

## **Donna Brown**

Unlike most of you in the group, I do not have the knowledge of the evolution of Portland over the past 40 years and exactly what has contributed to making Portland what it is. But having come from the outside, and especially from the East Coast, I have thought a lot about what I have experienced here and where it might be going.

So first, some things that may not be earth-shattering but I have found attractive about the city:

1. Courteous drivers! (We were in LA recently and realized we had forgotten how often drivers honk at each other...try Boston!)
2. Concern for public parks and open spaces available to all throughout the city--though I was disappointed recently when the city put in parking meters at Washington Park, which will discourage folks of more modest means from using the park.
3. Citizen volunteerism and concern for the general well-being of the community—so many opportunities to participate in activities that improve the city or benefit others.
4. City support of activities at the community centers and through Portland Park and Rec. (I recently talked to a woman on one of the P & R hikes, who had lived on the East Coast and in the Twin Cities, Houston and Austin, and said she is amazed at the offerings of activities and classes sponsored by the city. She did not find that elsewhere.)
5. Variety and diversity of livable residential neighborhoods whose sense of community is reinforced by the active neighborhood associations.
6. Multnomah County Public Library and its branches.
7. Of course, I could also mention the great restaurants and cultural offerings for a city of this size and access to so much outside the city.

There are three big problems that seem to have increased since we arrived, even in the past few years. If not addressed in some way, they will have a negative impact on the quality of life here:

1. Traffic: I appreciate the efforts to improve public transportation and encourage biking/walking, but there is a bit of naiveté about what is possible. Sometimes you feel that the city (and some citizens) believes that all you need to do is to make bike riding perfectly safe and then no one will want to drive a car anymore. Apparently Portland has the highest percentage of people biking to work of any city in the US (I heard 6% a couple of years ago). Has anyone done a serious study of what might be the reasonable percentage of people who could use a bike for work or other obligations (not simply recreational)? It is likely to be a fairly small percentage even under the best circumstances. People still need to drive cars for many reasons (elderly, disabled, transporting kids or stuff) and the more miserable you make life for drivers the more you promote irresponsible and discourteous driving...and accidents.
2. Homelessness: In the few years that I have participated in the Grant Park Nextdoor Neighbor website, I have seen a significant change in the announcements from people wanting to sell

something or find a good plumber to more reports of theft, burglary, vandalism, and generally aberrant or threatening behavior. Some of this is simply criminal activity (and needs to be dealt with accordingly), but some is related to the homeless situation, especially those on drugs. The homeless are not an undifferentiated mass, and the city needs to figure out how to address each group: 1. those temporarily homeless through some unfortunate circumstance, 2. those who have mental illness, 3. those with addictions, 4. those who simply want to be “free.”, i.e., service resistant. The city and local NGO’s have an obligation to assist the first three categories, but I’m not sure that the city has an obligation to the 4th. I’m not sure these “homeless by choice” have a right to squat on city streets and on public or private land. There is no simple solution but without one, Portland’s quality of life will be seriously jeopardized. Philadelphia is just beginning a major effort to clean up homeless camps and provide services. Cities throughout the US should be trying to learn from each other what works and what does not. Any programs adopted should include assessment to be sure that they are effective.

3. Zoning and affordable house: The recent zoning proposal for residential neighborhoods drew 100 people to the little Hollywood library branch to talk to city planners. They were completely overwhelmed and, standing in line, I heard a lot of angry comments about developers, tear-downs, and negative impact on residential neighborhoods, and these weren’t just NIMBY folks. I was unable to attend the two general meetings in May, so did not hear the testimony there, but those of us who live in R5 all have our favorite stories about mansionization on our very small lots, ugly triplexes stuck in with single family houses, and developers tearing down small houses that would be appropriate for families of more modest means to build a \$1M home. There are numerous large apartment complexes being built on the Eastside. According to the city, 20% of the units in these large complexes will be set aside as affordable housing. This is good and I hope the city makes sure that it happens. But wedging duplexes and triplexes onto small lots in single family neighborhoods affects parking, traffic, safety, and the feel of the neighborhood. I do think there is great value in the urban boundary, but it does create housing issues within the city.

A Question: What do those of you more knowledgeable about Portland think of its commission form of government plus Metro? Is this an effective form? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Should it change?