

PROPOSAL TO THE HOMELESS STEERING COMMITTEE

Peace House, Homeless Empowerment Project
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What's the issue/problem?

Lack of job opportunities.

There are many people in our town eager to work. Some are homeless and many are threatened with homelessness as unemployment benefits run out and the economy continues to falter. Help!!!

What can the city do to help?

Among the homeless are some that live a day to day subsistence lifestyle and choose to live with extreme simplicity. For these, occasional odd jobs may be all they want or need. Others work hard to collect bottles and cans, working seriously to make peasant wages that cannot pay rent. (10,000 bottles=\$500)

A growing number are young, strong, smart and unemployed. They are searching for work experience to gain a footing in a region they love, many with roots here. Some have quite useful skills and education.

Clearly, the state of the economy is a challenge to all and what can the city do that does not carelessly increase the tax burden on already struggling locals?

1. Make it a goal to hire more people, not more EXPENSIVE people.
Less consultants and administrators, more workers.
2. Make hiring local a priority.
3. Have each department assess the tasks that have been put off that could be handled by part-time, temporary hires. These positions will give a leg up to someone desperate for income and supply them with valuable local experience and references.
4. Interface and seriously consider hiring from a local inventory of homeless with listed skills and interests to give hope to those whose economic condition has rendered their gifts largely ignored and may even have labeled these residents as "problems." Such an inventory is currently being planned.
5. Lift city restrictions that may impede entry level jobs or entrepreneurial efforts that do not compete with established businesses. For instance: allow coupon distribution on the streets for local businesses (coupled with related litter clean-up, if necessary), lift the rule against passing the hat after performances in the park (It's not payment, just a gesture of appreciation.)
6. The arts are areas of interest frequently cited by local homeless. How can the city help create connections for those that have these skills and ambitions? There's always appreciation for street musicians, are street artists a possibility?

7. Food production is another area of interest in this and other local groups. There are waiting lists for the Community Garden spaces. More need to be planned and perhaps assigned with some consideration of need. Helping prepare these spaces would be an ideal part-time temporary job.

The City of Ashland is one of the largest, best funded, outfits in town. Do what we want all businesses to do: Hire. While employees without benefits are not an ideal for the future, we are currently in a state of economic emergency. Everyone needs to look for jobs that have been put off and could use doing. Any city worker who wants to work part-time or job share, should be encouraged to do so. Consider and support efforts to create jobs. Encourage brain storming.

Costs:

Part-time temporary employment has some advantages to both employer and employee. There would be savings from scheduling to meet specific task needs and this labor would fall below that necessary for benefits. For those interested only in part-time work, these jobs would be their ideal. For those interested in more hours, their foot is in the door to prove their worth and perhaps find opportunities later or through recommendations and more supportive contacts. If there's an attempt to hire for a few targeted projects not budgeted for, some funding may be needed. A fraction of the cost of consultants and administrators could create a small useful labor pool.

Background of Agency:

Peace House is a locally based nonprofit community organization begun in 1983. We recognize the essential unity of all life. Operating from principles of non-violence and compassion, we explore ways that people can live cooperatively with one another and with the earth.

Peace House has hosted a free weekly meal for 20 years in Ashland. At this meal, we interface with many homeless and with low-income residents on the edge. Our Office Manager, Ruth Coulthard, is one of the coordinators of the Emergency and Winter Sunday Shelter. She has comfortable interface with many local homeless. She has coordinated input for our proposals.

When we were invited to join a group including some local churches, agency reps, and interested advocates meeting to discuss local issues regarding the homeless, we felt it was essential to get more input from them to develop meaningful plans. With a small grant from McKenzie River Gathering, we have worked to increase outreach and gather input from the homeless and those on the edge. Their input is reflected in this and other submitted proposals.

Please consider ways to expand your Committee to include someone who has been homeless. The projections of others cannot fully represent the reality of the homeless experience and your understandings would no doubt be enriched by such inclusion.