

October 30, 2022

Mayor Wheeler and City Council Members

RE: Portland's Homeless Strategy

I listened via Youtube last week to the entire public meeting on the above subject and here are my written comments for consideration.

My name is Judith Pitre and I retired from Home Forward in 2006 after thirty-four years of service. During part of this time, I was a single Mother with a small child while attending college, working part-time finding it difficult to pay market rent, child care expenses, and provide the necessities for us. I was referred to the Housing Authority of Portland by a friend and applied for subsidized housing. After a two-year wait, I was offered a unit and remained in subsidized housing for four years eventually marrying and moving out to buy a home. During the four years of my occupancy, I was offered a job at Home Forward and this began my progression through various departments and ultimately to Supervisor, Manager, Director of Public Housing and the Section 8 Voucher program, and Deputy ED.

In my role as Deputy ED part of my responsibilities was Policy implementation for program management of our Public Housing and Section 8 voucher program. In the last fifteen years of employment as Deputy ED, I had the pleasure along with my staff to implement a Self Sufficiency program to assist residents to eventually move from poverty through a variety of methods in coordination with partners in the community that provided social services. Through these partnerships, residents participated in the program to become self-sufficient over a five-seven-year period while earning an escrow in an IDA (Individual Development Account) and some became homeowners through partnerships with three major banks. Many of these residents previously were homeless, drug addicted, victims of domestic violence, had untreated mental health issues, hadn't completed high school, had criminal records, or were formally incarcerated and had low self-esteem due to their situations. My staff and I offered them a way to overcome barriers that had impacted them in the past. Many completed their GED and some returned to school and attained college degrees. Two earned PhDs. An additional resource through a partnership with the trades offered residents the opportunity to opt into a pre-apprenticeship program as Carpenters, painters, and the trowel industries.

The Self-Sufficiency program is still in operation at Home Forward and the Apprenticeship program is now provided by another organization in the community.

Housing is a human right and is essential as the first step to stability. Without stable housing and security, you cannot think about the next steps in your life.

Before the Pandemic in 2017 and 2018, I attended two events in the community where Mayor Wheeler was the guest speaker. At both, he said, "all ideas were on the table for providing housing for the homeless". In addition, he stated, "if there was land anywhere in Multnomah County he would partner to achieve this goal".

Several churches in the community formed a coalition with a desire to build housing on their lands and met with City Commissioners, the Bureau of buildings & Bureau of Land & Sustainability to discuss the

barriers that were preventing smaller property development. Now, here we are near the end of 2022 and the problem has gotten significantly worse.

Mayor Wheeler your proposed plan has some components of merit but what needs to happen is the will and action to resolve it with all stakeholders including the people living on the street participating in what will be their outcome.

Currently, I am a member of Ainsworth United Church of Christ in NE Portland, we are in the process of discernment about potentially building housing on part of our land to address the homeless crisis. When you state that you are willing to work with anyone in the community to address the homeless crisis then it's time to put aside the rhetoric and boldly step out to solve this untenable crisis with those that may have land in all sizes. Faith communities most certainly should be in this discussion.

Being poor or low-income with little to no money isn't a crime, the crime is lack of adequate shelter and if you don't have it coupled with a comprehensive plan for change you will continue trying to make it the same way over and over again getting the same results. Equitable and fair treatment to the least of these is our responsibility as human beings and inclusion to solve it must be at the heart of it.

Thank you.