

FALL 2023

HOMELESS VOICES FOR JUSTICE NEWSLETTER



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THE BASICS

Who we are: Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) is a grassroots organization that works for social change with, and on behalf of, people who struggle with homelessness and poverty. We seek to empower people whose perspectives are often excluded from the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic well-being. We hope to assert ourselves and our interests in Maine politics through protest, education, positive policy change, and reform.

When we meet: Every Monday, 9:30-11:30 am at 55 Portland Street; all are welcome to attend.

Come talk with us: Interested in advocacy or HVJ? Questions about what we do? Issues you would like to see us address? Email HVJ@preblestreet.org!

THE ADVOCATES

HVJ LEADERS:

BEN MARTINEAU
CAROLYN SILVIUS
CHER HARKINS
JIM DEVINE
MIKE STUCKMEYER
LISA FRANKLIN

SHELTER UPDATE

By Cher Harkins

HVJ has held multiple meetings at HSC (and plans to continue monthly) and were extremely vocal about our findings. I'm relieved to tell you there have been changes for the good, enough changes so I would ask you all to give it a chance and get on the waitlist to go inside.

1. Food issues are resolving.
2. 6:00 p.m. curfew has been relaxed. If you will be late you can call ahead to the HSC so they will know you will be back.
3. You will have the option to receive on site case-management to help you make out your necessary housing paperwork and obtain housing vouchers.
4. Portland and the governor's office are actively working on a plan to move the asylee and immigrant populations to a different area to free space for everyone to be allowed the shelter and services they deserve.

Please go to sign up at General Assistance and put your name on the shelter list!

This situation seems never-ending. Please consider signing up for the HSC. It has changed for the better. HVJ has access to city services so we can openly communicate any issues that may come up. We can keep everyone updated on any progress.

Shelters are never a first choice but it beats the hell out of being chased away every time you put up your tent. You'll be warm (or cool), have transportation (we're working on a bus through Metro instead of simply a van), meals, and a chance to regroup and decide how to productively address your particular challenges. The HSC has improved. Please give them and yourself a chance.



NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

By Mike Stuckmeyer

HVJ would like to remind folks about the upcoming Portland elections, which will be held on Tuesday, November 7th, 2023.

Mark this date down in your calendar or device etc! It's very important as we will be voting for Mayor, city council, and school board members! We will also be voting on several referendum questions, including one about rent control. HVJ will provide more information about the candidates and referendum questions as the date of the election gets closer.

HVJ would like to share information from our "You Do Not Need A Home To Vote" campaign. Maine has very fluid and accommodating voting policies. You're able to even register the day of the election or show up at your polling place at the last minute.

As it gets closer to election day, Homeless Voices for Justice will be presenting more information about the upcoming elections. Anyone who has experienced homelessness or being unhoused is welcome to attend or visit our weekly meetings, which are generally held at 55 Portland Street. We also meet on occasion usually once a month at the City of Portland Homeless Services Center located at 654 Riverside Street in Portland. The meeting time is 9:30am. There is always morning coffee and on occasions cookies or donuts.



THE DIGNITY PILOT

By Cher Harkins

You deserve to be treated with dignity whether or not you have a physical structure around you. That is why Speaker of the House Rachel Talbot Ross sponsored LD 1294, The Dignity Pilot. It passed with bipartisan support.

The Dignity Pilot is a 2-year pilot program signed into law by the Governor and extended for two more years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The information printed below is supported by the Maine Human Rights Commission. You need to note the time and dates that any discrimination has happened to you. Note where, when, and whoever else it may have happened to, and if there were any witnesses. These things are really important because a Board meets quarterly to discuss these problems and decide how to fix them.

REMEMBER: any discrimination toward a person who is homeless or perceived to be homeless is illegal.

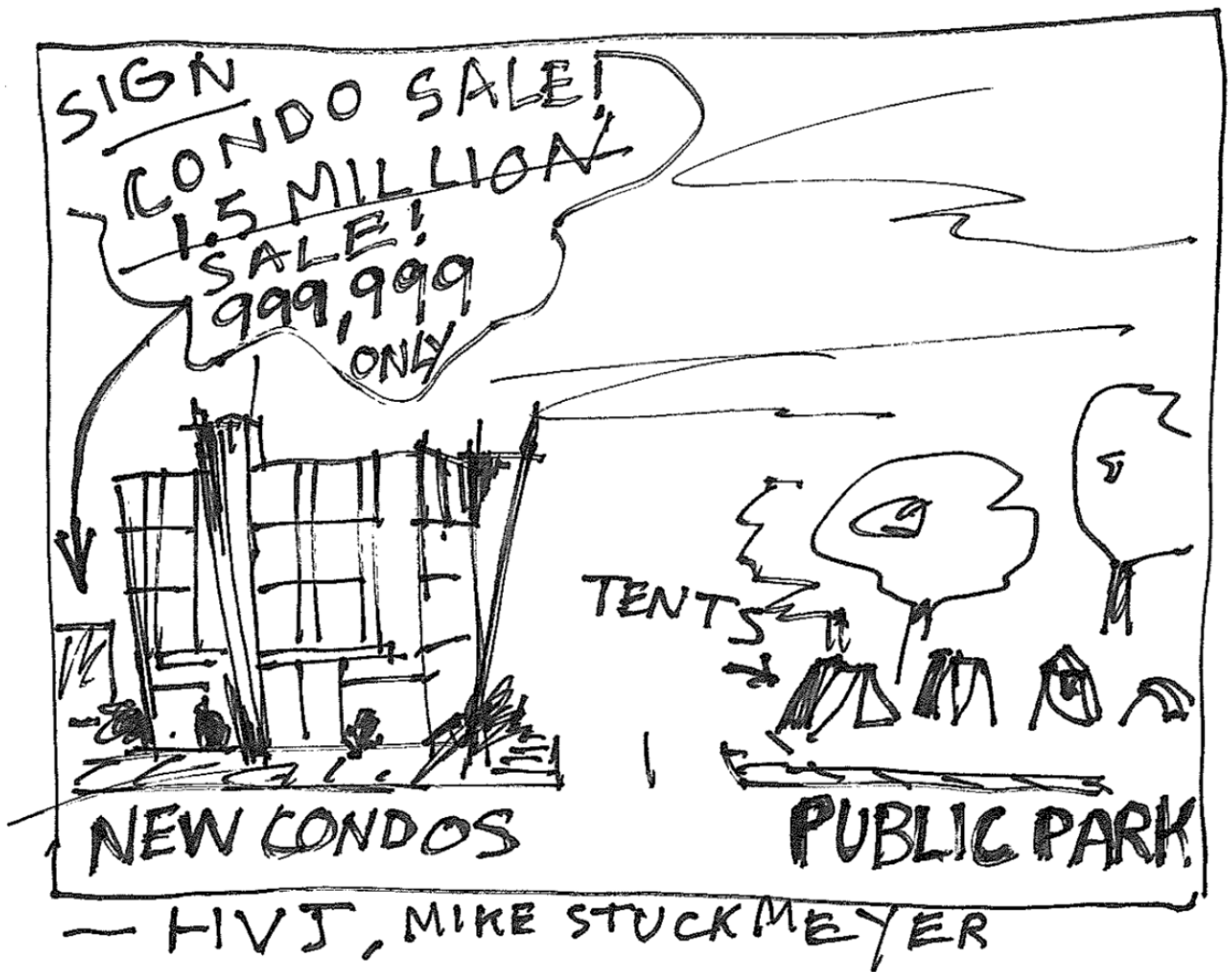
1. It must have happened within the last 300 days so make sure you put the date down.
2. No one can refuse to hire you strictly because you are homeless.
3. You should be able to rent a storage unit to save your belongings.
4. You cannot be refused food or not be allowed to come in and sit in a restaurant.
5. You cannot be refused an apartment because you don't have a home.
6. People cannot call the police on you simply because you're homeless and they want you to move along.
7. You cannot be refused a post office box because you do not have an address.

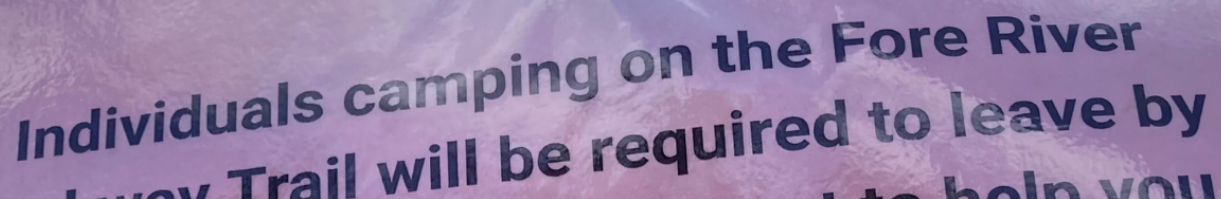


THE DIGNITY PILOT (CONT.)

Every one of those examples (and many more things) have happened to many folks, I'm sure. If these things have happened to you, please speak with somebody from Homeless Voices for Justice. A lot of you know me as the woman who hands out the tobacco. I'm there every Monday (usually at 55 Portland Street) so please find me if you need help with the paperwork to report these types of things. If people are treating the unhoused population badly, they should be called on their actions.

Discrimination cannot be fixed unless someone is notified about it. All reports are confidential unless the person who filed it decides to go public with it. You all deserve to be treated better, so let's work together to make sure that happens. Please stay safe.





Individuals camping on the Fore River
Levy Trail will be required to leave by

HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS

By Jim Devine

For some time there has been an issue of great controversy and debate, not only in Portland, but in many other locations across the country. That is the issue of homeless encampments.

People experiencing homelessness have constructed virtual tent cities in many locations in Portland and across the country. For some time, I have been visiting Logan Place on Frederic Street to play guitar and do outreach with formally homeless residents who now reside in apartments at Logan Place. Because of this, I am familiar with the encampment behind it on the Fore River Trail. I have visited this encampment several times and had friendly conversations with residents there. Some of the sites there are rather elaborate. One fellow even installed solar panels to provide him with light and electricity.

I am writing this on September 5th. On September 6th, the City of Portland plans to clear out this encampment. This seems to be a rather nasty and brutal approach. It will be very traumatic to these individuals who are just trying to survive. I believe that these people should be given more time and more outreach should be done to provide them with a more constructive alternative to sleeping outside. Of course, it is now September. Winter will be here soon and sleeping outside could become quite deadly. We need a more humane solution to this crisis.



LONGEST DAY OF HOMELESSNESS

By Ben Martineau

On Wednesday June 21st Homeless Voices for Justice held their Summer Solstice Event at Tommy's Park in Portland's old Port. This annual event is for people to recognize the significance of those experiencing homelessness have critical issues year round. From 10:00 am to 3:00 pm HVJ and some of her sister organizations had tables set up with information and give outs.

There were speeches at noontime. Among those speaking were Victoria Pelletier and Pastor Jeff. Both of them stressed that there is a crisis in the city with the sheer volume of citizens without a home and that something needs to be done.

All through the event there stood a post-it board near the sidewalk at the Temple St./Middle St. intersection with post-its. Three columns: Camping, Community, and Shelter had post-its with individuals' comments in reference to each under the headings. When the time came at the end to take it down, the post-its were in the shape of a heart, signifying the care and love there and the need for that to spread. Housing is a human right.



INTERESTED IN JOINING HVJ?

CONTACT US:

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