

CREATING CHANGE
Submitted by Clyde Doctor

Getting stuff done requires leadership, authority and resources.

Leadership is a rare blend of charisma, vision and persuasiveness. It's taught in business schools but can't be suitably mastered by the ungifted. You either have it or you don't.

Good leaders can be thwarted by a poorly structured institution. That's Portland's problem. Its weak Mayor system seems designed to frustrate teamwork. The Mayor has to work with a "Team of Rivals" who usually are amateurs in the work they are assigned and whose not-so-subtle goal is to displace the Mayor.

I had the good fortune to work for Don Clark at a time, 1979-1984, when the County Charter synched well with Don's Leadership style. I'm still amazed at how much he got done in that short time. The difference between the County structure then and the City now is instructive. The County Charter and Don's good relations with the Commission gave him all the authority he needed. He used a hybrid corporate/government model. He got to write his own strategic plan. He hired very capable people. They reported directly to him. Each had specific goals to accomplish and were given necessary resources including the active support of their boss.

Tuck Wilson got the Justice Center built with Don's support and despite an amazingly complex web of financial, legal and diplomatic demands. Tuck hired Fred Neal to convince County Boards throughout the State to support a State takeover of the District courts.

Don had created Project Health to provide health care for the poor. The county purchased health coverage for individuals from private insurers like Kaiser, Providence and Blue Shield. The poorest of the poor got health care for only a dollar a month. Dr. Dave Lawrence expanded the county clinic system and created an HMO called Multi-Care. It became the government option for Project Health. Dr. Lawrence later became CEO of Kaiser.

Rena Cusma, later to become METRO's Executive Officer, was tasked with overseeing construction of the County Truck Maintenance facility. I know you haven't heard of it but if it were built today it would earn a Platinum LEED rating. It was built underground in an mined-out gravel quarry and abandoned garbage pit, used a ground stabilizing method imported from Holland and got raves from architectural publications.

Rena was also charged with making sure Multnomah County set the standard for SB 100 Land Use plans... and she got Don's covered bridge built. We also got the Legislature to 'force' the County to provide sewerage to East County.

Before he left office Don took on two projects that he'd dreamed of for years, protecting the Columbia River Gorge and completing the 40 Mile Loop first proposed by the Olmsted Brothers in 1903. Sally Anderson was given the Gorge campaign. Don suggested she find a respectable Republican matron to lead the charge.

Typically, Don told Sally that he would do whatever she needed to get her job done. Then he did whatever she told him to do. One of the secrets of leadership is not demanding credit if it might get in the way of success.

The Portland system has worked in the past under a few strong leaders who cajoled, persuaded or used public pressure to lever cooperation from the commission. So I guess, in the near term, step one is to recruit a charismatic leader with a positive vision. Step two would be to recruit a slate of commissioners each willing to champion reform as team players. In the longer term a change in the form of Portland's government creating a strong Mayor system and a commission limited to policy making could be attempted.

PROSPECTS:

HOMELESSNESS: I'm optimistic because we know how to solve homelessness. Every program required is already in place. What's lacking is money. When we wrote the City Club report on Affordable Housing I interviewed Harold Schnitzer who was a major provider of Section 8 housing. He put it this way, "Homelessness is a problem that can be solved by throwing money at it". In Los Angeles the voters recently approved a \$1.2 billion bond to provide shelters and services for the homeless.

It would be useful to have a centralized assessment and referral center where the homeless would be provided safe shelter, food and medical care while undergoing professional appraisals of their needs and referral to appropriate agencies. The Wapato site would be good candidate.

Proper medical care is critical. To quote Don, "People become poor because they're sick and stay sick because they're poor". See "Project Health" above.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION: I'm pessimistic. Congestion is major problem in every viable American city and Portland has special challenges. Downtown Portland is an island surrounded by hills and a river with limited access routes which become choke points. It lacks a completed 'ring road' to allow regional travelers to bypass the central core. Portland has done a great job of promoting alternative transportation like buses, light rail, trollies and bicycles but they all run in the same lanes. Every bus, trolley and bicycle holds up traffic. It would help a lot if bicycles and buses ran in dedicated lanes. Pedestrians also hold up a lot off traffic. How about trying 'all way' pedestrian crossings?

Adding to the problem of course is Portland's successful effort to turn the Central City into a residential neighborhood but without providing nearby jobs. The mass of 'young creatives' exacerbate congestion commuting to their jobs outside of downtown and clog the streets with parked cars.

There is some good news. Driving has fallen 17% nationally in a decade probably as a result of new ex-urban cities and technology allowing people to work from home. Technologies already being developed could result in new transportation modes that shuttle people between destinations the way Amazon ships packages.

EDUCATION REFORM: I'm optimistic because I have to be. If we are to preserve any semblance of a civil society we must assure that every child receives a decent and equal education. We all know where the poor schools are (pun intended) and why they are there. It is time for Portland to overcome its institutional racism and adopt promising new models in underserved areas like LeBron James' new school in Akron . Or perhaps it's time for the City to take over the school system.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: I'm optimistic. The market handles housing costs clumsily but effectively. We've all been around long enough to see our home equities wiped out more than once. The Trump administration has already set the stage for the next 'Even Greater Recession' by deregulating Wall Street and unleashing the national debt. So fasten your seat belts.

There is one segment of the housing market that deserves special consideration, the 'Insecurely Housed'. This large segment is the folks borrowing housing from relatives and friends or paying more than 30% of their meager incomes for housing. Most housing assistance is targeted at this group. The government should provide a subsidy that reduces the housing burden to 30% for every qualified citizen.

As with homelessness, we know how to provide affordable low-income housing, we just need to find the money.