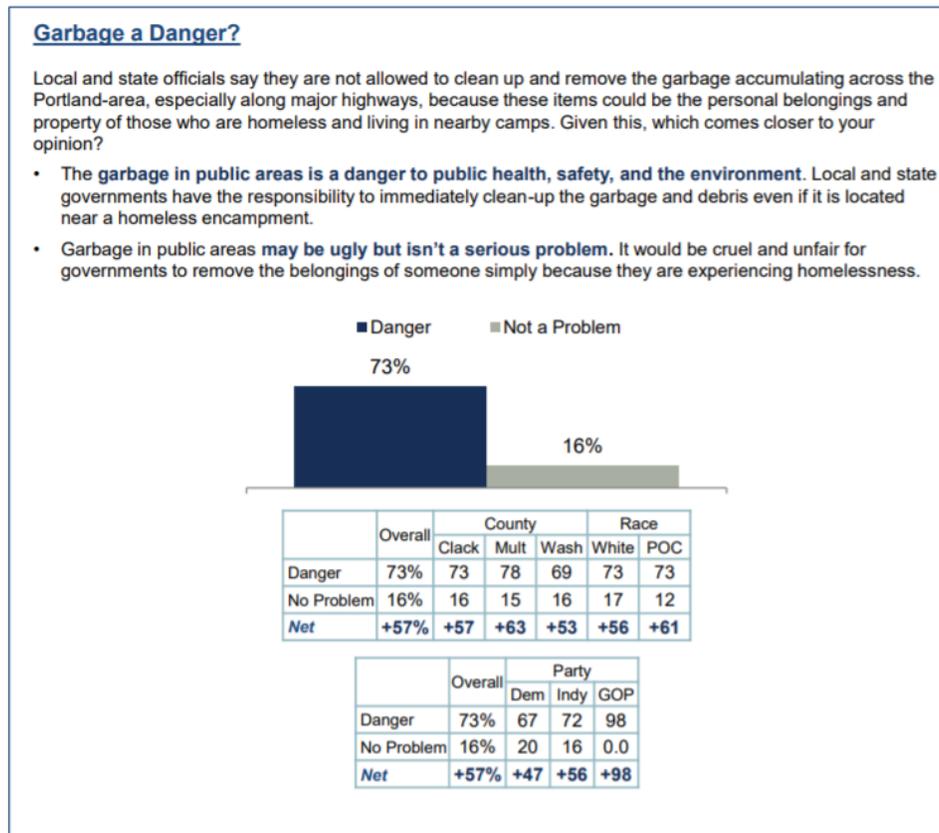
Source: Likely Voters in Metro Regional District, <https://peopleforportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Metro-Homeless-Survey-F-Public.pdf>, GS Strategy Group, Conducted 13-16-2021

Metro, County, and City residents' rate homelessness efforts as being on the wrong track



Source: Likely Voters in Metro Regional District, <https://peopleforportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Metro-Homeless-Survey-F-Public.pdf>, GS Strategy Group, Conducted 13-16-2021

Cleanliness Perceptions: We are not meeting the public's expectations for managing the issue of cleanliness



Immediately, City's Houseless Camp Removal Evaluation Criteria Needs to Be Changed

The city's criteria for judging whether or not a houseless camp should be removed needs to be quickly updated to deal with current conditions. For example, it provides for immediate posting for removal when a campsite:

- Inherently dangerous locations, like freeways and other high-speed traffic corridors
- Repeatedly violates federal ADA rules
- Blocks access to public utilities and other mission-critical infrastructure
- Fails to meet public health guidelines
- Within ___ feet of a government-sanctioned shelter
- Within ___ feet of a school campus/boundary
- Within ___ feet of a medical facility

Houselessness Complexity Will Always Out-Pace Traditional Decision-Making

As we know, emergency decrees exist to cut through processes that are fine for everyday work but not in a crisis. Emergency decrees bring together systems that do not work closely otherwise but need to in an emergency. Maybe less chartered territory, but it seems reasonable to suggest that human-made disasters like houselessness that ends lives and livelihoods disaster need an emergency response just as a forest fire blazing through a community does. We should demand this recognition from the federal government, even if we lose.

Hard to Simultaneously Improve Complex Systems and Provide Targeted Emergency Services

Under the banner of continuous improvement, among G4, there is a lot of excellent work underway to improve existing houselessness programs and services. But much of that much-needed good work will not make its way to ground level in time for the houseless crisis upon us.

Much like the response of creating new temporary housing and service site for other disasters, I suggest an emergency disaster approach of a larger campus(es), led by a G4 Partnership staff team that we can all add contributed services and resources to help those living houseless outdoors.

Co-Location of Trash Sites and Houseless Camps

With an increased effort of ramped-up volunteers, government staff, and contracted staff, modest progress has been made on dirty sites abatement to the point that most remaining sites to clean are houseless related. I believe this is especially true for many locations along Portland's freeways.

"In our experience, a vast majority of trash picked up by SOLVE volunteers in Portland originates from the houseless community, either from recently-moved camps or accumulated trash in the camps. In addition, all of the Portland complaints calls we receive are related to the houseless, mainly regarding trash piles along city streets and freeways."

Kris Carico, Chief Executive Officer, SOLVE, January 27, 2022

"A large percentage of our vendor staff hours and budget has been dedicated to removing hundreds of tons of trash and debris from active and abandoned campsite locations..."

Mark Wells, Executive Director, Downtown Portland Clean & Safe, January 27, 2022

Violation of Public Sanitation and Chronic Nuisance Rules

If you have been to the older and larger houseless camps sites, it is easy to observe the filth many homeless are forced to live. Surging use of drugs like fentanyl-laced meth seems to have fueled a surge in property crimes, like auto and catalytic converter thefts. Some camps show signs of being sites for coordinated illegal activities, like drug dealing, bike and vehicle chops shops, and more.

I have been told school parents, neighbors, and business owners are gathering evidence and looking for potential plaintiffs and lawyers to sue state, county, and city for failing to enforce camps that violate public sanitation and chronic nuisance rules.

The likelihood of suing the government for failing to comply with public sanitation and chronic nuisance laws is unknown. We will need to consult the government attorneys. If it gets to the point of a pre-trial discovery phase, we will all be dealing with public records requests and court proceedings for years.

Increasing Number of Campers Are Being Killed and Injured

Apparently, the Oregonian has launched an investigative article into the growing number of houseless camp residents of freeway sites on the freeways and other high-speed traffic corridors who are killed or injured.

Many of the related legal and financial issues are untested, so it's unknown what the actual potential liability risks are to the federal, state, and city, but they are not favorable.

“Domicile Unknown” Reports Shows an Increase in Overdoses and Violent Death

Oregon ranks Number 2 in the Nation for addiction rates and ranks last for access to treatment. The number of people we see living unsheltered, dying from overdoses, increasing low-level crime rates and lack of adequate treatment services and housing are connected. As part of this effort, there needs to be an emergency response while the state and county work out a long-term plan for behavioral health services.