

Like many of you, I am appalled at the homeless living on the streets and public spaces of Portland with garbage piled high and junk surrounding them, their tents and their dogs. At the same time, I feel sorry and want to help people who must live in that condition, many of them obviously mentally ill or addicted. So, I have been trying to understand the manifold issues around this situation and to think about what should/could be done.

I worked in a family winter shelter last year and visited several other shelters around the city as well as some neighborhood meetings focused on homelessness. I toured San Antonio's much acclaimed Haven of Hope in Texas and talked to numerous service providers. I've talked to homeless on the streets and helped in feeding programs for them.

The statistics are difficult to get a handle on as I am never sure what the various designations mean nor do all of the stats check out when you visit different sources (I understand, however, that Tuck will straighten that out.).

The city and the county have been poking at this issue for a long time. Multnomah County adopted Oregon's first 10-year plan to end homelessness in 2005. While accomplishing a number of important things (Bud Clark Commons, short-term rent assistance) it did not "end homelessness" and, after about 7 years, a new plan was devised: A Home for Everyone was launched in 2014 with the goal of reducing homelessness by 50% within three years. The homeless numbered 3,800 that year. But, even though the plan's managers claim to have moved 4,889 people out of homelessness, according to the 2017 homeless count (Point in Time) for Multnomah County, there were still 3,420 homeless either on the streets or in emergency shelters. This would either indicate large increases in homeless, recidivism or incompatible statistics. It does, however, mean there are still a lot of homeless on the streets even though Mayor Wheeler in his State of the City for 2018 paints a fairly rosy picture. "5,000 people obtained housing last year"—they are no longer in shelters or on the street." But, it is obvious to anyone who walks or drives in Portland that there is a homeless problem.

I think we all wonder what is being done and what can be done? And, is Portland up to it?

There are a lot of efforts underway—some comprehensive like A Home for Everyone and some smaller and more specific like Living Cully or the

Harbor of Hope proposal (Homer Williams) as well as the existence of a large number of shelters, transitional housing, feeding efforts and various services.

Personally, I believe there is not a magic bullet but magic bullets. Like the housed population, the needs and desires are various. There are several sub-sets of homeless which will need differing efforts. By far, the largest and most intractable are the mentally ill and addicted. Mental illness and addiction represent the greatest causes of chronic homelessness according to the Governor's Council on Homelessness. Such individuals also use a disproportionate share of emergency room and hospital care and experience incarceration at a greater rate than the rest of the population. Utah reduced their homeless population by 90% simply by providing a home plus services for all. Could we?