

CREATIVE COMMUNITY



COOPERATIVE

THE HOMELESS IN PORTLAND: PRODUCTION PLANNING AS CRISIS RESPONSE

Addressing and Preempting the Invasive Sprawl of
Poverty on the Streets

ABSTRACT

Immediate relief of the Metro Area homeless population by repurposing city-owned parking structures. Provide basic infrastructural necessities and dignities of human services, integrate pertinent programs, and transition into more permanent communities. With qualified supervision, productively direct community members toward service areas of experience and expertise, some self-sufficiency and growing interdependence. Convert liabilities into assets.

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Creative Community Cooperative: A 501 c (3)
nonprofit. www.CCCPDX.org

Defining the Problem, More Fundamentally, Begets More Sustainable Solutions

The subject of homelessness, as a defining issue, has been talked about and studied, with enough frequency over the past decade that to tempt more of the same is pointless without offering some pathway toward relief. Suffice it to say that socioeconomic, health and hygiene implications, especially in the Age of COVID, are self-evident. While the Creative Community Cooperative (CCCPDX) and like-minded agencies and organizations work on issues that precede homelessness and some means to preempt it, the one prevailing, most pronounced problem is one of scope.

The sprawl of homeless camps and collectives has all but taken over the landscape, from the core of the city and into its outlying suburbs, creating greater stresses on resources, businesses, neighborhoods, and the homeless, as well. The short-term remedies – sweeps – whose justifications are understood, are still no better than “burn and turn” strategies, compounding the struggles of their targets and further feeding this vicious cycle.

Limited access to temporary shelter solutions also limits their impact and success. There have been no substantial answers to the basic precursors to homelessness, which existed pre-pandemic. While 2020 has brought obvious other major challenges, demanding the bulk of attention and resources, any hopes of bouncing back or more fully addressing social justice issues are limited, if sustainable homeless and housing crises-related issues are not integrated into solutions.

Furthermore, the demand for such sweeping solutions is stymied by the glacial pace at which they are examined and analyzed, much less assessed and implemented. This has proven one thing, beyond a shadow of any doubt; that even thinking about dealing with the formidable complexity of homelessness, using the same presumptions and preconceptions of fact and function as done in the past, will beget more of the same, only tenfold. We have already hit the point of critical mass, with the irony of pandemic-related restrictions acting as control rods to chain reaction. If we are to avoid a veritable socioeconomic China Syndrome, then anticipatory preemptive measures are necessary.

An Open Source approach to community and economic development, one which draws upon the direct experiences and expertise of those being served, provides a transparent, responsible means to determine what measures are most relevant and useful, their organization and order, their execution and accounting. Converting individuals and communities, from liability to asset, arises from their being seen, not as expense, but as investment, their coherence a matter of finding common cause.

Transitioning from homelessness is one thing, but what are we transitioning to?

Social justice, as we have witnessed, resonates with the citizen base. What we cannot afford to overlook is that there is no social justice without economic justice. Historic relevance and reference, as to where this lies and how it can be dealt with, can be seen in examples of common good infrastructures. Power grids, highways, transportation, and even a national hospital infrastructure all provided some enhanced socioeconomic function, even as they provided employment. What is needed is a 21st Century version of these, with microcosmic iterations of implementation and macrocosmic implications for change.

To address and answer the deterioration of social equity, it must first be seen within the context of common good infrastructures, which translate as commonwealth. Structure is a tangible component, but the human element is the active component, interfacing its parts, harnesses functional potentials and productively directs each of these uses as infrastructure. **What we propose is a common good infrastructure of human services, which defines what facilities are designed and intended to facilitate.** The Creative Community Cooperative has a framework, including categorical and methodological references, that brings existing resources to bear, using principles of software development to adequately respond, with agility, to ever-changing dynamics. This is more than mere aggregation of resources; it involves their assessment and interface, from which innovation emerges.

Programs are only as good as the software that drives them. Certainly, there are those who would test the integrity of any such system and this, too, is addressed. Details can be found in the CCCPDX proposal for a network of intentional communities, built on owner-occupied residences and cooperative workspaces. Suffice it to say that implementation, management, and administration of development and programs utilizes the time-tested guild model – apprentices, journeymen, and masters; from the unskilled acolyte, to skilled and experienced field mentors, and certified management/administration.

Admittedly, the critical timeline of need demands that logistically practical considerations must be brought to bear. Their responsible execution is addressed in the appendix, “The Application of Event Production Models”. As previously mentioned, any short-term solutions to homelessness must be placed within the context of longer-term housing affordability, especially for the working poor and those living below the poverty threshold. This is not a matter of money, alone, nor of other resources. As the creative community of Portland has repeatedly demonstrated, it is a matter of *resourcefulness* in the face of diminishing assets and access.

A Framework for Solution

A white paper, “Saving the Creative Soul of a City”, written by David Kahl, founder of the Creative Community Cooperative (CCCPDX), provides frameworks for programs that those affected may transition into – or through, depending on circumstance, need, and availability. It also affords a comprehensive mapping of related considerations that can be applied, in a methodologically sound approach to the triage program, now proposed.

At its heart, the CCCPDX proposal suggests that, as a design challenge, any facility must begin by answering the first rule of design; that its form must follow function. A facility must, by its very name, “facilitate”; in this case, it is to provide more than shelter or even safety and security. Cohering community comes from fostering relationships and services arising from them. These *ad hoc* developments, of necessity, take on a self-ordered hierarchy, much like a guild. Those with knowledge, skill, and experience guide others and pass their understanding along. Those with certification guide, manage, and account for progress. A *de facto* menu of public and social services is more easily developed, administered, and managed where those in need and those who provide converge.

This is where, for present purposes, the most critical aspect of the CCCPDX program comes into focus. Practical concern for present and future affordability of housing in the Portland market began with acknowledging that the price of real property, itself, is constantly increasing. The City, in realizing its scarcity and value, addresses this with residential infill policies, but still limiting positive impact to those whose incomes fall within the median range of \$55,000.00. For the working poor, this is still more than what two- and three-income households bring in, leaving subsidized and supportive housing as the only tried-and-true, though still unsustainable, model in typical use.

In consideration of these and other factors, the only viable solution to the rampant horizontal scale and scope of homelessness is to look up. Literally. The concept of vertical scale naturally accommodates several concerns which would, left unaddressed, breed stress drivers, further exacerbating an already untenable situation. The City of Portland owns five downtown parking structures, providing physical framework for safe, secure space and infrastructural support. While the concept of housing the homeless in such structures, itself, is not new, a more practically holistic and sustainable approach to its application is novel and timely.

Feasibility, Component Infrastructure, and Logistics

The administration of former Portland mayor, Charlie Hales, attempted to implement a more wide-ranging policy, in that it considered public sleeping ordinances, organized camps, vehicle-related systems, and increasing temporary shelters. While generally welcomed as a step in the right direction, the late Nick Fish, City Commissioner in charge of the housing bureau from 2009 to 2013, voiced concerns that, in hindsight, were prescient. At a time when 3,800 people were sleeping on the street, Commissioner Fish expressed his worries that housing policy was “out of whack”, that City investments were possibly unwise, and that *the City should direct its efforts to providing more permanent housing for those at the lowest end of the income scale, not the wealthiest.*

Somewhere, in the middle of this shuffling, a proposal for using parking structures was floated, not unlike the now revamped overnight camping policies, just more centralized. While this was fine as a strictly emergency overnight remedy, the greater problems were left, unabated and far from solved. Where would these campers go during the day, when their presence, on the streets and sidewalks of the city, would be more visible and likely interfere with the daily routines of workers and businesspeople? How could they avail themselves of much-needed services, when the basic dignities of secure space, an address, and some reliable means of communication are not available? We know what they hope to transition *out of*, but is there a legitimate program for them to transition *into*? The cycle is vicious and is sucking more people into its vortex. **The answers become clearer when components of the physical structural space are identified and connected.**

The hallmark of the proposed triage treatment is its semi-permanence. Though still temporary, an identifiable feature is the ability to assign a number to each space. With an already established physical address in place for each structure, space numbers are effectively no different than an apartment,

mobile home space, or office, as far as the U.S. Postal Service is concerned. From this, other amenities are also forthcoming, from I.D. to banking and social services. Infrastructural features – showers, toilets, running water, power, laundry, Wi-Fi, phones, and computer stations, among them – help to facilitate more normal functions, such as securing jobs and accessing educational opportunities and resources.

The five downtown Smart Park structures, already owned by the City, represent approximately 4,000 potential spaces, each large enough to accommodate as many as 4 adults. With COVID-related restrictions and without changing any features that demise these existing spaces, by occupying every other parking space, safe social distancing is built in, given their average width of 8 ½ - 9 feet, and still begets an effective 2,000 units, enough to accommodate as many as 8,000 people. With eased protocols, this figure doubles – 4,000 spaces, with potential to shelter 16,000. Physical separation of space requires only some quantities of tarp and Gorilla tape, which is known for its resiliency and strength, a near-instant installation.

The CCCPDX proposal accommodates:

- Bathing – one portable shower per 30 spaces
- Toileting – one port-a-potty per 20 spaces
- Running water and sinks – stationed near existing floor drains and fed by diverters, attached to extensions added to fire hose connections.
- Power – technically available. Adjustments, in consideration of increased loads and safe access for individual spaces, are necessitated. While foreseen as most time consuming, it does not pose an obstacle to implementing other facets of the CCCPDX plan.
- Garbage service – under this plan, is better managed than it has been, where it has been implemented as part of the ad hoc assembly of campers on public and private land.
- Rooftop garden greenhouses could also be modularly integrated, designed for disassembly, moving, reassembly, and more permanent installation.
- Ground-floor amenities and accommodation of vehicles – of course, this removes an equivalent number of demised shelter spaces, although RV's and vans could provide the same functions and more.
- Access and Security – Doors and stairwells secured in exit-only position, entry point security served by posting community-designated RV's or fifth wheel trailers, also functioning as administrative offices, communication, and mail centers.

An analysis is underway to determine infrastructural potentials and adjustments necessary to attend to those physiological needs, presented in this framework. Logistically, execution of this plan is better put into effect by considering it from the standpoint of mounting a production, much like a festival. Direct corollaries and applications abound when you consider the scope of productions, like the Waterfront Blues Festival, the largest such event west of the Mississippi, and which typically takes one week to physically set up. With four stages, countless vendors and sponsor booths, security, communication, health, and safety, and accommodating 30,000 daily visitors, the production staff and crew have consistently delivered a smooth operating combination of enterprise and event. Even under the most

difficult of circumstance, these people have adjusted and managed to fulfill the mission, including the testing of a scaled-down, travelling version during the 2020 season, due to the pandemic, as well as a “drive-in” version. Creative thinking begets creative solutions.

Costs and Conclusions

While the city, county, and regional governments wrestle with the overwhelming scope of socioeconomic issues, including this one, it is difficult to pin down the actual costs of homeless sweeps, much less the broader problem and its multiplier effects. Exclusive of police assistance and cleanup of places like the Springwater Corridor, estimates of cursory efforts still exceed \$3,000.00 a week, with no relief in sight. **In the Fall of 2018, both Portland and Multnomah County estimated that 2,000 units of supportive housing, designed to address the needs of the chronically homeless, would cost between \$592 and \$640 million dollars for the first 10 years, with annual costs of \$43-47 million, after that.** To be clear, no short-term solution should be considered, without integrating something more holistically sustainable accompanying it.

The white paper, mentioned in the “Framework” section of this report, provides one such proposal that, compared to the above noted costs, promises to deliver more than necessary. **Including owner-equity, for between 13.5-17% of the lower 10-year estimate, this same target of 2,000 units constructed would also provide accommodations for another 1263 sheltered beds, complete with cooking, bathing, and toilet facilities, dedicated to transitional residents.** Other contingencies and considerations, related to food, energy, and other insecurities, are included in this plan. Peer-driven human services, overseen and administered by certified and qualified practitioners, promise to break through the barriers of access, affordability, and effectiveness.

In the words of Portland mayor, Ted Wheeler, “success is getting people out of the elements, off the sidewalks and either into shelter in the near term or some alternative safe campsite and into housing in the long term.” This combination of CCCPDX proposals fits the bill, especially in consideration of relative costs, fixed and ongoing. In little more than 2 years, the City estimates another 400 supportive housing units are needed. With the devastation of COVID ravaging lives and livelihoods, this number is almost certain to grow, bringing with it more people, including families, normally thought of as more mainstream than the drug, alcohol, and mentally challenged stereotypical profile.

In the meantime, exclusive of volunteer and sweat equity, an investment of \$1-2 million, per parking structure development, a total of between \$5-10 million, would still be money well spent. Even a phased-in approach, beginning with the simple demising of spaces and installation of portable toilets and showers would, at more nominal cost, bring about massive tangible relief, while improving the optics of this and related problems.

Simply put, potentials lost are dollars lost. Each homeless human being represents a nexus of others, also affected by their condition and programs, such as this one, reduces stresses on human networks

and services-related resources. As it sits, those struggling with homelessness are missing out in ability to see, let alone take advantage of opportunities to dig out, even with the help of others. They are, at best, living in a nonproductive state, unable to do anything but stay on the treadmill of survival. It is long past time for a more comprehensive course of action, one that sees this as an opportunity to invest in our present and future, instead of another expense on taxpaying individuals and businesses. At the very least, this action plan is a good start.

Appendix 1: The Application of Event Production Models

The example of event production offers an appropriate model for infrastructural consideration and physical implementation of our proposal. Of the many major events we might reference, there is none greater than that of the Waterfront Blues Festival. As the second largest festival in the nation, dealing with thousands of people, on any given day, the question of scale is immediately answered.

Nearly every aspect of our proposal is already addressed within this model. Even a cursory assessment bears out the intuitive validation of this premise; its comparisons and applications serve to confirm both example and the existence of experience and expertise to carry out its execution. Consider the green fields approach and its timeline of preparation, construction, operation, and even its disassembly and clean up, to get some reference. While preparation for the event is a much longer-term issue, application is not. Emphasis is placed here in the physical component. From a clear field, spanning several city blocks, all facets of physical structure and necessary infrastructure are created, fully functioning, and the field then restored to previous condition, leaving no sign of the event footprint, all within a span of barely two weeks. This is the *triage* aspect to execution.

Production involves more than staging, sound, and lighting. The hierarchy of management and crew, while effectively stage and performance oriented, connects to a nexus of other services, activities, and needs. Coordinating talent, for example, is one aspect that is too easily taken for granted, if not thoroughly overlooked. There is a clear methodology for collecting and assessing information, including availability, timing, transportation, hospitality, lodging, contracting, communicating, accounting, and accountability, among others. All of this is set in a spreadsheet, to give a responsibly quick reference for tracking and execution. Each of these included aspects of talent coordination also represents other such considerations, replete with its own hierarchy.

It is important to point out that, while there are professionals heading up and often carrying out these responsibilities, events like the Waterfront Blues Festival would be more difficult, if not impossible, without the enlistment of volunteers. This network is vast, coming from both community-at-large and various organizations, all with some interest in its objective success. Each of these brings with it some semblance of professional proficiency, the experienced hand with incumbent expertise, and even the neophyte, a *de facto* guild, if you will. This is directly applicable to our proposal.

Other relevant physical and other infrastructural needs include power, water, lavatory, communication, security and crowd control, first aid, informational, public relations, and connection to community-

based causes and organizations. What is most heartening here is that Waterfront Blues Festival organizers have expressed willingness to help with the triage proposal we hope to forward here. This elevates our plan, from one of conjecture, to one of practicality.

Appendix 2: Organization and Operational Model

The CCCPDX white paper, “Saving the Creative Soul of a City”, suggests that, among more permanent residents, each prospective intentional community includes enough registered nurses to sufficiently assure responsible and reliable medical care for other residents, the operational model being one of a skilled care facility. People with some proficiency in social services case management would comprise a portion of its administration, accomplished any number of ways.

General oversight could come from appropriate government agencies, such as the State of Oregon Department of Human Services Aging, Disabilities, and Veterans division. Clinics would be manned and managed, in cooperation with others, by institutes of medical education, like Oregon Health Sciences University and its various departments, Western States Chiropractic College, National University of Natural Medicine, Oregon School of Massage, and Oregon College of Oriental Medicine, and their existing clinics. The experience of working in real-world conditions, where stronger doctor-patient relationships can develop, affords opportunities that, otherwise, are limited to the constraints of HMO guidelines and procedures that emphasize speed and paperwork, over one where the physician can act as qualified patient advocate. Furthermore, there exists an operational model, by which qualified, experienced volunteers would plug into such a program. All that is needed is for its principles to be applied to these purposes.

Since 1964, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has partnered with the SCORE program, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, where volunteers are matched up, as potential mentors, to clients in need of guidance and advice. While allowing for near-total flexibility of schedule for volunteers, the systems of management and tracking are centralized, thus giving the client some progressive continuity. For our purposes, retired physicians, clinicians, and qualified staff can feel directly and relevantly connected to community, cause, and purpose, without feeling the stresses of more demanding schedules and workloads.

In many instances, though medical practitioners are retired, they are still driven to keep licenses active and, as such, must meet certain requirements. Nurses, for example, are required to maintain 960 hours of practice, every 5 years, an average of just under 4 hours per week. Our proposal affords one way to help accomplish this. According to the Oregon State Board of Nursing, there are 49,279 RN (registered nurses) and 4,652 LN (licensed nurses) in the state, whose average ages are 48 and 45 years old, respectively. The implications of these figures include a substantial number of them being of retirement age and, therefore, primed for our purposes.

Given the top-heavy operation of most caregiver agencies, their practitioners, in the field, are often overworked and dreadfully underpaid. Our proposal allows these workers some means of building

equity in housing and workspaces that is more than affordable for them. The methodology for matching client-residents to appropriate provider-residents, in the proposed long-term developments, is already outlined and only needs to be applied to the shorter-term proposal. While evidence is anecdotal, there have been enough caregivers in the ranks of the homeless, to argue the need for their inclusion.

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