

Real action needed to ease housing crisis

MYVIEW

By Lew Church

The recent publication of frequent contributor Jim Speirs' letter (Wheeler's re-election is easily assured, unfortunately, Dec. 27) is flat-out backward: Speirs says that Wheeler is assured re-election because he has "pandered to the homeless" and "marginalized police."

This is erroneous, at best. A rather different point of view might be that of Karen Batts.

Is Wheeler haunted by the ghost of Batts? Karen was a 52-year-old African-American woman who, after paying rent for seven years for her downtown Portland apartment, was evicted by her "nonprofit" landlord. Shortly thereafter, Batts froze to death in the winter of 2016 in a downtown parking garage.

Wheeler's end-of-year news conference focused on progress regarding homeless issues and stressed the importance of people in the community volunteering to help the homeless.

Well and good. The mayor's news conference emphasized that more than 10,000 people have been helped on homeless issues. Also a good thing.

However, housing activists note that the Oregon Department of Transportation and the city of Portland now are planning evictions starting this month of homeless folks who are camping outside on ODOT property.

Local Portlanders, local nonprofits and local media alike have noted that there continues to be hundreds — and perhaps, thousands — of people in our community this winter who are sleeping on sidewalks, in tents and under tarps.

Isn't Oregon supposed to be a blue state with what is now a supermajority in the state Legislature in Salem? Batts, a former Grant High and Portland State University student, before her tragic death at age 52, was one of the casualties, like many folks who die outside

each year during Portland's "mild" winters. Is Portland really a liberal, progressive city or a U.S. version of Calcutta, India?

What's wrong with this picture?

To take action, many of us with the newly revitalized chapter of the Portland Gray Panthers were happy to volunteer to help pass the \$653 million housing bond approved by voters in November. But government officials, managers of local nongovernmental organizations, and media in our area are all quick to note that the housing crisis is a national issue, that it has been building over a number of years, and that there is no quick fix to this complicated problem.

As Gray Panther organizers who identify far more with the likes of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) or even today's anti-racist, anti-fascist Antifa protesters — we believe the likes of AARP (for example) have not been sufficiently outraged by our city's housing emergency.

What is to be done? The anarchist faction of Gray Panthers in Portland suggests a

massive, organized squatters movement might be one tactic, given the large number of empty buildings and the vast number of cranes in our city that are now building numerous high rises and condos for housing that costs as much as \$2,000 a month in rent.

Many older folks have (as have many other people) simply been priced out of housing in the Northwest.

Other activists have suggested that pooling resources by area tenants via a citywide rent strike might be one way to establish an escrow account, force real estate speculators, scofflaw landlords and government officials alike to reckon with a tenant-pooled rent amount that does not go into landlord pockets, but rather demands action now to fix the housing crisis.

More than political rhetoric and more than volunteering with nonprofits clearly is needed. Getting the Oregon Legislature to finally pass rent control legislation and lifting the ban on cities enacting rent control laws (San Francisco, New York City and even Berlin have rent control now) would be one sig-

nificant way to halt price gouging against tenants in our city.

An additional step would include a sizable raise in the minimum wage, in order to keep up with exorbitant, so-called free market rent hikes. How much of an increase would do the trick? Thirty dollars, \$40 or even \$50 an hour as a minimum wage? Even in a supermajority blue state, such a tactic seems unlikely.

As a community, should we ourselves be "haunted" by the ghost of Karen Batts? Absolutely, yes. More importantly, as a millionaire mayor and an elected official, should Ted Wheeler be haunted by Karen's ghost as we enter 2019?

Short of the millionaire mayor from Harvard spending a couple nights outside sleeping on the ground at R2D2 or Dignity Village, shivering outside in the cold — Wheeler should have nightmares featuring Batts.

And what would Karen Batts say to Ted Wheeler in such a dream?

Lew Church is the coordinator of the Portland Gray Panthers and can be reached at POB40011@juno.com or 503-222-2974.



CHURCH

COMMUNITY FORUM

RENT CONTROL NOW!

PORTLAND GRAY PANTHERS

503-222-2974

POB40011@juno.com

When: Sunday, Jan. 20th, 4 pm

Where: Hawthorne Fred Meyer – 1st Floor

Mtg Space / SE Cesar Chavez & Hawthorne

Why: *****IS YOUR RENT TOO HIGH?***

*****DO YOU KNOW A HOUSELESS FAMILY
THAT WAS 'PRICED OUT' OF HOUSING?***

*****OREGON HOUSE SPEAKER TINA KOTEK
SAYS RENT CONTROL IS ON THE AGENDA
FOR 2019 STATE LEGISLATURE!***

*****LET'S MAKE SURE RENT CONTROL IS
LEGALIZED IN OREGON (RENT CONTROL IS
LEGAL IN SAN FRANCISCO, NEW YORK CITY,
BERLIN – BUT NOT 'LIBERAL' PORTLAND!)***

GRAY PANTHERS

**PORTLAND CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNICATION REQUEST
Wednesday Council Meeting 9:30 AM**

Council Meeting Date: January 16, 2019

Today's Date 11-6-18

Name Lew Church

Address PO Box 40011, Portland, Oregon 97240

Telephone 503-222-2974 Email POB40011@juno.com

Reason for the request:

PORTLAND GRAY PANTHERS

Lew Church
(signed)

- Give your request in writing to the Council Clerk's office to schedule a date for your Communication. Use this form or email the information to the Council Clerk at the email address below.
- You will be placed on the Wednesday official Council Agenda as a "Communication." Communications are the first item on the Agenda and are taken at 9:30 a.m. A total of five Communications may be scheduled. Individuals must schedule their own Communication.
- You will have 3 minutes to speak and may also submit written testimony before or at the meeting. Communications allow the Council to hear issues that interest our citizens, but do not allow an opportunity for dialogue.

Thank you for being an active participant in your City government.

Contact Information:

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Karla.Moore-Love@portlandoregon.gov

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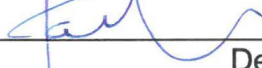
Request of Lew Church to address Council regarding Portland Gray Panthers
(Communication)

JAN 16 2019

PLACED ON FILE

Filed JAN 08 2019

MARY HULL CABALLERO
Auditor of the City of Portland

By  Deputy

COMMISSIONERS VOTED AS FOLLOWS:		
	YEAS	NAYS
1. Fritz		
2. Fish		
3. Hardesty		
4. Eudaly		
Wheeler		