

QuickPoint! – Nostalgia and NIMBYism Stand in the Way of Sheltering the Homeless

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.

For more than a year, Cascade Policy Institute has urged Metro to [convert all or part of its Expo Center into a shelter for the region's homeless](#). For much of that year, the City of Portland and Metro have had on-again, off-again conversations about using the site.

Let's face it. The Expo Center is a money pit. It needs subsidies from Metro, Portland, and Multnomah County just to cover its operating costs.

Metro likes to brag that the Expo Center generates \$50 million of economic activity in the region. That's the equivalent of a single Fred Meyer store. If the Expo Center shut down tomorrow, no one would notice.

Nevertheless, the commission overseeing the Expo Center seems to want [no part](#) in helping to address the region's homelessness crisis. Their rationale seems to fall into two categories: nostalgia and NIMBYism.

Last week, the chair of the commission objected because she said she went to the Expo Center as a child and has fond memories of going to the county fair there. The fair left the Expo Center more than a quarter-century ago. I don't think it's coming back.

On the NIMBY front, the chair complained that she didn't want stolen vehicles parked at the Expo Center—as if it's somehow better that stolen vehicles are lined up along Marine Drive. Commissioners were concerned that the sight of homeless people and vehicles would turn off the polite society that attends Expo Center events.

If our homeless situation seems hopeless, you can point one finger at the unelected commission that's standing in the way of one straightforward solution.

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