

Hi David, Clyde Doctor here.

Thanks for opportunity to take my brain out of retirement for a while. Jerri is an ex-reporter and clearly knows how to work to deadline!

So, " Whither Portland"

If we'll be looking to Portland's future it's a good idea to start with the present situation already defined by our august group as a City beset by poverty, homelessness, traffic jams and increasingly out-of-reach housing costs. A lot of progress can be made by focusing on "Items That Need Improvement" but the upside is important too. Portland is a great city with a high HQ (Happiness Quotient").

OVERVIEW: Cities are pretty much the same. Their issues and opportunities stem primarily from national trends over which they have little power. So improvement often comes only at the margins.

THE VISION THING: Portland has surpassed most cities in developing and implementing a clear vision of what it wants to be. Prior visions have played out and I'm told the City seems to be 'between visions" and drifting these days. "Visioning" is a rare skill so perhaps concerned citizens should identify and encourage a new crop of visionaries to create the next version of Portland.

TOPICAL ISSUES: I'm going to skip city services like water and sewer in the interest of time (Kudos on the recent rebuild of Portlands improperly designed and aging sewer system) .

HOMELESSNESS: I chaired the City Club Study Committee on Homelessness. Our report was issued on the cusp of the "Housing First" strategy, which is a great idea. Donna Brown is absolutely right in saying that the homeless population is too diverse to be treated in a one-size-fits all manner.

Poverty and poor health are the major causes of homelessness so this is a case where "throwing money at it" is a good idea. Yes, I know public funds have to be properly managed. Funny how Portland can 'manage' to build ivory towers to house the most fortunate but can't seem to find the cash or skill to house the least fortunate.

So what to do? First provide a minimum income for every person and adopt universal health care... Just Kidding! That's not going to happen.

The first step is a comprehensive system to evaluate the needs of each homeless person and prescribe services which, dare I say it, would need to be adequately funded. The services already exist. Ironically many poor people don't qualify because they don't have a return address or can't stand in line. Getting folks into the system requires intensive, hands-on processing. The much maligned Wapato Jail (renamed "Hope House"?) would make an ideal evaluation center.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION: Traffic congestion is a function of population density. Geography also works against Portland. With only three roads, Canyon, Burnside and Germantown serving the Western Hinterland and seven bridges serving the Eastern realms all roads to downtown lead to choke points.

Portland has been aggressive and clever in dealing with traffic congestion. MAX is 'good enough' for now but please lose the Trolley. Bicycles are also problematical. Traffic planners like to use bicycle lanes to eliminate auto lanes on busy thoroughfares. They call it "traffic calming" but it feels more like "traffic jamming" to an increasingly frustrated public.

The next Portland should keep mass transit and bicycles off the streets, as countries on other continents (and Canada) already do. Perhaps the new vision will focus less on promoting increased density and more on improving quality of life.

HOUSING COSTS: This is another issue caused mostly by external factors and shared by almost all U.S. cities. And again, Portland is doing much, but not enough, to solve the problem. Again, not actively promoting increased density would help. The factors here are: demand in excess of supply; increasing material costs; increasingly burdensome building codes and zoning restrictions; and most important, slow or no increase in wages.

The market will solve the affordable housing problem if government doesn't. Just look at the overcrowded near east side to see how the market works. We know how to build high density, decent, enjoyable, affordable housing so let's get to it. And because wages are not likely to increase substantially anytime soon we'll need nationwide guaranteed minimum income. Not joking this time.

THE UGLY: Jerri didn't get to "Ugly" so here it is, "Institutional Racism". In the "Leave it to Beaver" fifties everyone knew where the Blacks lived. "Williams Avenue" was the short hand. Overt racism has slipped below the surface. Thanks City Club for getting that ball rolling. But somehow the Black area remained the same, through the hopeful and violent 60s, the 70s, etc. Recently many blacks have been displaced by City-sponsored gentrification. In an apparent guilt trip the City wants to lure Blacks "home" with it's "Right to Return" program. I have to ask, do we really want to perpetuate the notion that Blacks belong in Albina? Sure, recompense the injured but let them decide where they want to live. BTW, I read about "Right to Return" in the Guardian. Another "First" for Portland.

So, "WITHER PORTLAND"

"Never make predictions, especially about the future" -Casey Stengel

Here's the good part where we get to do some dreaming. But first a note of caution, the Cascadia Subduction Zone and Global Climate Change will be with us for quite a while and should be factored into any projects we're thinking about building.

The population is aging and living longer. Opportunities in retirement services and geriatric health care abound. With strong high tech and medical industries already here bio-tech will probably thrive.

I marvel at the seemingly spontaneous 'villages' that have popped up around the City. Most great cities are subdivided into districts, boroughs or arrondissements which function as sub-cities providing local services with a small town ethos. Their growth should be encouraged so more citizens can meet their needs close to home.

A revolution in ground transportation is coming. The technology we need for an automated public system of surface and underground mass transit is nearly completed. Think Uber without drivers and traffic directed by computers the way Amazon moves millions of packages a day through it's system.

Free K-12 public education, an affordable baccalaureate for anyone qualified, world class post-doctorate education and research are essential to continuing our economic success. Yet, the whole system seems to have stagnated. Although the problem is national there are a few things Portland can do to get back on track.

The problem in K-12 is the wide variation in quality of teaching allowed among schools (read neighborhoods). See "Institutionalized Racism" above and add "elitism". Maybe the City needs to take over the schools but it's time for somebody to kick butt and take names. And don't fall for the siren wail of the DeVos's and Koch's who want to turn public education into training for the proles with well funded "Charter Schools" for the privileged. Corporations should not be allowed to use public money to run private schools.

I find the notion that American citizens are so stupid that they must be subordinate to foreigners with H-1B visas to be insulting and degrading. H-1Bs should be terminated immediately. Portland might want to look into recreating the Oregon Graduate Institute to provide the post-doc training needed to support the industries in this region.

So, notwithstanding Casey Stengel's wise words, here's a prediction. The computer revolution is just starting. By the end of this century every aspect of life will be controlled by computers. Think of the great Woody Allen film "Sleeper". I loved the robot cars not to mention the "Orgasmatron". Of course, computers will amplify both the best and worst of the human character. It's going to be quite a ride and I'm sorry I won't won't be there to see it.