

2024 Feb Peloton Posts Jess Falero and Cullen Ryan

Liz Trice 00:02

Liz Trice here with Jess Falero and Cullen Ryan. And so we all three of us had a conversation like three years ago. And I'm really excited to talk to you both. Again, there's just been so much going on with the, you know, the order at the city council level, and then recent clearings of two encampments, and opening of new shelters. And what I love about talking to both of you is that you have very, very different perspectives, and you both care so much about people on the ground, even though you have extremely different backgrounds and perspectives. So I think for people who care about homelessness in general and wonder what's going on in Portland, it's confusing, because the perspectives can be so wide. And so I'm kind of hoping that we could just have a conversation, to explain to people, what you both see that is the same, and how you see things as different. And hopefully, you'll both get something out of it too. And, but we can also get across to, you know, the generic reader on the street, who doesn't know a lot, you know, help them understand where things are right now and how they've been changing and are changing. And, you know, maybe if there's a way they want to get involved, what they can do, that sort of thing. So it's very generic, and I don't have a fixed thing in mind. And we've got a little bit more than an hour together. And we usually have only about, at the end of the day, about 20 minutes worth of text room to print texts that will be published. So we can just have a wide ranging conversation, and then we can you know, I can tighten it up later. That sounds great.

Cullen Ryan 01:52

Listen, I think we definitely, Jess and I both have different while definitely different perspectives. I would add that I think we also have a really strong mutual respect for one another and a lot of common ground.

Jess Falero 02:08

I would say that, too.

Liz Trice 02:12

How do you think would be useful to structure our conversation today?

Cullen Ryan 02:18

Just ask questions, I think.

Liz Trice 02:24

Um, okay, so maybe from I, I guess, first of all, I'd like to hear an update, maybe. And I know, it'll be a little bit out of date, because this will be published, like, you know, first week of February, but you can have, you know, there's a moment where you can like update numbers or a sentence or something like that four or five days before it goes to press. But like, what's the current situation with the encampments that have been cleared? What's the result of that? Like,

are shelter beds filling? Where are people? Where are people going? I guess that's the really big question. What percentage are being captured by the shelters? Are the shelters doing a good job? And to the extent that they aren't, what's happening there? And so I'm going to start there. So we're so we just cleared two big, the city just cleared two big. encampments. Where are people going? And how's that working? Yeah.

Cullen Ryan 03:25

You want me to start Jess, or would you like to go first on this one?

Jess Falero 03:28

Go for it.

Cullen Ryan 03:28

Okay. Well, I will say that a lot of focus is on the camera resolutions that hurt that occurred recently, but I think the focus should really be on what's changed in the last month or so. And that is that the city had a long effort to increase its capacity. And it did so in two ways. One, the city council allowed it to on an emergency basis, add 50 beds, and that was huge for the city. And bigger still, the city embarked long ago on and got resources to create, actually, it was the Greater Portland Council of Governments. I think they got the funds for this, but they created a shelter specifically for single adult asylum seekers. And there was one point where the homeless service center was close to 80%, single adult asylum seekers and I think that that resulted in a lot of other people who are experiencing homelessness, not being able to access that shelter. And by the time the shelter opened, I think some 120 asylum seekers move to that new shelter within the first hour. And then you add that to the 50 beds that had been added by the city council that made Portland suddenly have 170 beds available. And then the city did a third thing which is critically important. And they made sure that for the whole, essentially the whole month of December, and I think up until now, prioritizing those beds specifically for people who were unsheltered and outside. And the net result of that was we watched numbers go down in all encampments, not just the ones that were the areas of focus. But all people outside, we saw people start to come inside. And the fourth thing that the city did was it, it listened to outreach workers, and challenge itself to remove some of the barriers that stood in the way of people coming inside. And it did so. Not all, I'm sure, but it did remove enough. And it came up with some creative ways to invite people to come and see this thing, see this place, get a good view of it for themselves, people who hadn't seen it before, and experience it. And the net result is that we saw a whole bunch of people start to come inside from outside, go into that shelter, go into Milestone, go into Florence House and go into Elena's Way. And the landscape of unsheltered homelessness in Portland as a result on January 5, looks a lot different than it did on December 5. And we've gone from, you know, our peak in October, which I think was I think we're up to 280 people outside I'll get those numbers for you, Liz, but 200 people outside and 208 people outside or 208 tents outside rather - we don't know exactly the people - all the way down to where that encampment before it was before the sweep that happened last week, I

think had less than 50 tents in it. And Douglass Street was something less than half that size. So we were talking about numbers of beds still available to shelter that exceeded the number of tents known to be outside in the city. And what they found when they cleared the remaining tents was that a third of them were unoccupied. That I think 17 more people came in on that very day of the encampment sweep from Harbor View. And numerous numerous others came inside from other camps. So it's not just the days of the sweep that count. But actually the effects of that whole month that was a game changer for Portland. And I think we've cut the numbers of people outside down to something akin to a quarter of what it was and something back to being on par with what it was last winter. And I think that's big progress. And I hope that changes are happening at the city that will allow it to continue to prioritize people outside, continue to reduce and remove any barriers that stand in the way continue to do more outreach and connecting with people. And involving all that whole community in that effort to get people inside which it has done with the ECRT, Emergency Crisis Response Team effort, which was to mobilize all sorts of community members. So I just start with that and say that the good news is that we've seen more people agree to come inside, which is, I think, an area that we all agree makes sense.

Liz Trice 08:23

Got it. And I just have a couple of quick questions. Before I switch over to Jess. One of the questions I had was: what were the what were some of the meat? Or maybe we can what were some of the barriers that were lowered? You speak to those?

Cullen Ryan 08:43

So yes, I, as I understand it, the city had what people were referring to as a curfew that really was that they wanted to ensure that the beds got used night after night. So they would have people make sure to let them know if they needed to, if they were going to be there that night, by a certain time and that time used to be 6pm. It got moved to 9pm. And I think ultimately it got moved to 11pm that people have to let the city know, hey, I'm gonna be back there later tonight, by 11pm. The city allows people to stay out later that they can go if they have to go to church or go do whatever else they need to do. They don't have to be in by that time I it's my understanding goes but they have to notify the city by 11pm that they intend to use that bed and have an agreement to use that. So, that was one barrier. I know that they did some work with pets to allow to partner with the Humane Society to have the shelters essentially provide safe harbor for pets of people who are staying outside so that people were able to do that and other barriers, I think they work to remove misunderstandings, people get to lock their belongings outside before coming in and access those belongings anytime of the day or night. So people can really move around freely and access things, that although there are not mixed gender dorms, they people are allowed to spend all their time, you know, in the common areas of the building, you know, in couples, and spend time together, it is really just the sleeping quarters that are separated by gender. And those are some of the bigger barriers that I think that they examined and removed and helped to educate people that maybe there weren't as

many barriers as people have thought as well, because then people have misperceptions about how things work there.

Liz Trice 09:17

Okay. And then the last question I have for you right now is when they said that they're going to prioritize people who are sleeping outside, how do they do that? Like, are there still more single asylum seekers showing up every day who are like, they're ready to go into the shelter? And they're saying, No, you wait there because we're waiting to see if someone else is going to like, how does that work out? That seems off.

Cullen Ryan 10:59

Yeah. So for asylum seekers, we, I think we saw just a dramatic influx of that particular population between December and April of 2022, into 2023. So and then that continued throughout October, in particular. And some people stayed some people pass through, went on to Canada went to other places, but it resulted in the shelter being largely serving that population exclusively. So that new shelter opened up a tremendous capacity for that population. So for asylum seekers, I think they are now able to go to a specific shelter that is designed to have the services that best suit somebody seeking asylum at a different location. For other parties that are experiencing homelessness, they are actually saying, Yeah, we are making our beds available to people who are in our encampments. And we're going to work with you through general systems and other means to help resolve your homelessness so that you don't come you don't need to come into the shelter in the first place. Let's see what we can do to have you not stay here. And let's see if we can hold these beds for people who are outside and in desperate conditions. And are there enough like are there open beds at the shelter? What's the name of the asylum seeker shelter? I don't know what the name of it is.

Liz Trice 12:45

And are there open beds there are there still lots of single asylum...

Cullen Ryan 12:49

My understanding is 120 beds of 179. bed capacity filled when it opened. And I haven't heard that, that there has been anything other than still remaining capacity there. I'm sure that some of asylum seekers have arrived. But I believe that there is still room for them at that facility. And I know for sure, because I've been getting emails on a daily basis that there's capacity at the homeless service center continued with availability for people who are outside and those folks are being prioritized. And I think that number has gone down to much less than 50. But it was hovering around either side of 100 in a lot of December. So about 50 people have come in from outside into that particular facility, just in the last week or so.

Liz Trice 13:38

How many people you said?

Cullen Ryan 13:39

How many think about 50

Jess Falero 13:41

Okay.

Liz Trice 13:52

Okay, great. Jess, thanks for being with us. Um, tell us what you're hearing on the ground or seen, you know, how, what else do you have to add or any anything that like conflicts with what, what Cullen says, Tell us what you're hearing and seeing and your general understanding of the situation.

Jess Falero 14:13

Sure, I'm gonna say this without sounding pro-sweep, because I'm not pro-sweep. But I do think Cullen is right, people have tried out the shelter who otherwise would not have tried out the shelter. I think the way that we go about it, just because something is effective, doesn't mean that it's humane. And so I still have real struggles with the way that we went about it. But with that being said, people have accessed the shelter, but considering the space that people were put into it was either like, lose the home that you've built on the side of the road for yourself, or access to shelter that you're actually afraid of, and it wasn't handled in an ethical way that actually allowed people for their own autonomy. Because people will access to shelter based off their own personal reasoning, and how they know themselves. Like we talked about with Oxford Street before the HSC was built. People were getting CTOs people are having medical extractions, yada, yada, yada and CTOs are often because of people's mental health or trauma or brought on by communal living situations. And so I think that fear is very real. We have seen the numbers go down this week, social workers on the ground are having a hard time getting everybody into the shelter due to how many people have access to the shelter. The shelter keeps asking folks to call back at later times due to processing and takes. So that is really exciting. On the same coin of that part of the conversation that we leave out is how unsafe shelters are and how unprepared they are for the demographics that are entering the shelter right now that were outside. These are people that are veterans, these are people that have severe trauma, these are people with severe mental illness, these are people that don't either don't have the skills to handle themselves tactfully as people would like, or don't have the capacity to. And more often than not, just based on what I've seen what I've lived through what I'm hearing on the ground. That is a main concern right now is that the folks that are accessing it this week, are going to end up leaving, or getting kicked out due to multiple reasons, such as the ones that I just mentioned. So that's that's a real big concern for me, we don't really live in a trauma-informed society. And I know that me for myself, I'm lucky that I have been housed for three years now. But I know that that is luck. And if I was currently on the street, I would not access the HSC. And I would not access the HSC based on the fact that I experienced chronic

homelessness for as long as I did. And I'm still very traumatized from living in shelter spaces. And so even if that will manifest in my own personal life to this day, three years later, it's something that I'm still working through. And something that I really think that I want the general public to start talking about and being aware of, because as much as shelters are our current, temporary solution, they are a bandaid, and they actually perpetuate the systemic issues that are happening in our world, especially targeting unhoused people. And so I would love for that conversation to be more a part of our community, especially here in Portland. Because those are the things that we need to address in order to solve homelessness, and get everybody in their own home. It's not enough for me to get everybody into a shelter. And it's not enough for me for something to be effective, even though it's inhumane. So, those are my thoughts.

Liz Trice 17:59

That's awesome. Well, you say a little bit more. Can we have a little bit of that conversation right now? Like what is the nation that needs to be?

Jess Falero 18:06

I think Cullen can even add to it because I could see Cullen nodding his head. I didn't know that you weren't clinician. So you definitely must have stuff to add to this conversation, because I'm sure you know what that's like.

Cullen Ryan 18:16

Yup, I do.

Liz Trice 18:19

So, um, yeah, what is just what does that conversation look like? Like? What is the opening question? for opening

Jess Falero 18:27

question? I don't know what the opening question is, I can lead with some of like, what I've experienced being in the shelter, because I think just because I'm coming as someone who, you know, lived through it, you know, could potentially end up back there and somebody who has like, worked really hard to try and get out of that space. And so I can kind of just answer it from my own. My own life experience. From being in state custody for over a decade, transitioning into the homeless shelter. I'm very familiar with living in communal living, and I'm very familiar about what it's like. I mean, I'm sure both of you have had roommates before. And I'm sure you've had roommates that you haven't gotten along with that came with their own drama, their own circumstances. Imagine having 400 roommates. What I mean, that's really what it is, when you're in a shelter you have you know, if it's a 400 bed shelter, you got 399 roommates, if it's a 200 bed shelter, you got 199 roommates, and you got 109 Nine roommates that have also been on the streets, through domestic violence, human trafficked in the prison system in foster care, they have been like severely traumatized, severely traumatized. I mean, if you've been on

housed, you've been traumatized. It really is like the bottom line there. And when we talk about trauma, like we don't really talk about trauma, like there's trauma as in you have a singular traumatic experience. And then there's Complex PTSD, which is, you know, consistent nonstop one traumatic experience after the other which is something that a lot of unhoused people have when you have complex trauma such as veterans, because that's really the only context that I've really heard it talked about otherwise, other than, like when I talk about it, but you have one traumatic experience after the next after the next after the next. And so you really have to get into a conversation about what that does to the brain. And you have to really get into the conversation about how like, folks that are unhoused a lot of the time, if they don't have, maybe it's a co-occurring thing where they don't have the supports they need, and they have mental health or trauma or whatever. But really, like, if someone is struggling, normally they have a support person or support system that they can then rely on. You know, some people, most people, you know, have parents that they can return to if they were to become on housed. Cullen, I actually think you're the one that brought that to my mind during the the on unhoused encamped, and you were like, well, jazz people your age, usually are staying with their parents if they're in a rough place. And that kind of like brought perspective. To my mind. I'm like, Oh, that's true. Most people do have family members, besides your parents, your grandma, your aunt, whatever, you know, you have a support system that keeps you from entering homelessness, you know, and you're talking about people that have been through so much that didn't grow up in healthy families that didn't grow up in healthy households that, you know, we're incarcerated as young kids are incarcerated as adults. And we know that the incarceration system is not a, you go do your time, and then you're scot free. You do your time, and then you have 50,000 different barriers to accessing housing, employment, all the things, because everybody automatically assumes that you're going to do something horrible. So the new talk about stigma around those kinds of things. I mean, the situation that we talk about when we talk about it is such a complex thing that I'm not surprised that the general population is unaware, or that like Portland is in the place that it's in, I don't think that there's a lack of people that care. And I don't think there's a lack of people that want to do something about it. I think that there's a lack of like, very real substantial conversation around trauma and why people use substances and why people are like, where they're at. And what is it really that people are struggling with? And what is it really why they won't access the shelter? Why is the shelter unsafe? Why is it dangerous? Why is it something that, you know, people get kicked out of what is really happening there? You know, and those conversations could even brought up, like, through my time at the Florence house. I mean, I saw so many horrible things, I saw a lot of horrible things. I mean, I was harassed on a daily basis by different people, and you're not allowed to defend yourself in that space without losing your bed. And so like, the way that I navigated harassment, was I had the ability to go purchase myself a pair of noise cancelling headphones, to straight up just ignore people. But that's a privilege that I was able to do. It's not something that people are able to do to just ignore being harassed like that, you know, constantly over and over and over again. And I'm not sure that like people that like are housed and haven't been there, the general population would be able to do that either. Because they'll just go home, and they'll shut their

door, and they'll hit the block button, or they'll call the police or, you know, whatever. But you can't do that when you're in the shelter, you're not entitled to that. You don't have a door to close. Another example is like we had somebody with severe seizures. And every single morning, she would have a stress seizure, and she would fall in the middle of the lobby, and she would hit her head off something, and she would bleed all over the floor. And so like, in my mind, I can picture that almost every morning, I wake up very anxious every single morning, from how chaotic the shelter was, early in the morning, you'd have, you know, her bleeding on the floor in the lobby, you have a fight going on. And the other room, you'd have two ambulances and the police trying to get in. I mean, when you wake up to that kind of chaos, it stores in your body, the Body Keeps the Score, it holds on to all that unprocessed trauma. And if you don't have the things that you need in order to process through it, it just stores there and your brain will dissociate and keep you protected from that moment. And so instead of you healthily processing, whatever it was that you went through, it just stores there and it affects you for the rest of your life. It's part of why chronic trauma and chronic homelessness will take 28 years off a person's life. This is like this is why you know Preble Street will say it over and over and over again. But they don't explain it. You know, it's like 28 year it takes 28 years off the life but why does it it's because people are trapped, you know, going back and forth. I when I was unhoused and I was walking the streets of Portland, my shoes broken Monument Square and I had nowhere to go. I just aged out of the teen shelter on my birthday and I was waiting to get into the Florence House but the Florence house was a lottery system at that point. And so I would go every single day at one o'clock and I would put my name and but there was 40 other women looking for that one bed. And when they did do the regular beds and they transitioned that around those 24 beds were a lottery system. So all 40 women there ... there's no like tracking how long you've been waiting for a bed, all your names went into a hat and they pulled your name out. And that's how you got to bed. Yes. And so my shoes broke in Monument Square during this time, and I had to take them off. And my feet were covered in bloody blisters from the tip of my toes all the way down to the bottom of my heels on the bottom of my heel. And so that's another example. But you can also talk about how like, at the Florence House, there was just one incident where like, these two women gotten this argument, one girl grabbed the other girl's hair, and she shoved a pen in her throat. And I can remember very distinctly being in the bathroom because I had run away from that situation, I was like, I'm getting out of here, and I went to the bathroom. And then in came that woman with a pen or throat and she just rips it out-

Cullen Ryan 25:46

Oh, no!

Jess Falero 25:47

- right in the bathroom next to me. And so like, you know, I can continue to tell you all these like trauma dumped stories. But it's like it's not. It's not a let's bring everybody indoors and then we all sing Kumbaya, like the fights that you see down at the encampment and the behavior you



saw done at the encampment are manifestations of our systemic problems, as our society, they're not something that is just confined to encampments. That's also going to happen at the HSC. It's going to happen within the Florence House that happened down in Oxford Street happens at the Teen Shelter, you know, and it's not to say that it's a fault of the Teen Shelter, or it's a fault of the HSC, or it's a fault of Preble street. But it is a systemic failure failing, because none of these people regardless of like how they choose to take out all the stress, anguish, PTSD, all of them are trying their best, they are trying their best, and they're working with what they have. But there's something to be said that if you throw somebody out into the wild, and you make them to survive, they that long, they end up becoming wild. I mean, there, you can't be surprised by that. If somebody is sleeping outside for 10 years, you know, and they have a knife on them. Of course they have a knife on them. If I'm sleeping outside, I'm going to carry something to protect myself. When I was down at the Florence House, my best friend, who passed away now, her name was Christine, you remember this Liz, when she was camping down at the bay and you came down and helped with the knots on her tarps. Well, her and her son, who you also met, and his partner at the time, while we were building that encampment, there was just one gentleman that would ride down his bike, and he would make sure to stop at the encampment, especially when both she and Christine were trying to use the bathroom. And he would sit there and he would watch them. And he would make sure to harass them, he made it a point to come back every time. And at one point while I was down there, he did that. And Christine got ready to pick up her knife (laughs) to do something about it. You know. And no, should Christine do that. But it's like, at that point, like people that have not been in that scenario, don't know what that's like, you like you are exhausted, you're tired, you are traumatized. You're just trying to use the bathroom, you know, and you're swimming in the ocean anyway. And this housed guy is coming down on his bike just to harass you. You know, successfully I was able to talk her off the ledge and no violence happens that day. You know, but it's very much not the point like people should not be put in these scenarios, you know, we need to really focus on the systemic problems at hand and solve those.

Liz Trice 28:34

That's amazing. Thank you so much, actually, it's always I'm always so blown away when I listen to you talk, just that I actually hope that I can get this into some kind of format to share with other people. Because it's amazing. Like when you tell these stories, it's like oh my god! And I remember going down there and helping these women, this woman with the knots and thinking like, oh my god, like this is this is it. You know what I mean? Like, this is the best thing right now. And it's not great. It's terrible and the fear of safety and it's just a lot, you know,

Jess Falero 29:08

I didn't tell you but the reason why she lost her bed at the Florence house was because my best friend Courtney, I had gotten her a bed at the Florence house and I was always on seizure watch for her because Courtney has really, really bad epilepsy. And so she would just go into

complete stress seizures while we were just hanging out. And I was always right there. But one day one of the woman at the shelter stole her seizure medication.

Cullen Ryan 29:30

Oh.

Jess Falero 29:31

And so Christine flipped out and she ran down to meet that person and punched her in the back of her head. So that person called the police immediately and got a harassment order which meant that she could not be within 50 feet of the shelter that the other girl was at. And so she lost her bed. And that was why. And that morning, right after all that went down. She went into a grand mal seizure and ended up in the hospital. The ambulance was taking her away as Christine ran down to punch this person back, that, you know? And it's like one of those things like you don't hear that context, when you hear the situations that are happening with unhoused people, and a lot of people haven't been in those scenarios, you know, when I was growing up in state custody, I was in many places that would just let us beat the shit out of each other. They would! They would just let us beat the shit out of each other. And they would pick which best won to like, congratulate on or go for. And that was just the way that it was. And so, I personally am not surprised that people go and punch each other in the face, not one bit. Because if you put it into context, like, the goal of a parent is to teach a child emotional regulation skills and how to be an adult. It's to keep them a kid and give them the resources, they need to be a functioning human being. And so if you see an adult out in the world who can't do that, it's a really good signifier of what they missed as a child.

Cullen Ryan 30:58

(Agrees).

Jess Falero 30:59

I know just from my own personal experience of being institutionalized for so damn long, that like, it is hard to be functioning human of this society, it is really hard. I am very tired every day of day, I'm very traumatized. I'm very traumatized. I'm very tired, I have lost a lot of my friends. And half the time, I don't want to fucking do this, like, I don't care. I don't want to do it. You know. And so I know me, and I know that I am not going to- I know that I have a deeper understanding of where other people are at when they do this kind of thing where like, the general public is going to look at it and just be like, "That person is a piece of shit". But it's not the case. That is not the truth of it. It's the things behind that people aren't seeing. It's the truth of what is happening in the pits of our fucking society that, like, nobody wants to see because it's so horrifying. Like, it is so horrifying? Of course, nobody wants to see it. It's so valid, you know, it's fucking horrifying. But the solution is not to not see it, the solution is to see it and do something about it. Because if we're seeing systemic trauma, and systemic oppression happened before our eyes, and instead of blaming the system, we're blaming individuals, it shows us that there's

a gap between the, you know, the people that are just general population and the people that are getting beat on, you know, and it's not to say that, like, the person who's like, oh, like, I really, you know, I'm feeling really harmed by that. And I don't want to see that as a bad person. It's to say that that it is a part of the community's responsibility to hold on to that. Because honestly, if I have to see it, you have to see it. If I have to see it, you have to see it. And you're not exempt from seeing it if I have to. Because the problem is that conflict isn't inherently bad, it's not. Conflict shows us that something needs to be addressed. And we keep coming to this conflict, because we haven't addressed the thing yet. And that's okay. But we need to. Awesome,

Cullen Ryan 32:59

I'm with you, Liz. I love the opportunity to listen to Jess- - you're so extremely articulate. And, I agree with what you're saying, and you've really illustrate it very well. And I, I feel compelled to add to it, just to reinforce that what we're seeing with homelessness with people experienced experiencing homelessness is a broader systemic issue on every single count. And it is on us to fix that broader systemic issue. And if you look at people with mental illness, for example, and you know, it's people with serious and persistent mental illness, it tends to be people who experience psychotic symptoms. And what we know about people who experience psychotic systems symptoms, is that all those symptoms are exacerbated by stress. And arguably, the most stressful situation you could be in is chronic homelessness. So when you see somebody who has a serious and persistent mental illness, and they happen to be in homelessness, we often see them floridly psychotic, and that is nothing more than the circumstances that they're in that they're under a tremendous amount of stress. And that when we move that same person and say, Hey, you get to come inside this apartment and live right here, and you're all set now. I watch people and nothing has changed. They're not on psychotropic medication. We haven't done therapy. We haven't done really anything except remove that- take them from a really stressful situation, move them into a safe situation of housing. We - I watched people clear of those symptoms right in front of my eyes. And it's just as if they took medications just as if they were treated. That safety and security of housing. is health care for our population, and we don't offer it to everyone. And we're we have tremendous barriers to access, accessing housing and safety. And we have a tremendous amount of the population as Jess described so well, there have other situations of trauma or you know, family situations that were not supportive, or families that just aren't there. And that adds to stress and it adds to trauma, and it leaves people in an unfair situation, that is exacerbated by us not having housing for them. And it is solved by us actually having housing for them. So really well said Jess, and if we can bring people indoors into housing, we win. And short of that, shelter is an is a interim step, because we're much better at getting people housed from shelters than we are from outside. So it can be useful, but it's not without its challenges. And it doesn't it's not a panacea, you know, we still need to fix these systemic issues, but you've described the challenges that the population face just beautifully. And, and I will tell you that when we get people into housing, those challenges dissipate, largely, they don't go away completely, but man, it is so much better, you know,

because we watch people get to heal, and they don't need to, you know, be worrying about their safety, if they're in their own home, you know, so and they're not sharing it with 400 people or 200 people, you know, they're actually they're in a manageable setting. And so, that's really what we want to aim for. And I think both Jess and I are aiming for give people insight into housing, and help to make a shelter, you know, recognize that trauma is there, and we need to solve for it and treat for it and, and, and meet people where they're at. And, you know, can't ignore it.

Jess Falero 33:04

(Laughs)

Cullen Ryan 33:09

So I'm interested in two pieces. So one piece is, when you guys both talk about the systemic thing, I wonder if we could talk a little bit about what some of the systemic solutions look like. And I realized that can be really complicated, right? But I'd be curious to hear a little bit about that. And also a little bit maybe from Jess about or both of you, but I'm thinking just might Jess have more here on you know, if Cullen's right, you know that people are healthier and safer once they get into housing, and it's easier to get them into housing once they're in the shelter. But that process itself is traumatic. So I guess there's two topics here, we're not gonna be able to do both really thoroughly, right? But one is like, how do we make that process from getting people from outside through a process to a safer place in a non traumatic way? And then the other is the question of like, the bigger systemic failures, which of course the bigger conversation so I don't know which piece of that you want to take them first, Jess.

Jess Falero 38:03

I think me and Cullen could popcorn this one easily. My first thoughts are I think you're absolutely right about the shelter's Cullen, we do need them. I look forward to the day when they're temporary like they're supposed to be.

Cullen Ryan 38:14

That's right. Me too.

Unknown Speaker 38:15

I look forward to that. The piece about the process of getting into housing, so we need to we need to like mainstream housing. Homelessness shouldn't exist. It's really ridiculous that it does. It really is ridiculous that it does. The fact that we can even say that our country has been alive - yeah, I'm gonna use the word alive because I'm lacking articulation in this moment - alive for this long while our people have been sleeping outdoors and freezing to death is absolutely ridiculous. In my opinion. I'm going to talk from my own personal experience around getting housed the process of getting housed, I realized very quickly that I was not going to be able to get a job while I was actively unhoused. But when I first became unhoused, I'm going to use the

word unhinged - because I really love the word unhinged - I want to make myself a t shirt that says "unhinged" with the "un" crossed out, because I really try not to be unhinged, even though I know that I can be and I was very, very unhinged when I first came to the city. I had just gotten out of - super institutionalized just spent, you know, over a decade in state custody, where the reaction to me crying or being upset or trying to run away was for them to put their hands on me, and to throw me down on the ground or to lock me in a seclusion room for weeks on end. And so I was not okay when I arrived and I was homeless and I was in a state that I had was not familiar with and I was getting lost in all the squares, because Monument Square, Longfellow square and Congress Square all look the same. You know, and so, that was kind of like my starting point. And at that point, I was not able to work. I was so traumatized. I was so alone. I was terrified. I had nowhere to go. All my mother didn't want me around, even though she was the one that got me out of state care. And so there was a lot that I really needed to navigate in order to feel okay and feel functional and be in a place where I was able to get a job. Okay, so I fast forward, right, I'm in a place where I am able to work on finally housed, the process of being housed has been very, very hard. When I first got housed, I was in a domestic violence relationship. And my transition into housing was me being locked in every single room of my house and restrained on my couch and kept me from leaving. And it turned into the police being called me being - he grabbed me. And because I grew up in state custody, I don't do well, when a man grabs me doesn't really matter who it is. And I immediately kicked him. Because I was like, What are you doing because he had asked to chat and I had been very straight up like, I am very triggered right now. And I need to calm down before I can have a conversation with you. He did not like that. He grabbed my arm, I tried to push past him, his buddy grabbed my other arm, I kicked him, He charged me with a police assault on a police officer. After restraining me on my front porch. Bruising my arm, I broke my finger in the back back of the paddy wagon trying to call my grandmother because it was in the back of my pocket. It ended up being a very, very, very fucking traumatizing experience for me! And it didn't need to happen that way. And I look at it and like, from there, like it has been a very rough- I entered college while actively in a DV situation. I entered college and I got you know, A's and B's, I got to I took like three, three classes, I got A's and two of my classes B and one. And I had to take a medical leave on my second semester due to everything that I was trying to navigate all at the same time. And then like so now from there, I started working for the Church of Safe Injection. And that has been a whole transition. But for me, like, I don't have any family support. I don't have any familial support, and I am still building my community support. And so I very much and I'm doing a lot of things on my own. And it's very confusing. It's very overwhelming. I don't know what the fuck I'm doing. I'm just winging it, you know? And so like, these are some of the things that we talk about, like, we need to absolutely bring people into their housing, because Maslow's hierarchy of needs, like people need fucking housing. And this is why I love Housing First, which I actually don't qualify for. But I think that I should. But it wraps around the 24/7 support. And that is such a crucial piece. That's also why I love Greater Portland Peer Services, because this is what they do down at Franklin Towers, because they know that getting people into housing is just a very first step. The second step is that people can't make progress without community support,

because people are inherently social fucking creatures, you know? People are inherently social creatures, and we need each other, we need each other to do the things, you know? And as someone who's like, young, you know, and has been doing this alone for a very long time, I think like I can testify to that. And I can say that, like, that is something that like we really, really lack, and really leads into our housing recidivism rate, like people get housing, but then they're alone, and they've been in a community living situation for years. I have never lived alone, it is so anxiety provoking living in my own house by myself. So anxiety provoking! I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop every single day. I pac around my house, like I'm still under shelter, you know, but it's from being at the shelter because there was nowhere to sit down. There was nowhere to sit down. I was always wandering around, I was always anxious. I was always in survival mode. And so I was just pacing back and forth. And I'll find myself doing that in my house. And so that just touches on a little bit of like, how hard it is even after you transition into housing and how traumatizing it'd be and how alone you can like realize you are sometimes so do when people enter like a non housing-first housing, like independent housing, or Franklin Towers or anything like that. As far as systemic issues go, we - that is a really in-depth conversation. It's an in-depth conversation. I mean, you're talking about - one of the things about systemic problems that I'm really into is the rehabilitation piece of like, how do we get people the support, they need to move forward from all the shit they've experienced? Because then you talk about generational poverty, and you talk about racism, and you talk about the incarceration system and you talk about CPS, [child protective services] and you talk about the youth. There's just there's so much there's so many different aspects to it. That yeah, anyway, so I lose my train of thought.

Cullen Ryan 44:55

Well, I think the you know, one big one is that our society does not value the health of our fellow human being as much as it's set up to just value our own needs. And that shows in the way that we treat one another and allow people to be really in terrible situations and tolerate that as a society that that's somehow reasonable or acceptable. And instead of that being a motivator for us to make sure that everyone has access to housing and health care that they deserve, as a human being just as a basic right. But we have great disparities of wealth, we have every type of -ism that's out there that keeps people down, we have oppression, we have systemic oppression. And all of those have played into the hands of us having a group of people who have underlying poverty, and discrimination, and are oppressed within our society unable to access very basic goods such as housing, or health care, and, or food, you know, some cases. So I think we've got work to do. And I guess the bigger question, I think, I hope that we have some time and the conversation is, what do we do to step in and mitigate that because you also then step right into the hornet's nest of people's autonomy and rights to do as they choose. And I'll put out there just for conversation, because I think this is a good one for Jess I'd have is that I am of the mind that we have gone too far, in making sure that people have their preservation of self rights, that we have grown comfortable with letting people sit and struggle and die in front of us in squalor, and that it is on us to change the way that we set our systems up. So that there is

not only a basic safety net, but in insistence that people deserve to have housing and health care at the very root. So that motivates me to think that it's on us if we see people who are struggling outside. And it's okay for us to do what we can to insist that they come inside. We can't make them. but that we set the bar that everyone deserves to be inside and we open up space for people to come inside. And I do think the city did it right in terms of opening up shelter spaces, as the first step. That doesn't solve everything, but it is a good first step, other communities have not had the luxury of that. Because opening up housing is a much longer game. And we have such a long way to go to have an availability of that. So the question that I would like to discuss is, what do we do? Can we intervene? If we see somebody who is struggling with substance use disorder, and we're watching them, you know, slowly die in front of us? When is it, or is it ever okay for us to step in and say, "Hey, we want to step in and intervene and make sure that you're safe" - at least for a little while, a week or so - "can we pull you inside warm you up? Give you a chance to think clearly and be safe and warm for a second?" and then recheck and see how you're doing. As opposed to ask when you are in your right in the thick of this crisis and chaos and very dangerous or damaging situation? And I don't know the right answer to that. But part of me leans towards that we have to somehow switch from a hands-off approach. And I don't mean that in a triggering way, Jess, but an approach where we just let and watch people deteriorate in front of us and somehow grow accepting of that as a society, to more of an engaged approach that we say "We need to do something about this, we need to ensure that everybody has access to what they need." And I have gotten really worried with encampments, I've always felt in Maine that homelessness - it was within reach for us to solve homelessness. I think we have a finite population. We have an almost adequate shelter network. We have pathways into housing, and we have we know essentially, all the people who experience homelessness by name because our numbers are so small, I think we can end it. But once we have people outside, what happens is that there's some sort of effect where people are arrived here from other places and want to be a part of what looks like some sort of a party. So we watch our numbers really grow and we had people outside and not all people are homeless that are people participating. So I just worry that when if you go to the West Coast now it is almost the norm that you will see people outside in every Western city and that it has gotten to the point where we can't imagine it not being that way. And that's not how it is in Maine. We have - unsheltered homelessness is relatively new to us, large encampments are new to us. And I want to make sure that Maine is not a state where that becomes somehow normalized, acceptable, and that we just go on our way and step over people who are outside, I'd like for us to become more interventionist, where we say, "Nope, we've got to do something. This means that we don't have enough shelters, this means we don't have housing. This means that we're not stepping in ..." and challenging ourselves to insist that people deserve to be inside. So those are the greater discussions that I think we need to have as a society. How do we get that right? Because people have a right to choose for themselves, but are they choosing if they are unable to think very clearly, because of trauma? Right now, and they're in traumatic situations? And what do we do? Do we become more paternalistic? And say, "You're not thinking well for yourself? So I want to think for you and I want to get you inside?" I don't know.

It's tough. But we've got to challenge ourselves or else, we're going to have this decision be made for us, where we allow a society that comes to be accustomed and accepting of unsheltered homelessness as the new norm.

Jess Falero 51:26

I like that question, Cullen. I as a harm reductionist through and through, I really appreciate the question, because I think it's a valid one. And also, I don't think that it's up to us to become paternalistic, and to tell people what it is they need to do. Because the idea of recovery, like just talking specifically for people who use drugs, the idea of recovery, everybody knows about it, like when we bring it up to people, it's not something that they haven't heard of before, it's not something they don't know is an option. It's not something they don't like, they don't want. You know, most people who are using drugs do want to be sober. Drugs don't actually help the situation. The problem is that, that they're using it to deal and cope with a situation at hand, you know, and so the issue is not necessarily like, do they want to get sober, And do we need to make that decision for them? It's more of allowing people and showing them that like they're loved, they are safe, and it's okay to exist, wherever they are. And also know that people are there when they're ready. Because when you talk about recovery, you talk about people who use drugs. As someone - I have never used hard drugs in my life. And I don't know if that's true for you call in or you live, but I don't know what it's like to get sober from heroin. I don't know what it's like to get sober from something like that. I know, from working people who use drugs, and I know from loving people who use drugs and having many friends detox at my house, you know, I've been a main support for a lot of my friends who have detoxed at my house. Did they get sober right after? Not necessarily. Did it matter to me at the time? No, because it's really a matter of - I can't say what someone else needs. Because I don't know, like, what they've been through, where they're at why they're doing what they're doing. And I also can't say what it is that like, will turn them in the other direction. But I do know from my own life, that people that have sat with me, regardless of where I was at, and kept reminding me about my inherent worth, regardless of where I was, at that moment, changed my life forever. And if it wasn't for those people, I wouldn't have recovered to the point where I am now. Not that I'm recovering. I'm a fucking mess. But, you know, like, I wouldn't be here. And so I think that question is really, really good. I just think that there's a way to approach it that the city is just missing, which is, you know, like, is what it is, but it's, it's a very, almost like - harsh - move to just be like, "I'm going to destroy this home you built, and your only option is to access the shelter." You know, even if the shelter is a good thing, even if like we are increasing our bed capacity, even if people are accessing it, even if like people do get sober from it. Like that's all fantastic. But I do think that we need to be careful about trying to step into other people's lives and telling them what it is that they need, because we can't possibly know we can't possibly know within a moment...

Cullen Ryan 54:32

me ask you this criticism aside of whatever the policy is, part of what you said suggested that you have realized that people just deserve love, and that they deserve kind of like a big hug,



you know, when they're in their hardest time. And so, you know, that is something that you were deciding sort of for somebody on the outside. We can't fix people we can't make them do things. But I just I'm thinking, as you say that that, how do we say to people who are outside in a terrible situation or are about to face a winter, where we know it's going to get dramatically cold or dramatically snowy are really dramatically dangerous, that they just deserve love and warmth? And, and, and our positive attention to be inside? You know, how do you do that in an empowering fashion? Most successfully in it? And again, I don't have the answer. But I want to think with you about that. Because I think that what you said, I know that recovery happens in community, because recovery happens because people feel finally a chance to feel good about themselves. Instead of what the you know what substances do to people, they make them feel bad themselves, just like advertising does, just like all sorts of other elements of society. But when people get into true recovery, they figure out how to really care that they've figured out how to have a positive sense of self worth. And that takes, you know, days, months ,years to establish, but that starts with somebody giving them a message that they are worthwhile.

Jess Falero 56:21

And person is usually somebody who they trust, because I can go out and we can say that to people, but they're not gonna believe me, if they don't know who the fuck I am, you know, and so that starts with just a trusted relationship with the person that you care about, because this person knows that you care about them. You know, like, I'm not going to just go out and tell if I'm going to come across the first random homeless person I say, and be like, You deserve better than this, because they do, but they're gonna be like "Who are you?" Like, "I don't know who you are like - leave me alone!" But like it, it all starts with a basis of trust and a relationship.

Cullen Ryan 56:54

Yes. And yet, you know, you do feel like you - it's the person is - they're deserving of you saying to them, "You deserve better than this". You're essentially implying that through a trusting relationship, and you are communicating that through action, right?

Jess Falero 57:13

Yeah.

Cullen Ryan 57:13

So somewhere in there lies the answer. And I don't know how we parse that in terms of policy. But I think that is the direction where I think Jess and I have common ground, how to get there is, I think, maybe a longer conversation, but I think that we're getting somewhere to towards the nut of it.

Liz Trice 57:33

Um, I imagined the outreach workers are trying to build relationships with people. I mean, I imagine that's part of the strategy, right?

Jess Falero 57:41

That's been really hard for folks with the encampment sweeps because people have been so scattered after the encampment sweeps. That's the other part of it, right, because it's like, encampment sweeps are inherently violent. And so like, when you displace people, whether it's a tent structure, or a roof structure, it communicates to them that you are not trustworthy, and that they don't matter, regardless of you have an inside place for them to go. And so like, I guess, the point that I want to target here is more of the way we go about things, the way we go about things is so important, because the way we go about them communicates our intent to people that are incredibly vulnerable and incredibly observant. They're watching us, they're watching to see if we actually give a fuck about them or not. They're trying to see it, you know. And so like, if we go to somebody, let's say for an example that I am, the city and Liz and Cullen, you both are at the encampment. And if I come down there, and let's say you're both using drugs, and I'm like, "Listen, you need to leave, and you need to access our shelter." And you're like, "Hey, like I have these barriers that are in place that like I don't feel comfortable going to your shelter. I don't feel comfortable having 200 roommates. You know, I'm actually really scared to access that." But now I'm like, "Okay, but you still need to go anyway." You guys are gonna stay outside. And then if I come back a week later with a bulldozer and I bulldoze that, that you're tent you're not going to feel safe with me as the person who just told you to access your shelter, you know? And so I don't know what, you know, the answer is to that either. I don't. But at the same time, the people that are on the streets are incredibly vulnerable, and people that are making the decisions around how we handle it are not. And so there is inherent power difference between that, you know, and I don't think that people are giving that as much weight as it needs to be given. Because with that, it's very, very important, the way that we choose to handle things, because it does tell people whether they're worthy or not, and it's not really like we should not be perpetuating the shame that people are already feeling for where they're at. It's not helpful. Shame kills.

Cullen Ryan 1:00:02

So I totally I think you said that really well. And I totally agree with you and I can see exactly your point. And coming at it from the other angle, if we choose to just essentially do nothing and suggest to people who have, you know, our experience, have experienced trauma, have self esteem issues, don't feel good about themselves, that we think it is perfectly acceptable for you to live outside in, in a winter in Maine in this setting, that also communicates to them that they're really not worth the kind of basic human rights that other people are entitled to, which is

Jess Falero 1:00:45

I don't feel like we're saying that because we don't want people outside. This is part - - of the conversation around encampment sweeps that I don't fully understand. Because I don't feel like either one of us is saying that I don't feel like we're going to people and we're saying "It's okay for you to be outside.. People are saying "It's okay for you to be where you're at. We would love

if you went inside, it's really cold out here. You may freeze to death." Like those are loving conversations we can actually have with people. But it's it's really a it's a hard line. It's a really hard line to hold. Because I don't think anybody agrees people should be living in encampments. Nobody wants that not the people that are pro sweeps, not the people that are against sweeps. Like it's not, that's not a problem. You know, it's more of this line of like, yes, it was effective and getting so many people indoors, but only time will tell whether they're able to actually stay there or not due to these systemic things that we just talked about, you know? And so there's that acknowledgement if they don't make it - tents are illegal in the City of Portland, Maine now! So the people that are still out there are waiting to get a better trying to find transport to the shelter, which there are people that are trying to do that I see it every single day, I've seen it since Tuesday, you know, they're still trying to access that shelter. But it does not mean that it's set up for them to be able to stay there and like get what they need and stay there long term until they do get housing, you know, and so that's something we really do need to address in our shelters. Because if we want people to get indoors, and we don't want people outside, which all of us can agree on, we need to assess that. And we can assess the dog barrier and the you know, the couple barrier and all these other barriers. But if it really gets down to the nitty gritty, what we're worried about are the folks that have that severe trauma, and are going to go right back outside anyway to be to be swept by the police officers again. You know, because the issue is that the shelters just not set up for everyone to be in it. That's the real issue. You know, if the shelter was set up, and it was safe, and it was a place for everybody that they could access and get what they needed, like I would 100% be like "Tough love, let's get you in the shelter. It is a safe place for you to go." But I can't say that to people and social workers can't say that to people. So that's like, that's the thing. You know what I mean? Like, that's what it is.

Cullen Ryan 1:00:50

Oh good So you can't force people to come in and do that the wrong way, because that's going to miss it. And you can't not do anything, because that also isn't the right way. We clearly want to have everybody inside. So you know, it makes me think that I am certainly not pro-sweep. I think I'm pro-inside Pro, Pro-challenging people to come inside as best we can.

Jess Falero 1:03:36

And didn't mean to imply that by the way.

Cullen Ryan 1:03:38

no, no, no, no, I You weren't talking to me. I was just I was identifying I was owning my own stuff as to where I am. You are fine. But I think that the common ground is always that we want people inside and how do we make that happen most effectively. And it is dicey because it also is a whole group of individuals with their own set of experiences and traumas and challenges and hesitations and everything else. And so it is an engagement challenge that we face, both on an individual outreach basis. And as a, as a city in a society. How do we do this? And it's new to

us as well. We've never had large scale encampments in the country before 10 or 15 years ago, and that was not happening, didn't happen, you know? So now it's after on the West Coast and here it is spreading into this country and we still the last time we had an adequate supply of affordable housing in this country was in 1977. We've been going sort of, slowly trying to catch up but our trajectory is much lower than the the absence of housing that we have. So for example-

Jess Falero 1:04:47

I heard we have to invest 150 million annually in order to restock or housing stock!

Unknown Speaker 1:04:53

It's in the billions for sure. But just in Maine we're short somewhere between 20,000 and 26,000 units of housing. And right now we're developing housing at the fastest pace that Maine's ever done it, at 500 units a year. That seems blisteringly fast, but you know, doing the math, that it will take 40 years to get to 20,000 units at that pace. And so we need to have federal investment in housing that really rights the ship, or we're going to see not just all communities where rent is a little bit out of reach for people are a lot out of reach. And we're going to see every single community be out of reach for a significant portion of the population. And that's going to drive our homelessness to where there is no alternative. But having a mixture of people who you know, are, you know, living outside and a mixture of people living inside. So we got to fix this systemically with housing ultimately.

Liz Trice 1:05:55

Awesome. I, so I guess I'd like to sort of start to, you know, bring us in a little bit. And so I'm sort of curious about, you know, over the next month or two, like what are you seeing as positive actions, either that you see happening or are likely to happen, or that people who are reading this could take, like how people how can people get involved in the conversation? I know, April Fournier as the chair of the HHS [Health and Human Services City Council] committee is supposed to take a leadership role. I haven't talked to anybody at Preble Street, you know, so I'm just sort of curious, like, what are the what are the mechanisms in place that where these conversations are happening? Or is there anything that you want to propose publicly that should happen? Like, what sort of our positive actions here that are happening? Or could happen?

Cullen Ryan 1:06:49

Do you want to go or have me go first?

Jess Falero 1:06:51

Yes, you go first.

Cullen Ryan 1:06:53

Okay. I would propose that we take a plan of action that focuses on insisting that people be inside. And by insisting that we create space, and welcoming environment and encouragement for people to have access to that environment. So one of the postulates is to ensure that a shelter has sufficient emergency capacity for the ebbs and flows of homelessness that it will face. I think that's critical. Because if our city has less shelter capacity than it needs, we are inevitably going to see more people land outside. And if the city has adequate capacity and ability to be flexible to meet emergency needs, I think that's our best solution to it having the ability to insist that people come inside. So we need structures for people to be in there indoors, warm food, warm showers, privacy, those kinds of things need to happen for safety reasons. So having people insist that their city keep up the emergency of the extra 50 beds as needed, I think that's the best way to actually empty out the shelter that we, if we can have that shelter, operate efficiently, and help people as quickly as possible. Again, at housing, we'll continue to create room, if the capacity is able to ebb and flow with the needs that it meets to, I think we need to insist and welcome in housing in the city. So that we have places for people to go. And three, we need to make sure that we are kindly welcoming everybody into the fold that we are meeting people with support services, we're opening up healthcare, we are opening up outreach services, and we really are short on all those levels. You know, our emergency rooms are overcrowded, our outreach staff is thin and inadequate. We are short of the resources we need to put people in housing, we need to focus on righting that ship and we can do that locally with some resources. So those are the three things I would start with and having the City of Portland insist that everybody deserves to live inside, should be sort of our mantra, and you know, and then we can fine tune how that works for each person facing their own crises. As Jess and I were just talking about, I think there's a way to do that well on a per-person basis, but we have to start with the decision that we're going to have space for people inside and help people to get to it as best we can.

Liz Trice 1:09:50

Okay, um, Jess you want to respond to propose, propose what you think are the best like next next actions conversely..

Jess Falero 1:10:01

sure!

Liz Trice 1:10:02

- action-wise. Yeah.

Jess Falero 1:10:06

Sorry, this feels like a tough question. I absolutely agree..

Liz Trice 1:10:10

I was gonna ask was like, I was kind of wondering, if you're sort of take the policy of "Everyone deserves to be inside, and we're gonna push you really hard to be inside, but we're not going to commit an act of violence in order to get you inside." Like, what is left in that middle place? I guess that's what I like, how much of it is just like, more money for outreach workers? Or how much of it is like a sort of picturing like, to follow the paternal or parental thing? Like, maybe you don't, you know, you don't physically force your 13 year old into the car, right? But you start constraining them, you know, like the various tools parents have coercion, that isn't actually violence, right? You know, so I'm sort of wondering, like, if you said, "No violence, but highly pushing and pulling," you know, like, what, you know, are there different practices that could evolve?

Jess Falero 1:11:08

That's a good question. I don't know how it works across state to state because I know that other other states definitely do like resolutions. I think that there is a way...

Liz Trice 1:11:21

Maybe there's three people who are better in their tents for now. We're going to help support your tent, to the HSC property, and you can come in and you eat and use the shower, but you can sleep in your tent at night. And we're going to make sure that your tent is safe at night, like like something like, you know, I'm just trying to think is there any, like, interim thing that because it because we seem stuck in this all or nothing thing, you know?

Cullen Ryan 1:11:47

I don't think we're gonna get everybody inside. I don't think that's necessary. I think that can be a goal. But a goal is something that you aim for, but you don't necessarily always achieve. But if it remains our goal, then we will strive towards it as a city. And we will, if we do our best, we will get almost all people inside as a result of that. I don't think that moving people's tents to the outside of shelter is a good idea, because we watched Bangor try this at the Hope House, and it resulted in a very large encampment right next to the shelter that has not ever been able to be resolved. Because it sort of, it just hasn't worked. But I do think there's a difference between an individual who has figured out how to survive the winter outside. And we always have 10, 12 or so people who have figured this out, you know, in in a city, you know. And then there's a cluster of people that attracts people who want to prey on them. And I think that we need to distinguish those two things that we try really hard to have everybody inside, we recognize that perfect is not the enemy of the good. And that for the couple of people outside, we then do our best to build relationships and figure out a way to get them directly into housing, because we can do that, it's just much slower, or into the shelter if we can remove those barriers to make that happen. So I tend to lean in that direction.

Jess Falero 1:13:25

I think you answered that perfectly.

Liz Trice 1:13:28

Um, but just I mean, I want to hear about like, you've been talking about hosting community conversations, I had circled some ideas about, like hackathons. And there's like, you know, 850 people sent written comment about encampments at the meeting in November. So like, people care about this, like, I mean, I can't, I can't help but think that we sort of have a failure of human resources and energy, like there's people who are so revved up about this. And there's not a lot that they can do. You know, I mean, if I said, I've got 800 People who are each willing to put in four hours of time, every two weeks into this issue, like, that's a ton of energy, like what do we do? Like, what can we do with that energy? I mean, you can always tell people to send money, but like and send political support, but like, I always wonder how do we harness people's passion, and energy, and skills? You know, especially for these systemic problems? It seems like that's the biggest systemic problem, right? is that we don't have ways to to organize ourselves towards the outcome that everybody agrees would be a better outcome.

Jess Falero 1:14:39

Well, I mean, historically, we have organized to fight for a better outcome that has happened over and over and over again in our history all the way from MLK on. And so I think that like, there is a lot of passion, I would, I would red flag that just be because somebody has an urgency or a passion for the issue doesn't mean that it's inherently altruistic. And so I would red flag that there are people in the world that wish homeless people will just die. I mean, we see that everywhere, right? I stay far away from the comment thread on news articles, even if I'm in them, only because there are a decent amount of people that wish homeless people will just die, they don't care. And they'll say it right there, you can see it, people are very upfront about their hatred. And so kind of circling back to the whole, like, what do we do about it first, I mean, people really, really, really need to unpack their stigma and their individualism and the way that our society teaches us to be because we are very capitalistic, we are very self serving, we are very selfish, we are very like, me and my family, you know, like we're very, very, very, very, very self centered. Where we don't have systems of community care, we don't invest in each other, we don't have, you know, like, our system does not operate in a way where it puts the people at the bottom first. It doesn't operate in a way where like, there is passion and determination to care for the people at the lower grounds first. I mean, we focus on how our system is currently running, and we work to uphold it. But what we need to do is we all need to sit down and we need to have a conversation about what is the answer? And I think we can all agree that housing is an answer, housing supports are an answer addressing these larger systemic qualities or an answer. But we're not going to get there unless we do harness all that good energy Liz, and we decide what are we working towards? And how do we get there? I mean, we're all working in our own silos. And I can't help but think that the nonprofit industrial complex, as much as it, you know, serves right now within our system, I can't help but think how much it perpetuates the silos because it forces all the nonprofits to fight for the same grants, and to, you know, get into arguments about what are we doing, and who is getting the most money and who

has the right ideas, and who has the most client base and who has the best relationship with the city and, you know, like, and all that little tiny things that don't even matter! Like, it's not about, you know, community housing a main and it's not about Preble Street. And it's not about Amistad, it's not about the Church of Safe Injection. And it's not about just about Liz, and it's not about Cullen. And it's not about Donna, and it's not about Heather, it's not about any of these people, like all of us are an agent for change. That's it, it's not about us, and it's not about our orgs or whether we get that grant next year, and the system does not leave a lot of room for us not to be focused on those things. Because if you're running a nonprofit, you have to consider how forward facing you are you have to consider your next grant, you have to consider your next funding, you have to consider, you know, like, what is happening here. And it doesn't leave a lot of room to focus on the systemic harm that's happening every single day that really needs to be addressed. Because part of the problem is we can't address it because we're still working in the same system. Okay, so we're still working on it. It's the hard question when I put it to you. But I want you to keep matra-ing this, "If I had a magic wand..." you know, or if I had even better than a magic wand "If I had \$10 million..." because then you're forced to actually spend it on practical things like you can't just like theoretically, a magic wand, you could just remove all mental illness, right? But if you had \$10 million, you'd actually have to plan and budget. You know what to spend, I's open transitional housing. If I had \$10 million. I had opened a bunch of transitional housing.

Liz Trice 1:18:39

Tell me more about that. What would it look like?

Jess Falero 1:18:41

It will get people directly off the streets and allow them to have the one on one support. They need to like get where they need to go wherever they're at. So

Liz Trice 1:18:48

What would it look like? How many people would be in a house? How many kitchens? Would there be how much staff would people be have roommates? Would they have individual rooms? Just tell me - just paint me the picture.

Jess Falero 1:18:58

Paint you a picture, don't come up with a treatment plan. All right!

Liz Trice 1:19:01

Just tell me exactly what it would look like, how long the average person would be there. But like, tell me talk to me about the physical plan. What would it look like for starters?

Jess Falero 1:19:12



Yeah, there'd be, I mean, I wouldn't have more than five people in the house. I definitely wouldn't have more than five people in the house, I would have at least three to four staff on at all times. Because you never know what's going to happen. And there wouldn't be a timeline about how long people can stay because everybody is different. It would be an individual treatment plan for each individual. Because some people would not be able to leave some people - there is no - for people that are severely mentally ill and need one on ones and like need the actual support, like there's no place for them to go. Especially if you're young. You know, there's no place for you, so there wouldn't be a timeline. I mean, my biggest thing has always been trying to give people the skills they need to like, get where they want to go like whether That's emotional regulation skills or interpersonal relationship skills or conflict management skills or just daily living skills. I mean, all of those things, but even as I say that, like, I have never felt like I can decide what it is that another person is ready to learn. Yeah, either, you know, and so like, I know that I've been in a place where somebody has tried to give me you know, tough love or like, feedback. And I wasn't in a place where I was able to learn that yet because what the person didn't see was the like, the thing the step before that, that I needed to reach before I could reach what they thought I needed to reach. And then even like my thought, even now like now, I said, "Okay, transitional housing", but I don't even like I don't even know, I don't even know the transitioning housing is what I would want to do because I haven't started a transitional housing and no transitional housing has ever helped me. It's always a hard question, because I'm just a formerly unhoused person that is well too aware of systemic trauma and systemic inequities.

Liz Trice 1:21:11

Okay, well, I'm gonna keep asking you that question. Every time I talk to you Jess

Jess Falero 1:21:43

Cullen, what do you think?

Cullen Ryan 1:21:49

Oh, I was trying to think about what, what I would do with \$10 million. You know, I'm involved in housing, but I don't know that that would go a long way.

Jess Falero 1:21:57

Right, it's a very small amount.

Cullen Ryan 1:21:58

Yeah, It's a very small amount. So what I would probably do is take the \$10 million, put it into a fund that would last for 10 years, hire 10 people, for 10 years in a row, have their salaries for 10 years in a row, all their benefits, everything else. And their job is "housing stability worker". They find people who need housing, they navigate systems, they develop those relationships that are needed that tell people that they're worthwhile, and that they matter. They navigate all the

systems that stand in the way of people accessing and getting into housing, they help people access rental subsidies, they navigate relationships with landlords and leverage those so that they can say yes, I'm standing by this person just like you're renting to me. And then they not only get people into housing, but they follow up and support those people in housing, and 10 people in case loads of 20 would serve 200 people a year. And I think their caseloads could grow, because once people are in housing, they may need a diminishing amount of support compared to what they need if they are unsheltered, which takes a lot of relationship work. So it could be you know, checking in, you know, several times a week for many people or helping people to navigate, get other support once they're in housing to stay there successfully. But you really need those people to be able to do it for long enough, that is a significant intervention. And we lack people who do that right now. And the only way that you can hire people to do that right now is to have them somehow bill MaineCare, and you spend about half your time billing, and you have to make what you do fit into the box of health care. And a lot of what people need is help finding housing, help getting a bed, help dealing with their friends, who are you know, in the trenches with them in homelessness from coming over and sabotaging their housing placements, you know, how to set limits with their peers, you know? Those kinds of things don't fit neatly into billing for health care. And yet, that's what matters for getting people to housing. And we know that once people are in housing, people get a lot more, or have a pathway to wellness. So that's the first thing that pops into my mind, I don't even deliver, so, I don't know how to do it. But if you spread that around and said, Look, agency A, here hire three people here, agency over here, hire two more, have them all work together, but really go out there, I think they can cover a lot of ground and help dig a lot of people out of situations. And have the ability to really hit the accelerator because they can put 40 hours into this instead of 20 and not be constricted by having to, you know, fit into all these other bureaucratic boxes..

Jess Falero 1:24:37

... or are overwhelmed by their caseload ...

Cullen Ryan 1:24:38

find the people who are good at that and do a really good job of it.

Liz Trice 1:24:40

I just have a belief in like visioning big positive things, and that we're more likely - because sometimes, once we say "That's it!" and even if it might have taken us to have the challenge of like, what would you do with \$200 million, or a billion dollars to get the idea. But once we have the idea, there's often things we can do on the ground for a lot less money. You know what I mean? Like, if you knew your goal was free college education..

Jess Falero 1:25:52

Even like, privacy pods would be better, they would even be better. I mean, they're not ideal. I mean, I hate give it, it's like the whole tiny home concept. I do hate the like, "Let's give them a tiny home!" you know, like, when we could give them real one, but like -

Cullen Ryan 1:26:22

I hate that, too, Jess. Exactly.

Jess Falero 1:26:23

- just the privacy. The privacy is so important. You know? Even in the interim, like, if we're talking about the interim, like, the privacy piece. Like that is life saving, that is crisis intervention, that is harm production, when somebody can just close their fucking door. (laughs) Like, that is like -

Cullen Ryan 1:26:41

That's why I think if people can get into, you know, their own apartment, and lock the door and have their own bathroom or whatever. Also, I think a one bedroom apartment is a really neat thing for a human being.

Jess Falero 1:26:52

It is.

Liz Trice 1:26:52

So um, something we haven't talked about is, you know, the same on the 18th. The city council also voted to fully implement LD 2003

Cullen Ryan 1:27:00

That's is fantastic. That's huge!

Liz Trice 1:27:03

Jess, I don't know if you're following that. But there was a state law passed a year and a half ago that basically abolished - sort of - single family zoning, which basically says up until now, it's been like, you know, 75% of Portland?

Cullen Ryan 1:27:16

Oh, no, it's more like 95%.

Liz Trice 1:27:18

Yeah, are single family homes, like, it's technically been illegal to build like, a four unit there. Okay. And now because of state law and City of Portland implementing it fully, which really only happened because we have a super progressive council right now. And they like, basically brought amendments that changed it dramatically against like the planning board's

recommendations and staff recommendations. It's now - you can build up to potentially 12 units on any little house lot in the City of Portland, because the state requires four, and then the Portland's affordable density bonus says that if 100% of them are affordable to a certain income level, then you can get 2.5 as many units that gets you up to 10. And then you have two accessory dwelling units. So like, theoretically, you could do something where you take a house lot and you build like 12 little pods on it like that is - or it's some combination of multiunit and pods. And that's just something that was like literally impossible and illegal three weeks ago. The dimensional side, front, and back Setbacks requirements don't allow it practically in most instances, but there's interesting opportunities now that didn't exist before. And I'm not sure how different it is from taking a three bedroom house and just creating like, the equivalent of like a sober house out of it. But it does, it does open, like I don't know, what makes it economical necessarily? But like I was playing around with ideas, like instead of - instead of beating on short term rentals, and calling it like a problem saying, oh, short term rental licenses don't cost anything for the city to give to someone. So like what if you said, you can have - if you build new housing, which is really expensive, you can have six short term rental licenses for five years, because they're worth like \$20,000 each per year, but it doesn't cost taxpayers a dime. But then after that, it has to go into some more like, general, you can't short term rental after that, whether or not it has affordability requirements or not, you know what I mean? But it means that an organization like Cullen's could potentially like use short term rental money to build something, run it for five years that way and then have it mostly paid for and then be able to use it for whatever population you want. So I think there's like some creative opportunities that are available now that weren't before. But I think it's going to take people a while to like, think about it and put it together and figure out the economics because it's just not how we've done things.

Cullen: Yeah, it's huge. If you look at the land area of Portland, it was a small little section that allowed multifamily, and all the rest of the land mass was all single family. So this opens up an awful lot of opportunity where the housing doesn't need to look a lot different, you know, a four unit building looks a lot like one of the larger single family homes we have on thoroughfares like Brighton Ave or Forest Ave. But you could have a building that looks just like that but has four units in it. Instead of one family you have four households.

Liz: Any other thoughts from either of you of positive thoughts or processes you see happening.

Cullen: I think this has been a really good conversation, Liz. And Jess, I want to thank you. It's a treat to get to listen to you, and to think with you. It's a joy. It's a gift.

Jess: I feel the same, this has been nice.

Liz. OK. Well, thank you so much! I really appreciate you both taking time, and it's a joy to be with both of you at the same time. And I love hearing you talk, Jess.