

Re Reading Group meeting 7.18.18 from Tuck Wilson

I'm very impressed and heartened by the outpouring by over half our members of thoughtful and provocative responses to Dave's challenge, "Let your inner blogger come out!"

Many included the rise of homelessness, lamenting its impact on our social fabric and challenges to governing institutions. Having studied it recently, I offer the following observations.

1. Oregon's population has doubled since the years when so many of us were consumed by local affairs.
2. The major corporate headquarters with powerful executives, who could be counted on to husband the mayor's initiatives, we'll all recall have long since abandoned Oregon, but for a meager remnant.
3. The widening gap between those with great wealth and the many who have not kept up in the face of inflation or are weighed by the growing burden of college debt.
4. The excessive financial speculation during the early 2000s, compounded by the reckless risks by banks and the neglect by the Clinton/Bush administrations, culminated in the Great Recession of '08—draining from the working and middle classes billions in equity and savings from which they have yet to recover, and the devastated home construction industry deprived Portland of thousands of units that would otherwise have been built.
5. While Portland has always had "skid row" homeless, since 2014 the number sleeping on sidewalks and camping in parks increased exponentially, culminating in Mayor Hales declaring in 2015 a housing emergency. Public clamor and the intractable nature of the emergency forced Hales to abandon his reelection bid in 2016.
6. An Oct. 2017 KGW-funded public opinion survey found:
 - a. Homelessness has such a significant impact on Portlanders' lives that 34% contemplate moving out.

- b. Over half of those surveyed voiced dissatisfaction with the response of the mayor and police to the homeless problem.
- c. 70% of Portlanders opposed allowing homeless camping in the parks.

7. Emerging data points

- a. Recent years have seen Portland rents rising faster than inflation and wage growth. Average rent for a one-bedroom apartment has climbed to \$1,200 in Portland, out of reach for minimum wage earners and a big stretch for the average earner at \$21/hour.
- b. In response to the emergencies declared by the city and county, the Joint Office of Homeless Services was established in 2016 and this year receives \$61m in local funds.
- c. The office claims to place approximately 5,000 individuals per year in permanent housing but experiences an inflow of an equal number of new homeless persons each year—and that number is growing.
- d. The absence of reliable data has frustrated the county auditors, who are attempting to quantify shelter bed, clinic space and transition housing needed to meet future growth.
- e. Portland police recently acknowledged over half of their arrests in 2017 involved homeless individuals.

8. Mayor Wheeler admits he hears more about homelessness than any other issue. Prospects for his re-election in 2020 may be at risk, together with other major city initiatives, such as the SW Corridor Light Rail Extension and others.