

Solving the Homeless Crisis with Compassion, Realism & Common-Sense

A Businessman's Approach

by MICHAEL SIPE

Recent polls show homelessness, addiction, mental illness and public safety lead the list of concerns for Oregonians — as they should. The crisis is escalating. If we don't turn the tide, it will become a social tsunami. Every day, we see homeless camps in neighborhoods and commercial areas, along highways and parks. Compassion is a right response. However, we need to face reality and change course when compassion, a desire to "love our neighbor," or a virtue-signaling desire to *look* loving and compassionate leads to failure. In business, parenting, medicine, sports and the military, when a strategy isn't producing the desired results, we change our approach. But in government, when something isn't working, it seems we double down and press for even more of the failing approach.

Like many readers, I have firsthand experience and knowledge of these problems. As a child, my family had so little that we lived for six years in a chicken house — with the chickens — a situation most today would likely consider homeless. My deceased wife of over 30-years was in and out of treatment repeatedly, suffering with severe addiction and bi-polar disorder. My current wife runs a nonprofit focused on serving women graduates of recovery programs. I've interviewed people who clawed their way off the street, recovered addicts, reformed felons, street cops, nonprofit leaders, ministry leaders, politicians, community leaders, parents and business owners. Based on all this, here are my compassionate, realistic and common-sense recommendations — at the state and local level.

At the state level we must immediately re-think the Measure 110 "experiment" with decriminalizing hard drugs. Regardless of original intent, it's not working. The addiction problem is spiraling out of control. We need to focus more resources at the state level to target the drug traffickers and slow the flood of dangerous drugs like heroin, meth and fentanyl that are killing our children and our friends. We must immediately direct resources to build detox and treatment facilities. This was the Measure 110 promise... and the state is failing miserably to keep it. Regardless of



Measure 110, the state should develop a plan to mandate care for the addicted and the mentally ill. Expecting the impaired to make rational decisions on their own volition to get help is simply not realistic. We need to get people who are a danger to themselves or our community the help they need, even though they often don't know or admit they need it. Finally, state law currently discourages cities from enacting and enforcing regulations against urban camping. These laws should be repealed.

However, even if the state government takes the actions I suggest, if we don't make dramatic changes immediately at the local level, the problem will only get worse. Here's a summary of what I believe must be done in Deschutes County and our Central Oregon Communities.

First, and most essential, the citizens must decide and strongly guide our elected officials that our towns will no longer be operated as "sanctuary cities," attracting the homeless, addicted and mentally ill of the world, as they do now. Until this fundamental perspective shift is made, Central Oregon is doomed to repeat the mistakes of Portland, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles and waste many millions of dollars — to no avail.

Second, we must segment the homeless population and deal with individual people according to their unique situation. It's not a homogenous population. A one-size-fits all approach will fail from the outset.

Third, it's not illegal to be homeless. However, our cities and county must pass and enforce ordinances outlawing camping on public property and providing strict limits on private property camping. We must no longer allow camping tents and RVs on city streets and in unregulated areas throughout the county. For that rugged percentage of the population who just desire a homeless lifestyle, they will simply have to seek it elsewhere.

Fourth, we must actively police, disrupt, arrest, prosecute and jail the criminals who prey on the homeless population as well as the citizens of our town. Jail them or run them off. While most people in the camps are not hardcore criminals, we need to go after

the ones who are: the human traffickers, the ones who rape, assault, rob, extort and murder those who live in the camps. Permissiveness makes them increasingly emboldened to commit crimes against you, your family and your business. We must empower and release our police officers to deal with these predators.

Fifth, for those people who are homeless and sincerely want help, we should help. This is not quick or easy, but it is possible. It requires deliberately building relationships and serving one individual at a time. Coordination between government officials, businesses, churches, faith-based ministries and secular nonprofits is essential to provide the assistance that will save lives.

Finally, we need to proactively direct and compel the chronically addicted and demonstrably mentally ill into treatment facilities, or they must move on. The "housing first" approach attempted in the sanctuary cities noted above has been proven not to work. Likewise, allowing people to burn out their bodies and brains in city-sanctioned open air drug camps is not compassionate. It leads only to sickness and death.

The homelessness crisis is an existential threat, literally, to the people who find themselves homeless. It is also a real and growing threat to the social fabric of our state. We must start addressing this crisis with something like the steps above. The longer we wait, the more the problems threaten the very viability of the urban areas of our state, and the harder it will be to avert disaster for those on our streets.

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Introductory Video: vimeo.com/685330217/c3121199d5.

Check out my interviews of Central Oregon Leaders at: CascadeViewsPodcast.buzzsprout.com.

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Middle Housing

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Small-scale, infill specialist developers such as Bend-based Mary Hearn supported these code changes, commenting that they “will allow a pathway for small, infill developers like myself to provide the ‘Missing Middle’ housing that is so desperately needed and desired.”

Effectively, SB 458 allows for a land division of a parent lot solely for ownership opportunities of middle housing units. For example, if a triplex used the middle housing land division process, you could purchase one unit of the triplex and the land around it.

As a follow-up to, and local refinement of, HB 2001, it requires jurisdictions to allow middle housing lot divisions for any relevant middle housing type (duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhomes etc.) built in accordance with the relevant Oregon Revised Statute (ORS). It applies to middle housing land divisions permitted after June 30, 2022.

Hammered out pursuant to stakeholder advisory group input, work sessions and public hearings, Bend City Council has approved a large set of development codes to bring the city up to date with the requirements of the enacted legislation.

The code change now requires that triplexes, duplexes and town homes be allowed in any residential zone where a single family-home is allowed, subject to appropriate parameters such as setback requirements and so forth. It also lowers parking requirements for developers and includes more stringent regulation of short-term rentals.

The primary thrust of the legislation aims to provide Oregonians with more housing choices, especially housing choices more people can afford, and required updates to local codes that previously limited the type of housing people can build.

Locally, the statute compelled the City to amend the Bend Development Code to comply with the new housing act, with the amended code provisions overriding any conflicting Comprehensive Plan or provision.

A spokesperson said, “The City will continue to create incentives for and remove barriers to development of a variety of housing types in all residential zones.

“This policy is intended to implement the City’s obligation to encourage availability of adequate numbers of needed housing units at price ranges and rent levels which are commensurate with the financial capabilities of Oregon households and allow for flexibility of housing location, type and density.”

Bend City has reaffirmed its support for residential infill development to help achieve the mix of housing identified in its adopted Housing Needs Analysis, and the fiscal year 2021-23 Council Goal Framework plan includes a housing goal to “Take meaningful action to make this statement a reality: People who live and work in Bend can afford housing in Bend.”

That goal includes a strategy to pursue policy actions to increase the supply of housing as a “platform for equity” by removing and reducing regulatory barriers

for development of housing, with an emphasis on incentivizing rent and price restricted affordable housing, middle income housing and housing that serves vulnerable community members.

Relevant residential districts within Bend’s jurisdiction affected by updated code flexibility include Low Density (RL), Standard Density (RS) and Medium Density (RM-10 and RM) Districts.

To help meet Bend’s pressing housing needs and Council’s goals and strategies, implementing the HB allows “new types of housing in areas where they were previously prohibited, provides additional opportunities to meet the housing needs of Bend residents, and also provides additional opportunities for housing in the Urban Growth Boundary, thereby increasing its capacity.”

According to the adopted Bend Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) Bend is planning for growth of approximately 38,500 people between 2008 and 2028, requiring nearly 16,700 new dwelling units. Mirroring general trends, Bend’s housing needs are evolving, and key demographic changes are coming in Central Oregon and across the nation.

Examples include Baby Boomers that may need affordable housing or may choose to downsize their housing, resulting in greater demand for middle housing types and small single-family dwellings, cottages, accessory dwelling units, townhomes, apartments and condominiums.

Growth in Millennial households will similarly increase the need for affordable housing for renters and homeowners such as small single-family dwellings, cottages, accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, garden apartments and apartments.

The Bend City Framework Plan also prioritizes “leveraging legislative opportunities to obtain housing for those most in need and provide additional opportunities for first time home ownership.”

Such removal and reduction of regulatory barriers for development of housing places an emphasis on incentivizing rent and price restricted affordable housing, middle income housing and housing that serves vulnerable community members.

This is especially relevant in light of the average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment in Bend currently hovering around \$1,800 per month, which represents a 13 percent increase compared to the previous year.

The City will continue to promote a mix of housing types in areas zoned residential through the updated “clear and objective” standards which will see impacts to include:

- Middle housing in areas of Bend where it was not previously permitted. Bend residents need a variety of housing choices to fit their lifestyles, and not everyone needs or desires a large home. The new code allows middle housing in all residential areas of Bend, regardless of zoning, with the exception of areas with existing covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) that prohibit these types of housing.
- Housing prioritized over development standards. Middle housing is designed to be more affordable. Affordability is impacted by building requirements such as parking, height, and distance from the road and other structures. The new code reduces many of the requirements previously limiting the development of middle housing, helping to prioritize more units that are likely more affordable than large homes.
- More housing for community members who live and work in Bend. The new code limits permitted short-term rentals for developments that have more than one unit. Previously there was no restriction on the number of short-term rentals units by property. Now, the code will allow only one short-term rentals unit per property in residential zones, as long as the property complies with all other requirements for short-term rentals. This change will further the goal of supporting the use of middle housing for people who live and work in the City of Bend.

The approved code was drafted by the HB 2001 Stakeholder Advisory Group, which was comprised of members from the City Council, Planning Commission, Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Neighborhood Leadership Alliance and others. To view the proposed amendments and for more information on Bend’s HB 2001 implementation, visit bendoregon.gov/HB-2001.

The new legislation also necessitated updates to the Bend Comprehensive Plan to ensure compliance after City staff spent several months working with the HB 2001 Stakeholder Advisory Group, which comprised of members from the City Council, Planning Commission, Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Neighborhood Leadership Alliance and members of other special interest groups, to draft a package of proposed amendments for consideration by the Bend Planning Commission and City Council.

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