



Turning abandoned shopping malls into homeless shelters may prove to be the outside of box type of thinking we need right now. Lloyd Center fills 23 acres of prime real estate in Portland. The current owners, KKR Real Estate and Finances, a Texas firm, has defaulted on their loans and announced the intention to redevelop this mall into a mix of expensive residential units and office space. Homelessness experts and advocates love the idea of converting this facility into a homeless shelter and navigation center. Smaller stores could be converted to living spaces for two or more individuals, couples and families with children. Most of these stores have restrooms for employees and the common areas have larger restrooms that could be repurposed to house showers. Larger stores could be used to provide health care, mental health care and addiction services. Existing food courts could be used to serve meals and offer employment training and volunteer opportunities and the expansive parking lots could be converted to “safe parking” sites where campers and cars could park and camp, moving them off residential streets.¹

The Hidden Homeless: Part 3 Notes from the Oregon State Grange Convention

By Lilly Anderson, MPH, DAFH Director, June/July 2023



Photo by Chris Pietsch: The Register Guard, 2015

Hello Grangers!

I recently had the pleasure of attending our Oregon State Grange Convention and I learned so much! Although I was not able to attend the entire convention, I really enjoyed seeing everyone and learning more about how resolutions are passed. Thank you to those who helped me figure out how and when I could speak. It can be a complicated process for us newcomers.

This year, the DAFH committee used our time at the convention to check in with you regarding your feelings about the homeless situation in our state. We hosted a conversation space and we also posted questions on posters to the convention attendees that we could use as conversation starters.

We had numerous comments left both on the question posters, and that were driven by our conversation time. I've done my best to record those points and opinions here for you. It is our

hope that this facilitates dialog between Granges and Grangers about what we can do to help end homelessness in Oregon.

Question #1: *If you were homeless, what do you think would be the hardest aspect?*

Poster Responses: The humiliation of living off the generosity of the government and others.

As a woman, safety.

Loneliness.

For me, the stress of never having a for sure place to go.

People viewing me as not human and the feeling of being disrespected.

Finding a bathroom.

Finding a shower.

I would not be able to sleep. My body needs a soft place to rest.

Embarrassment at the indignity.

Tiredness from little sleep and carting stuff around.

Never being sure when I was going to sleep.

Getting a job.

Question #2: *What do you think **we are doing** about homelessness that is working?*

Poster Responses: Starting to see 'people'.

Nothing.

Consistent source of resources.

Tiny house villages to stabilize lives and transition services.

Dual-diagnosis and counseling.

Beginning to recognize mental health connection.

Veteran's Village in Clackamas.

Help families to help their homeless family members.

Giving tax incentives for creating homes for the homeless.

A land trust that purchases RV camps etc. as they come available.

More housing people can afford-tiny or not, instantly available services for abuse treatment, and a better health care system.

Question #3: *What do you think we are doing that is **NOT** working?*

Poster Responses: Passing the buck.

Moving people along without help.

Enabling government funding to homeless without work in return.

Criminalizing the poor and hopeless people of the street.

Lack of explaining the process they must follow to get help.

Allowing mentally ill to avoid treatment.

Not having affordable housing.

Identifying those who need help from those who do not.

Pricing people out of housing.

The middle class is disappearing. It feels we are rich or impoverished.

Allowing foreign entities to own property in the US.

Not taxing corporations. Not taxing the wealthy.

Stigmatizing the houseless.

The mentally ill and disabled (most of the homeless) are incapable of working.

Question #4: *What do you think of the tiny house villages like Eugene is creating?*

Our in-person discussion centered around the theme that some form of house to keep people out of the elements was better than nothing at all. The overall tone seemed to be that if these tiny house villages were supervised it might eliminate or, at least cut down on some of the problems that arise from a homeless population interacting with the public. By having a place to leave their possessions, this would make it easier to get services and look for work.

Poster Responses: Bad idea, creates more homeless.

Not a long-term solution.

A safe secure supervised space for getting stable.

For singles or a couple, a great solution, especially if privately built and owned. (How many of our ancestors lived and thrived in small houses?)

Great, a place to call home and potentially a community of stable housing.

Not viable, long term in cold weather communities.

Will work in smaller communities.

Better than nothing. Talk to the folk already using them.

Great idea. Pay the residents to build more.

Question #5: *What do you think of the homeless camps some counties are building to relocate the homeless in their communities out of the downtown areas?*

Our in-person discussion explored the idea of repurposing old shopping centers and drive-in theatres to create places supervised spaces to get people out of the weather and into services that can help. We also talked about creating a land trust to purchase mobile home parks when they come on the market, so they can be kept as mobile home parks and not demolished to make room for more expensive housing tracts. We can look to the Deschutes Land Trust as an example. Unfortunately, there is fear that by creating and providing services it will draw homeless people from outside the area. Also, we need to research automatic enrollment to OHP. Is this being used to ship homeless people here?

Poster Responses: Moving the problem is not a solution.

Better than sweeps and arrests, but not a long-term solution.

Slumtown/prisons.

Better than nothing.

Terrible idea, interferes with commercial agriculture practices.

There is pushback from the homeless who need services offered in town and those who provide the services.

Question #6: *What do you think re-establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to build houses?*

Our in-person discussion was very robust about this topic. Almost everyone knew someone or had a relative who worked in the CCC and most of the stories regarding those experiences were very positive, with most members in attendance indicating this could be a very productive step. Most everyone agreed that if we did this we should focus on building houses rather than bridges and public buildings, and that we should engage with the construction trades and get them involved.

Poster Responses: Would love to see regular public service, like an alternative to military service.

Cut off government funding and force the homeless to get a real job, if capable.

The CCC was a 'real job.'

My mother was a CCCer at Cascadia.

We don't have an unemployment problem, we have an unemployable problem. CCC might help.

Several people responded with just, "Yes!"

People of our country enjoyed the public works of the CCC for almost 100 years. Best investment “we the people” ever made.

In our discussion we talked about Myrtle Creek used to have a program through the high school that built 2 houses per year. This starts vocational training @ high school to prepare them for some college programs.

In closing, I’d like to thank everyone for their contributions. This is a very critical and timely subject. We must find a way to end homelessness and just repeating, “get a job” hasn’t really provided us with any answers. I think the answers that work for rural and small-town residents will probably come from rural and small-town residents because recycling solutions that work in urban areas haven’t really served us well.

Next time, we will talk in more detail about some of these ideas and what it would take to put them into action. If you have ideas or suggestions on how to help end homelessness in Oregon, please visit our page on the Oregon State Grange website and let us know what you think.

Fraternally yours,

Lilly

References

¹Bak, R (Nov 2021). Should abandoned shopping malls be converted to homeless shelters? Retrieved July 2023: <https://rosebak.medium.com/should-abandoned-malls-be-converted-to-homeless-shelters-6f07c6999b10>