

Christi Cawood

Shortly after reading Donna's comments (which are worth much more than 2 cents!), I headed toward Transition Projects to deliver some donated clothing. Headquarters for TPI is on NW Broadway and Hoyt (and includes Bud Clark Commons, day shelter, etc). Having volunteered in differing capacities for TPI over the years, I have visited this location many times and was aware of the tent camps on various corners around the building. I've spent all night assisting at a cold weather shelter there. I've watched people come and go from the day center. I've always been comfortable visiting TPI and serving in any capacity, but as I crossed Flanders, continued on Broadway past Glisan and neared Hoyt at 6:30 Tuesday evening, I wasn't sure I was comfortable parking. The number of men and women, some barely clothed, some with bags and carts of possessions; some ranting and raving; some passed out; some stumbling or lurching about; the stench and filth of the sidewalks and streets was at the same time appalling and heartbreaking.

I was born and raised in Portland. My grandfather was a truck farmer on SE 89th & Powell. We watched the first set of Golden Arches rise as McDonalds built across the street. We biked and skateboarded on I-205 when it was first built (imagine no traffic on I-205!). In the 1980's I had an apartment on SW Second and Yamhill. While working and living downtown, I would often walk at night to Fred Meyer on West Burnside, and wander all through downtown, Chinatown, and NW feeling perfectly comfortable and safe. There were some people living on the streets back then, but I never felt threatened by them. In fact I felt safer just knowing someone else was out and about at night. I loved living downtown and often consider moving back again, but then I jump on MAX and realize as soon as I get off the train that I do not want to live in an area that is so impacted by homeless people.

I would rather not see a new high-rise go up on every corner, nor 3 homes built on one lot, but I would much rather have infill than sprawl. I so value our green spaces and the natural world that we inhabit here in the PNW. There are more people on the planet, and if accommodating all of us requires infill, so be it. That increased demand for housing also results in people being priced out of the market is another matter. I do not have a solution for the homeless problem – mental health care? affordable housing? treatment for drug addiction? – but whatever it is, we aren't doing it. People are suffering on our streets. Perhaps like me some of you may at times wish they would all just disappear so we can go back to enjoying the Portland we know and love. Admitting to myself that I sometimes avoid downtown so I don't have to face the misery that street people must be facing is difficult, but I honestly do not see a solution coming forward. I hope some of you do.