

August 25, 2021

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Thanks for sharing your perspective in your prior email to me. I appreciate Meg's offer to involve me in the process. However, I want to share that at this point I'm extremely frustrated at the lack of visible action and frankly I don't have faith in the process that my participation would amount to any significant changes. And this is NOT about Meg! I hear great things about Meg. Read on to see my concern.

Addressing homelessness is a very emotional subject for me and I wanted to pause before sharing my angst with what occurs to me as a snail's pace to actually productively solve homelessness in our community. Part of my angst is that many communities across the nation have actually driven homelessness to functional zero. Best practices exist. How does this relate to my frustration about Astoria's process of updating the Comprehensive Plan? I'll explain but first let me say one of the reasons Nelle & I moved to Astoria is we really appreciate the community; it's good people led by good people. Even though Clatsop County has the highest rate of homelessness in the state, and Oregon is in the top handful of states with the volume of the unsheltered, I still think we're good people led by good people. However, I still have great angst around the issue of homelessness....

- Clatsop County Point in Time Homeless Counts:
 - 2017: 680
 - 2018: 790
 - 2019: 894
 - 2020: 1,000+.¹
- Mike Cook spent two and one half years sleeping in a downtown alcove (with the business owner's permission) in a wheelchair. Nelle & I invited him into our home where he was able to finally get disability (with the help of a lawyer) and housing (in Portland). He reported little to no support from local social service agencies. I suspect the service providers labeled him as "service resistant" or "service intolerant" when in fact he needed respect and safe shelter. **I am tired of hearing people blame the homeless.**
- In 2018 we (Astoria) did a sweep of the camps in the Astoria forest promising to hold possessions for 30 days as required by law. **Nothing** was saved.² See the impact [here](#).³ We still don't have a plan to prevent this from happening again **even though it is the law!**

¹ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/research-pit>.

² See https://www.dailystorian.com/news/local/astoria-police-say-homeless-camp-cleanup-a-success/article_0c033a9e-f929-11e8-89f4-1775498d29e3.html.

³ See <https://youtu.be/nR7lt7sfNDQ?t=1577>.

- Clatsop County's ten-year plan to end homelessness was published in 2012.⁴ We have one year left, little if anything in the plan was put into action, counts have gone up, and people are suffering. **I am tired of creating plans and not acting on them!**
- We continue to turn to policing as the solution even though police departments rightfully say they don't have the tools to solve the problem.⁵ **There is no legal basis for getting rid of the homeless.**
- This past winter we were approached by the Clatsop County Public Health Department about an individual they were temporarily housing in a motel. In a day or two they thought the woman would be homeless (no more funding) and due to her health condition would likely not survive the winter. Public Health had tried finding support at the area's social service agencies — without luck. She has been living in our home ever since (and after hiring a lawyer will likely start receiving disability in November). When she does start receiving assistance she still won't have enough money to move into market rate housing. Vouchers are a two-year wait. What does it take for the city to realize that Astoria needs more truly affordable housing? I am tired of waiting for the city council to address zoning issues for all income levels, utilize vacant buildings, contribute city owned property for emergency housing and I will not accept the often repeated lie that "we have no land."⁶ **There is simply no will for using what Astoria has to house the homeless.**
- August 1, 2019 Nelle Moffett arranged a conference call with a representative from Built for Zero⁷ (written up in the NY Times and elsewhere for successfully solving homelessness), Geoff Spalding, Brett Estes, Monica Steele (acting County Manager), Leslie Ford (Columbia Pacific CCO), and the two of us. No one from the city or county pursued working with these experts. **The city instead seems to continue to rely on agencies that have not solved homelessness.**
- September 7, 2019 Nelle Moffett sent Geoff Spalding a pointer to an article, *Creating Systems That Work*.⁸ Based on this Geoff asked Nelle to create a job description that fulfilled the promise of the article. This apparently stimulated the HOST conversation on the County-wide Coordinator position. A HOST subcommittee was formed October 1, 2019 without including Nelle. The December 5, 2019 recommendation by the HOST subcommittee proposed a position but stripped it of power by placing it in CCA in order to save money (benefits for a county employee are more expensive than benefits in a nonprofit). **This is contrary to best practices.** April 1, 2021 (almost two years later), two liaisons started work. One resigned after a week on the job. The authors of the book, *How Ten Global Cities Take on Homelessness: Innovations that Work*, say "By far the most frequently requested strategic advice has to do with overcoming street homelessness.

⁴ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/plans/>.

⁵ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/2021/06/29/il-legalization/>.

⁶ We recently visited a tiny home village in Bellingham, WA that is housed on one quarter acre of city controlled land (that had been a gravel parking lot). They have used this land for two years, currently house 22 people, and the city is so impressed they renewed the lease for three additional years. The unused "concrete park" (where the city removed the picnic tables in order to "shoo away" the homeless) next to the American Legion is 0.22 acres. We have land. We don't have the will.

⁷ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/built-for-zero/>.

⁸ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/proven/>.

While the municipal leaders, nonprofits, advocates, communities, and resources involved are as varied as the people who are on the streets, the challenge is the same: **persuading** outreach, shelter, behavioral health services, and the housing providers to **coordinate their services** in a way that reaches each person on the street, assesses their individual needs, and offers them safe shelter and stable housing, that works for them [emphasis added].” Nelle was recommending situating the liaison in a location with “the power of convening and persuasion” (e.g. Gresham, OR). That best practice didn’t happen... to save money! **I am tired of repeatedly seeing such lack of compassion and responsibility for solving homelessness. How much does it cost to keep people unsheltered in terms of human lives?**

- Nelle and I don’t normally try to assist people finding local resources (except for pointing them to either CCA or CBH’s RA-RA Team). We are not case managers. However, we have accompanied four people as they access the social services “system.” None received the services they needed (primarily a roof over their head). In one situation we went to eleven doors (via referrals) in a big circle back to the beginning.⁹ The last I knew this individual was living in the woods near Home Depot. **I am frustrated by the perception that we have all these services and the homeless don’t use them when the truth is Clatsop County does NOT have services that really address the needs of the homeless. No one in Clatsop County is responsible for ending homelessness. No one!**
- In July of 2015 The Astoria Affordable Housing Study was published.¹⁰ How many of the recommendations were followed? In 2018 Astoria participated in a \$100,000 county-wide study. One city official expressed to me “This is going to tell us what we already know.” The resulting study was published in 2019. Nicole Bales, *The Astorian*, wrote a June 16, 2021 article titled “County affordable housing strategy takes shape: Little progress since housing study [emphasis added].”¹¹ Astoria’s City Council Goals for 2019-21 include “Support efforts to increase the housing supply... using the County Housing Study as a guide.”¹² The 2021-23 goals include “Support efforts to increase the housing supply using the County Housing Study as a guide.” In February of 2021 the Astoria City Council and the Astoria Planning Commission held a joint work session discussing the recommendations from the 2019 Clatsop County housing study, based on statements like “the council will be providing some direction so that the planning commission's efforts will be very focused and targeted in an effective manner.” Also, regarding the recommendation from the Housing Study “the first strategy is to adopt a supportive and inclusive comprehensive plan and just right now what we're planning on doing is to have the city staff address that through part of our code amendment.” In reviewing the Planning Commission and City Council agendas after the work session I see nothing on Development Code updates. **Really?? So, what the city council put in its goals are just pretense?**
- In April of 2019 the City Council held a work session on homelessness. One of the councilors said in closing remarks that this session was really about the “stick” approach (to addressing

⁹ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/2020/03/04/who-is-responsible/>.

¹⁰ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/studies/>.

¹¹ See https://www.dailyastorian.com/news/local/county-affordable-housing-strategy-takes-shape/article_b95eac78-cd4e-11eb-b146-83bf1cef4c19.html.

¹² See https://www.astoria.or.us/Assets/dept_1/pm/pdf/2019-21%20final%20council%20goals.pdf.

homelessness) and in the future would enjoy discussing “carrot” approaches. **Did I miss the carrot work session where the city addresses how to help the homeless?**

- Astoria’s Homelessness Solutions Task force has been meeting since late 2017. Then Mayor LaMear wanted three things “we should do this year.” In May of 2018 she encouraged the group to turn toward solutions. No recommendations were forthcoming. **Oh maybe another year will produce solutions.**
- The City Council goals over the last several years have anticipated recommendations from HOST. But as Mayor Jones, co-leader of HOST, has said “...the purpose of the HOST is... really it's a coordination and communication body.”¹³ The agenda of HOST doesn’t even mention solutions in the title any more: “Homelessness Task Force – Agenda.”¹⁴ Why rely on a group that isn’t even focused on solutions?
 - City Council 2021-23 Goal: “Support work and recommendations of the Homelessness Solutions Taskforce (HOST) as well as other community efforts to address homelessness. Explore partnerships for housing first programs and a County-wide drop in center.”
 - City Council 2019-2021 Goal: “Support work and recommendations of the Homelessness Solutions Taskforce (HOST) as well as other community efforts to address homelessness.”
 - City Council 2018-2019 Goal: “Support work and recommendations of the homelessness task force.”
 - March 4, 2021 HOST meeting — Mayor Jones [automated transcript lightly edited for clarity]: “[HOST] was founded by Mayor LeMear during her tenure about three years ago. Chief Spalding has been the chair of it. Since then the purpose of the HOST is... really it's a coordination and communication body because as you can see by the faces on your screen there's so many different organizations and individuals and groups that have some that are dealing with some aspect of issues involving homelessness. We thought it would be beneficial to meet periodically share information share ideas hopefully occasionally eliminate some redundancy and maybe take advantage of some opportunities that someone might not have known about before. Basically this many different organizations involved in some aspect of a complex issue it's probably a good idea to get together periodically and share information and even between meetings we can do so by email as well. So that's the premise of this group.”¹³ The group is about sharing, not recommendations or solutions. **I am so frustrated that this group still has not come up with solutions and, even though best practice calls for integration of social services to address individuals’ needs one person at a time, HOST has clearly not created an integrated approach.**
 - March 4, 2021 HOST meeting — Chief Spalding [automated transcript lightly edited for clarity]: “As the mayor mentioned we've been meeting since November of 2017 and one of the very first things we did at our very first meeting was come up with a name for our group. A lot of names were tossed around but the one that stuck was the homeless solutions task force and to me the one key word in that title is **solutions**. That was called

¹³ See <https://youtu.be/KXX9S9FFn9I?t=194>.

¹⁴ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/wp-content/uploads/2021-07-08-HTF-Agenda-7-8-2021.pdf>.

out by one of the members at the time who said you know we're here to look for solutions and not just to talk about things. I will say that there has been some criticism about what we've accomplished the last three years and I think a lot of the criticism is justified. This is a very difficult problem to solve. There are lots of different ideas floating around in terms of what we should do and they're on both sides of the spectrum in terms of how we address the topic of homelessness. So it is challenging. We are going to be talking about one of our significant accomplishments today. What I've said in the past and I continue to believe is the relationships that we developed and formed have been at least to me have been extremely invaluable and have gone a long way towards addressing some of these concerns...."¹⁵ **But these relationships have not focused on solving homelessness.**

- The one recommendation from HOST was the county-wide homelessness liaison position that took one year and seven months for the liaison to be in action **and failed to meet the criteria for an effective position. I am so frustrated at the city continually ignoring the information provided to them about what has been proven to solve homelessness in many cities across the country.**
- In reviewing HOST minutes and meeting recordings I find five subcommittees have been formed.
 - The Clean Slate subcommittee was formed December 4, 2018. From HOST minutes the last Clean Slate update was October 1, 2019. The subcommittee has been active for two years and seven months. **There is no plan or proposal.**
 - The Transitional Housing subcommittee was formed December 5, 2019. From HOST minutes the last update was May 6, 2021. The subcommittee has been active for one year and seven months. **Their work has been on hold pending finding a fiscal sponsor for almost a year.**
 - The Countywide Liaison subcommittee was formed October 1, 2019. From HOST minutes the last update was July 8, 2021 (where they announced hiring a second person — the first person started April 1st). The subcommittee has been active for one year and nine months **adding two positions which do not add any additional services or solutions above the services that already existed and did not solve homelessness.**
 - The Journey Home subcommittee was formed January 30, 2019. From HOST minutes the last update was July 25, 2019. The subcommittee has been active for two years and five months. **There is no plan or proposal.**
 - The Employment subcommittee was formed October January 30, 2019. From HOST minutes the last update was April 18, 2019. The subcommittee has been active for two years and five months. **There is no plan or proposal.**
- In 2017 then Community Development Director Kevin Cronin said in the staff report regarding the Temporary Conditional Use Permit for the Astoria Warming Center, "Homeless are residents too just like homeowners and renters, but do not currently have permanent shelter. The Comprehensive Plan does not articulate a hierarchy of housing status. For example, homeowners are not elevated above renters or homeless for that matter and should be evaluated equally.

¹⁵ See <https://youtu.be/KXX9S9FFn9I?t=633>.

Conversely, the compatibility goals [from the Comprehensive Plan listed previously in his report] are applicable to this proposal and short term impacts and a long term location need to be addressed. **In total, when reviewing the Housing policies cumulatively, it is decidedly in favor of protecting the needs of existing neighbors over non-residential uses and incompatible uses** [emphasis added].¹⁶ Temporary shelter for those without homes is relegated to the status of “incompatible use.” One out of forty Clatsop County residents is homeless and therefore are relegated to the “incompatible use” category. **The State has now stepped in to say that shelters can be located in ANY zone. I guess the State is tired of waiting also!**

- In July of 2019, two years ago, I wrote a letter requesting, as other cities in Oregon have done, an update to the Comprehensive Plan.¹⁷ **To date, there has been no action towards this goal.**
- In August of 2020, one year ago, the Astoria Planning Commission tabled further work on proposed Development Code updates regarding emergency shelters. President Moore said (automated transcript lightly edited), “I think that we should at some point take a look at the comprehensive plan and social services and how our comprehensive plan was lacking. That was part of the instigator of this amendment request in the beginning. We could speak with our city councilors and try to drive them at some point [into] opening the comprehensive plan for services like that. In the meantime I think this amendment request... well we've stood on it for a long time the staff has put a great deal of effort into it... I think is not necessary at this point so I am going to make a motion that the Astoria Planning Commission table discussions of amendment A19-06....”¹⁸ We have known since the Astoria Warming Center’s Temporary CUP hearing in 2017, and restated in 2020, the Comprehensive Plan is lacking.
- In March 2020 I wrote a letter to County Commissioners and Astoria City Councilors pointing out that no one in Clatsop County is responsible for ending homelessness.¹⁹ **How do we expect to tackle this, as other cities have successfully done, if no one is in charge? I'm frustrated and tired of waiting.**

Given:

- Clatsop County has had a plan to solve homelessness since 2012; and
- we have had multiple Housing Studies; and
- since at least 2017 we have known an update to the Comprehensive Plan is needed; and
- the 2019 Clatsop County Housing Study recommended Comprehensive Plan updates; and
- in August of 2020 the Astoria Planning Commission tabled their work on shelters due to no guidance from the Comprehensive Plan; and
- other Oregon cities have updated their Comprehensive Plans regarding the homeless... long ago....

¹⁶ See https://www.astoria.or.us/assets/dept_3/agendas/72517_APC_packet.pdf page 51 (of the PDF).

¹⁷ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/2019/07/15/astoria-city-council-re-comprehensive-plan/>.

¹⁸ See the 8/25/2020 Astoria Planning Commission meeting at <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/government/>.

¹⁹ See <https://friendsoftheunsheltered.org/2020/03/04/who-is-responsible/>.

“Business as usual” has not and will not get the job done. There are many cities which have been successful in solving homelessness. We have shared this information repeatedly and yet Astoria is still saying “it’s so complex.” **It is NOT complex.** One out of forty Clatsop County residents is homeless. City leaders, both elected and staff, are responsible for systemic changes to address this crisis and have yet to make any progress towards serving our residents who are homeless. I have lost trust. Somehow the city is able to find grant funding for \$844,843 to put lights on the Riverwalk but is unable to update a comprehensive plan since 2017 that will address housing for all income levels of residents.²⁰ **I am frustrated and tired of waiting patiently for city officials to take responsibility.**

Sincerely,



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²⁰ Statewide Planning Goal 10 states “Plans should be developed in a manner that insures the provision of appropriate types and amounts of land within urban growth boundaries. Such land should be necessary and suitable for housing that meets the housing needs of households of all income levels.” See <https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/OP/Pages/Goal-10.aspx>. Astoria’s Comprehensive Plan, CP.027 says “The City of Astoria Comprehensive Plan Background Reports are hereby adopted as the factual basis of the Comprehensive Plan as required by ORS Chapter 197.” Oregon Statewide Planning 10 is in the list. We seem to be ignoring the “housing needs of households of all income levels.”