# Establishing Dignity: From Tense Beginnings to Legalization

## An Urban Planning Approach to Homelessness in Portland, Oregon

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## 1.1 Introduction

The most commonly citied definition of sustainable development is from the 1987 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). UNCED's Bruntland Commission defined sustainable development as: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The key components of this definition are: inter-generational equity, social justice (intra-generational equity), and trans-frontier responsibility (global stewardship) (Haughton and Hunter 1994, 16). The social justice component, however, is often underemphasized by urban planners, relative to environmental considerations (though the two are almost inextricably linked). It is underemphasized not because policy makers and planners hold intra-generational equity considerations in low esteem, but rather because to adequately address them, the underlying structures of power and accumulation must be examined and fundamentally rebuilt. The prioritization of economic growth at the expense of the environment and considerations of social justice has generated considerable and problematic asymmetries, both between and within countries. On absolute levels, GDP in the west has risen since the turn of the century; standards of living have risen for a majority of people, leading to an explosion of the middle class. However, a great number people were left behind during this economic boom; these people live a precarious existence at the margins of our society. Despite the fact that their numbers are small relative to the number of those who have prospered—indeed, precisely *because* their numbers are relatively small—it is imperative that we not abandon them.

John Friedmann, advocating the pursuit of an alternative development based on inclusive democracy, intra-generational equity, environmental sustainability and appropriate economic growth argues that:

> If social and economic development means anything at all, it must mean a clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of ordinary people. There is no intrinsic reason, moral or otherwise, why large numbers of people should be systematically excluded from development in this sense, or, even worse, should become the unwitting victims of other people's progress (1992, 9).

It is my opinion that this optimistic endeavor, the endeavor towards democratic, inclusive, and livable cities should be constantly and consistently pursued. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of each government to pursue strategies that secure their citizens' ability to meet these needs. However, the implementation of top-down policies, even those with admirable goals, are likely to be ineffective without concomitant changes in the underlying attitudes that make up a society's system of power and accumulation. Revolutionary change is outside the realm of this research, as it is not within the scope of urban planning. Evolutionary progress, without direction, through isolated grassroots efforts and micro-projects, however, is inadequate. In this paper I am advocating a marriage between revolutionary and evolutionary change; an intersection between top-down directives and grassroots initiatives. The dynamic between officials' and citizens' perceptions of morality, and the policies resulting from this are formulated and negotiated locally.

> It is in the village, the neighborhood, the town, the factory, the office, the school, the union's local, the party's branch, the parish, the sports club, the association—whatever its purpose—that personal and societal development first and best interact (Friedmann 1992, 4).

This is particularly true for disempowered sectors of society whose sphere of influence is severely limited through lack of resources, both social and financial. In this paper, I argue that it is the responsibility of urban planners to endeavor to effect real change on a path towards an alternative development that emphasizes both social and environmental justice.

Using approaches to housing and homelessness in Portland, Oregon I will attempt to show how dominant understandings of homelessness affect planners' ability to effect real change

on a path towards sustainable development. Utilizing the case study of Dignity Village, a legalized tent city within Portland's city limits, I will explain where the City of Portland and Portland's homeless community have made progress, and where improvements can be made. Dignity's transitional model used in conjunction with increases in the provision of affordable housing may yield positive change. Urban planning, by itself, however, can only make incremental progress towards this goal. The most effective and valuable solutions would combine city programs with radically reformed national policy.

In the first section, I will explain my reasons for advocating an urban planning approach to addressing homelessness in American municipalities. In the second section I explore the causes of homelessness, both individual and structural: how the problem is defined subsequently defines the solution. In the third section, I explore the failure of past approaches in order that these pitfalls may be avoided in the future. In the fourth section I broadly examine the theories of homeless mobilizations and the mechanisms and justifications municipalities frequently use to contain them. Lastly, I will turn my attention to Dignity Village; its history, its ideals, and potential. I will describe its proposal and also the Village's interactions with the City in some detail. Positive and negative aspects, as well as implications for urban planning will be considered. I will end the paper with my prescriptions for urban planning approaches to homelessness and an entreaty towards the embracing of grassroots solutions by the state, and an embracing of the state by grassroots movements.

**1.2 The Role for Urban Planning**

It is common for urban planners to write off homelessness as a social problem; one to be dealt with by social service agencies or institutions. However, if the problem is ever to be solved, planners must realize that their visions of a 'good city' can either legitimize or further

marginalize vulnerable populations. The city planner designs, builds, and zones with an understanding of what is right and what is wrong; what belongs and what does not; and who is and who is not to be excluded. Urban planning is a powerful tool; creating the spaces and landscapes within which people live, love, work, play, and die. It is however more critical than only this for "the practices of the city planner, the architect and developer, the banker and real estate agent, the police officer, the politician, and the social worker, create not only the city they live in, but themselves as well" (Wright 1997, 59). Through both societal and individual understandings and impositions of morality, the building and construction of a city reinforces existing power structures and social prejudices. Downtown redevelopment plans often create pleasure spaces designed for office workers, tourists, and others with money to spend. Henri LeFebvre believed that the imposition of abstract concepts of what constitutes dominant and subordinate sectors of society reinforce themselves in spatial representations (LeFebvre 1984). Put another way, the manner in which a planner designs a city not only reflects but reinforces that society's social and economic hierarchy.

The role of urban redevelopment and planning in reinforcing structural inequalities is often overlooked. Those most vulnerable, those at the bottom of the hierarchy, those without homes, are stigmatized, excluded from the city, and 'warehoused' in shelters, jails, or institutions. Downtown beautification policies and zoning ordinances, enforced by police action, endeavor to keep the sight of the very poor out of view. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, more than 60 cities are introducing measures to make it illegal to beg or sleep on the streets, to sit in a bus shelter for more than an hour, or to walk across a parking lot if the person doesn't have a car parked there (2002). These policies have enormous economic, social, and individual costs, yet do nothing to resolve the root problems of homelessness.

Exclusionary zoning and controlled growth policies often have the effect of reducing the availability of affordable housing. Transport accessibility planning also has dire effects for disadvantaged sectors of society. Most cities in the United States are heavily car reliant and transport systems have been designed for the automobile. However, those in poverty often do not own cars, but rely exclusively on public transportation. If there is a grave enough concern for safety of property and people, transport services may bypass poor neighborhoods altogether. Environmental zoning can also reinforce the social and economic hierarchy; reserving the most desirable land for those able to pay, leaving refuse space for those lacking resources.

I do not presume that urban planners can restructure society; nor do I presume that planners alone are responsible for the continuation of poverty—far from it. Rather, what I argue is that planners have a responsibility to recognize their contribution to the perpetuation of social and economic hierarchies and to act on this knowledge in a manner that reinforces the principles of sustainable development while working to ensure the basic needs of their citizens. The scope of this paper, however, is limited to the study of one particular aspect of the relationship between the creation of space and social justice: the problem of homelessness. Portland, Oregon will be my case study in the rest of this work, though I will draw on other regions (and statistics from the United States) to highlight relevant aspects of this challenge.

## 2.1 The Homeless Situation: Defining the Problem

One of the main difficulties in resolving the problem of homelessness revolves around rhetoric, both academic and anecdotal. A homeless individual is defined by the US federal government as:

> 1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and 2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is – A) supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (does not include prisoners); C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (Legal Information Institute: Title 42; Chapter 119; Subchapter I; Sec. 11302)

This definition includes those people relying on the kindness of friends and family for shelter, those remaining in unacceptable living conditions (i.e. situations of domestic violence), and those people who have money for a room in a hotel some nights of the week, weeks of the month, or months of the year, but not others. However, due to methodological difficulties reaching and identifying most of these individuals, a large number of researchers utilize the literal rather than a general definition of homelessness which is defined:

> On a day to day basis, and involves either sleeping in a facility serving homeless people, in accommodations paid for by a voucher from a program serving homeless people, or in places not meant for human habitation (Burt 2001, 6).

Peter Rossi, in his controversial report on Chicago's homeless problem estimated the number of homeless individuals in Chicago at 2,700; This was far below the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates of 17,000 to 36,000 and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless estimates of 25,000. "Much of this difference can be traced to the differing definitions of what constitutes homelessness; Rossi chose the more restrictive definition, 'literal homelessness'" (Wright 1997, 35). Though the use of this

definition is widely recognized as inadequate, it is often tolerated as a matter of practical or analytical objectivity. However, any solutions that evolve from use of this definition do not serve to address the broader social and economic issues, but only help "to decide who should receive services at any particular time" (Burt 2001, 7).

Even the word 'homeless' itself can be problematic, insofar as it singles out a unique group of people rather than identifying an onerous condition in which people, indistinguishable from others who are very poor, find themselves at a given point in time. The classification and segmentation of 'homeless people' draws attention away from the issues underpinning the precarious existences of the very poor in American society. Talmadge Wright in Out of Place argues that:

> Homelessness emerged…as a rhetorical device and a real, objective situation…the adoption of the label homeless had both negative and positive effects. Positive, because it allowed for a way to talk about a special segment of the very poor in a manner that would capture public sympathy, and negative, because [the term] displaced concerns over the unequal distribution of power, poverty, and privilege. (1997, 15)

The classification of homeless as a unique and identifiable sector of society means the range of solutions can only be ex-post, focusing on those who have already lost their homes. In this paper, I will utilize the term 'homeless' to identify a fluid subsection of the very poor, who at given points in time are unable to secure or maintain adequate housing; and 'homelessness' to describe that condition.

To adequately contend with America's homeless problem, we must first tackle the question of causality: how we define the problem will define the solution. The ultimate cause of homelessness is a mismatch between household income and availability in an area's stock of affordable housing. This mismatch comes about as a combination of both individual and structural factors; in addition, the presence (absence) of a social safety net can diminish

(intensify) the negative consequences for a community. In the next section, I will explore the combination of these contributing factors to the perpetuation of homelessness.

**2.2 Homelessness: Individual and Structural Factors**

> In an extensive study of the homeless population [of the United States] the Urban Institute has suggested that homelessness can be broken into three roughly equal categories. One third are released mental patients, one third are substance abusers (drug and alcohol) and one third are 'economically homeless'. (Tucker 1990, 27)

Personal pathology approaches to homelessness regard homeless populations as failing to conform to social norms, either voluntarily due to moral deficiency or involuntarily due to mental or physical disability. These explanations, based on the premise of individual culpability, often result in salvationist or reformist solutions. These solutions are designed to repair the individual and reintegrate him/her into mainstream society. Individual responsibility is, politically, a very palatable explanation of homelessness; those in power do not need to accept liability. Any assistance is charity, doled out to those deemed 'deserving' and denied to the 'undeserving' poor. Whether an individual is deserving or undeserving is decided based on a 'morally' established level of individual worthiness.

It is true that many homeless individuals lack the valuable skills to advance themselves in mainstream society; many individuals lack education or have serious behavioral or psychological problems. For some, independently housed living is unlikely regardless of income or opportunity; however, blaming homelessness on personal pathologies "makes it difficult to see how homelessness is intrinsically linked with city, region, and national underdevelopment" (Wright 1997, 12) and dominant systems of accumulation. John Friedmann articulates,

> For all practical purposes, [the very poor] have become largely redundant for global capital accumulation…Some in fact, perceive them to have negative effects on capital accumulation on the grounds that the urban poor siphon off capital for relatively unproductive public expenditures. (1992, 14)

Mental illness, drug abuse, and an absence of marketable skills are no doubt contributing factors in the growth of the homeless population in the United States. However, the extent to which these problems are individual and the extent to which they are structural is blurry.

> The mentally ill cannot begin to cope with their disease until they have a place to live…The unemployed person cannot begin to look for work until he or she has a place to change their clothes and sleep at night. Housing is the one indispensable starting point in solving homelessness. (Hayes quoted in Tucker 1990, 18)

Or put another way,

> Homelessness…inflicts environmental stress on individuals that might produce symptoms of mental illness—symptoms that might well disappear if individuals were fed, clothed, sheltered, cared for, and assured that they could count on a more stable future. (Wright 1997, 18)

The mismatch between income and the availability of affordable housing is partially due to individual pathologies that prevent acquirement and retainment of adequately remunerative work, partially due to the low valuation of the skill sets held by the very poor, and partially due to the economic and political structure of society. The perspective that emphasizes structural considerations is known as the 'liberal structuralist perspective.' Liberals discuss poverty and homelessness as if they were "aberrations of a market economy, soon to be rectified upon application of the appropriate technocratic solution" (Wright 1997, 12). According to this point of view increased housing provision and sufficiently remunerative job opportunities[1] would go most of the way in solving America's homeless problem. Robert Hayes of the National Coalition for the homeless summed up the solution to America's housing problem in three words "housing, housing, housing" (Tucker 1990, 18). Likewise, Martha Burt has said "the answer, succinctly put, is housing. Subsidize their housing, and [the long-term homeless] become—and stay—

[1] Though intuitively and anecdotally the relationship between lack of employment and homelessness is clear, some research (Tucker 1990) has determined that no significant correlation exists. Also, a survey of 27 US cities found that over twenty-five percent of people in homeless situations are employed (US Conference of Mayors 2002), calling into question the nature of this relationship.

housed (Burt 2001, 14). However, nearly all researchers recognize that homelessness results from individual and structural factors, though the weighting of each factor is matter of heated debate.

It is outside the scope of this paper to determine the weights of contributing factors. Rather, the purpose of this work is to recognize that it is a combination of factors—neither just 'housing housing housing' nor ubiquitous personal pathologies—and to determine what reparative role urban planners are able to take. Rehabilitation for substance abusers and adequate care facilities for the mentally ill are necessary to alleviate the problematic of America's homeless; however, these prescriptions are outside the scope of urban planning. In order to effect change, planners must understand an individual municipality's structural situation and devise practicable structural solutions.

**2.3 The Problem of Affordable Housing**

In the United States "between 1970 and 1995, the gap between the number of low income renters and the amount of affordable housing units skyrocketed from a nonexistent gap to a shortage of 4.4 million affordable housing units—the largest shortfall on record" (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). Portland was no exception. Though Oregon's Statewide Planning Goals and Guidance requires that each city maintain an adequate stock of affordable housing (2004, 1), advocates now claim that Portland's "metropolitan area is in need of approximately 47,000 units of affordable housing" (Philips and Goodstein 2000, 335). According to the National Association of Homebuilders 'Housing Opportunity Index', Portland, Oregon is one of the nation's least affordable places to live (Manvel 2004[2]). The median price[3]

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[2] Out of 187 urban markets, only San Fransisco, CA; Eugene, OR; and Santa Cruz, CA were rated less affordable than Portland" (Young 1999, 1). There are, however, a small number of critics find this index to be misleading (see Young 1999; Manvel 2004).

of a “house in the Portland area rose from $85,000 in 1991 to $144,000 in 1996, an increase of 69%” (Philips and Goodstein 2000, 335). Indeed, the median price for a house in the Portland metropolitan area in 2003 was $185,000, up 5.1% from 2002 (Moving to Portland 2004). The price of housing, however, is only one half of ‘affordability’; income comprises the other. Portland’s median annual income is $65,800; median annual renter income is $36,183 (Out of Reach 2003). Of these renters, 38.8% paid more than 30% of their household income on rent in 1999[4] (Moving to Portland 2004). In addition, a full time worker must earn $15.29 per hour in order to:

> Afford a two-bedroom unit at the area’s Fair Market Rent. This is 222% of the minimum wage (6.90 per hour). Even for a zero bedroom [studio], it is 146% of the minimum wage…In Portland, a worker earning minimum wage must work 89 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area’s Fair Market Rent (Out of Reach 2003).

Part of the affordability crisis is due to the boom in some sectors of the economy that “bid up the price of housing, while leaving behind those who still earn at or near minimum wage” (Burt 2001, 321). This, coupled with decreases in national, state, and municipal social safety nets leads to the unsurprising statistic that Portland suffered from a “36% increase in homelessness over the last two years” (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). For a more in-depth examination of urban planning partial responsibility in Portland’s housing affordability crisis, see Appendix 1.

**2.4 American Values: The Political and Cultural Challenge**

Burt purports that four predominant American values have frustrated the development of effective solutions to America’s homeless problem: the autonomy of the individual; the virtue of work; the primacy of family; and the desire for and sense of community (2001, 324). America’s

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[3] In his comprehensive study of homelessness, William Tucker determined that “the median price of homes in the metropolitan region turns out to be by far the single most significant factor for predicting homelessness ” (1990, 65).
[4] To be affordable, national guidelines stipulate that housing should comprise no more than 30% of a household’s budget.

"pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps" mentality obscures the connections between homelessness and the broader issues of economic polarization, capital accumulation, land-use, redevelopment, and local policy. Discourse of individualization and personal pathology is far more prevalent than structural explanations; even homeless advocates are guilty of this. In order to foster public sympathy, and the funding that streams from it, many advocates have aggravated the problem by 'playing up' homeless families and children. As well, local media coverage individualizes homeless problems by reporting on human interest stores, rather than "issues of land-use planning and displacement" (Wright 1997, 209).

To be poor is to be deficient in the eyes of many; the homeless are "still widely perceived to be dirty, dumb, wanting in skills, drugged, prone to violence, and criminality, and generally irresponsible," (Friedmann 1992, 56) though the truth is, that many of them are just poor. In addition, American emphasis on the 'primacy of family' can be problematic. Many homeless people are without homes precisely because their families have been unsupportive, abusive, or absent. Also, the American desire for and sense of community causes political difficulties insofar as it creates a division between the category of 'us' who belong and the category of 'them' who do not. 'The Other' may not have a right to charity, even if he or she may be in the same situation; rather, assistance is reserved for members of the community. This was particularly problematic during the Great Depression when transient individuals and families were repeatedly turned away by exclusionary communities. To adequately challenge homelessness, planners must get past stereotypes of the homeless and the very poor, and thwart the tendency to categorize the homeless as inferior, deficient and 'Other'.

This categorization and stigma has often produced exclusionary redevelopment schemes and zoning practices. In Portland, homeless people "are banned from [some] designated

neighborhoods altogether" (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002, 13). 'Quality of Life' laws or 'City Beautification' ordinances are becoming significantly more popular among urban planners. One such example is the situation in Santa Ana, California.

> In a 6-1 ruling…the Tobe decision now criminalizes the use of a 'a sleeping bag or blanket (sleeping/camping paraphernalia) or the storage of personal effects on public sidewalks, streets, parking lots, and government malls within the city of Santa Ana. In a city containing only 332 shelter beds for a homeless population of over 3000 such rulings have the intended effect of criminalizing homelessness and abolishing any democratic use of public space (Wright 1997, 193).

On September 20, 2000, Circuit Court Judge Stephen Gallagher found Portland's anti-camping law unconstitutional on the grounds that it was "impossible to separate the fact of being homeless from the necessary acts that go with it" (Cinelli 2004); The City of Portland, however, has sidestepped the court's ruling and continued to enforce the ban (Busse 2003). Downtown spaces are increasingly reserved for middle-class consumers, living middle-class lifestyles; this leaves little room to maneuver for those at the bottom of society's social and economic hierarchy. Rather than acceptance into this society, those with no crime other than poverty are warehoused in shelters and jails.

### 3.1 Solving Homelessness: State Sanctioned Approaches, Passive Resistance, and Active Defiance

Emergency shelters are one of America's traditional approaches to solving homelessness. The National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients estimate that about 40,000 homeless service providers operate in the United States (National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients 1999). Shelters, however, are not very appealing places to live, even for those who have few alternatives. Shelters ameliorate society's guilt by its appearance of accommodating, and even helping the homeless overcome their difficult situations. However Friedrichs notes,

> As institutions of social control, the shelters tend to confirm people's own self-blame, to increase their feelings of helplessness, and to perpetuate their powerlessness by denying them the opportunities to allow people to control their own lives. In the rituals of obtaining food and shelter, the homeless are forced to be utterly dependent and without a voice. (1998, 182)

There are incredibly few shelters that allow pets and almost none that allow partners to share accommodation. Ibrahim Mubarak, one of Portland's foremost homeless advocates, says that "Shelters institutionalize you mentally, they tell you what to eat, when to eat, go to bed, when to wake up, what clothes to wear. They feed you, they take your plate…all the time you're doing nothing" (Dignity Virtual Village 2004). In most shelters, there are early morning wake-ups (usually between 5:30 and 6:00 am) and early curfews at night; homeless residents are generally forced to leave the building during the day, expected to look for work. However, their space in the shelter is not secure for that evening. "Since there are far more homeless people than shelter beds (in [Portland], three out of four people who seek shelter can't be accommodated), the beds are assigned arbitrarily on a first come first serve basis or by some form of lottery, usually for one night at a time" (Estes 2002). Because of this and a fear of liability for in-house theft, the homeless are forbidden to leave any of their possessions. They must carry all of their belongings

around during the day; making it difficult to find employment. In Portland where unemployment is a high 9.5% (US Department of Labor 2003), it is unlikely that an employer will be sufficiently impressed by a candidate wearing a backpack or pushing a shopping cart. Most homeless persons, however, are met with a great disincentive to look for work. After being kicked out of a shelter in the morning, most homeless people must immediately begin the search for shelter again. If they do not manage to secure a place, by waiting in line at the shelter door, they must sleep on the city's streets. In most shelters, as well, safety is a major concern; theft and physical violence are commonplace.

Many homeless people will choose to sleep on the streets rather than suffer the indignities and degradation of the shelter system. However, many of the problems associated with the shelters are also present on the street; safety not least among them. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that:

> From 1999 to 2002, there have been 211 acts of violence against people experiencing homelessness. Of these 211 acts of violence 122 were non-lethal, 89 resulting in death. These incidents took place in 97 different cities from 34 states and Puerto Rico (2002).[5]

It is important to note these numbers are based on reported acts of violence; the actual number of violent acts is unknowable. Homeless living is also a major problem "for young homeless women who are often raped within weeks of becoming homeless" (Carrigg 2004).

Sleep deprivation is also a significant problem; sleeping in doorways, under bridges, or on benches makes getting adequate rest impossible. Since many cities have made sleeping, sitting, or being outdoors without purpose illegal, those experiencing homelessness outside of the shelter system are constantly under threat of arrest. These arrests often lead to job loss or the

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[5] Portland, Oregon experienced one such lethal attack in August, 1999.

prevention of job procurement. Worse still they serve to further criminalize an already destitute population (Wright 1997; Friedrichs 1998).

Rather than risking arrest or suffering the indignities of the traditional shelter system**,** many homeless people will sleep in unoccupied buildings, as they provide shelter from the weather and also from the gaze of public officials. Utilization of these sites is often short term, with no prospects for long term habitation. However, there are squatters who challenge municipal authority and power structures by "[occupying] a dwelling without the consent of the owner…with the intention of relatively (>1 year) long-term use" (Pruijt 2003, 133). Self-build is another illegal, but common approach to affordable housing crises. Though both of these approaches are illegal in name, they are often tolerated because municipalities do not have the capacity to solve housing shortages in the short-term or sufficient police resources to combat these actions; perhaps, also because they see these informal, yet stable communities as long-term, low-cost solutions to housing low-income residents. This is particularly true in the developing world, where thousands of municipal residents build homes on illegal land, often unsuitable for urban development, as part of a broader survival strategy.

In the South, the incorporation of shantytowns into the map of a city is a long-term, highly ritualized "ballet of confrontational politics" (Friedmann 1992, 151). The production of irregular settlements is followed by eradication, in an "iterative process until poor people eventually stick to the landscape" (Pezzoli 2002, 196).

> Over the years, individual housing units are built, brick by brick, replacing the soft, temporary materials—cardboard, straw mats, tin roofs—of the original huts. Through persistent efforts residents eventually gain title to the land. Roads are paved. Water lines are laid. Electricity is provided. Community facilities are built. The entire process may take 30 or more years—an entire generation. But finally what began as a *barriada* [shantytown] will have connected with and become an integral part of the urban 'web', undistinguishable from other low-income, already consolidated areas (Friedmann 1992, 151).

Though this form of land seizure and occupancy is 'illegal' and the settlements are repeatedly bulldozed, cities lacking viable alternatives, use law and planning ordinances to shape the strategies employed by the urban poor, thus shaping the structure of urban space (Pezzoli 2002, 201).

Though illegal, land seizure and occupancy is far from entrenched in the United States, and there are lessons to be learned from the developing world's approach to housing production. Keith Pezzoli, in a comprehensive study of Mexico's Ajusco Ecological Reserve, demonstrates how squatter communities, with support from university and other advocacy groups, manipulated the discourse of sustainable development and environmental protection to secure their continued habitation in a protected area, without destroying its value as an Ecological Reserve. Though the collective movement ultimately failed[6], their innovative strategy of integrated planning, which combined "housing, economic, and ecological problems," (Pezzoli 2002, 207) can and should be utilized in both the developing and the developed world. Dignity Village, explored in greater detail below, has taken this task on board.

Homeless encampments are familiar scenes in America's urban landscape; generally built, bulldozed, and shuffled to another location within the city in a short period of time[7]. Occasionally, the community grows in numbers and confidence and challenges municipal authorities and city planners to solve that city's homeless problem. Tranquility City in Chicago managed to secure housing for all of its members by forging alliances with local community groups and universities. Their visibility and utilization of economic and socio-cultural resources,

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[6] The individualization of land tenure, combined with insufficient economic and social capital eventually led to the breakdown of the collective action (Pezzoli 2002)

[7] Some encampments, like Tent City in Toronto or the Albany Landfill Community near San Fransisco, remain in the same spot for many years before being forcibly evicted. The constant threat of displacement, however, results in modest resident investment.

forced “Chicago’s public officials to negotiate seriously” (Wright 1997, 70). Tent City III became Seattle’s first legal village after residents sued the city for denying it a permit to camp on private land. Though it is mobile, Tent City III’s community remains intact. Los Angeles’s Dome Village, founded in 1993 by Ted Hayes, one of California’s leading homeless advocates, is now a “twenty geodesic dome facility, which sits among orange and avocado trees” (Haimerl 2004). In Ft. Lauderdale the homeless lived:

> In a legal tent city just across the street from City Hall for most of the 90’s. Because the facility was so visible, the city was able to raise nearly $10 million to create additional low-income housing and shelters, and after six years of squatting on the site, the encampment was transferred into the permanent Broward County Central Assistance Center…Tent cities are no longer allowed in Ft. Lauderdale (Haimerl 2002).

Encampments also exist in New York, Fresno, Key West, Boston, Denver, and almost every other major municipality in the United States.

Most encampments, however, do not meet with the same tolerant fate as those mentioned above; Exclusion and repression in the form of police sweeps, arrests, intimidation, and physical force are far more common[8]. These illegal strategies all suffer from the same problem: their precarious nature prevents adequate investment and may undermine the likelihood of developing an effective long-term solution by providing an inadequate ‘band aid’ solution. There are several examples both in the developing and the developed world, of communities taking initiative to invest in encampments to provide a long-term solution. Dignity Village is one such example. It differs, however, from shantytowns in the developing world as it offers intermediary housing, not affordable housing. Its goal is to provide an alternative to shelters or the streets rather than provide permanent homes for a number of very low-income households.

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[8] Talmadge Wright defines exclusions as “actions that exclude populations from particular physical areas, discourses, narratives, and any given means of communication,” and repression as “forcible removal, punishment, harassment for occupying space or communicating in ways not sanctioned by authority” (1997, 83).

**4.1 Dignity Village: An Unconventional Solution**

In December 2000, “eight homeless people, tired of being shuffled from spot to spot under Portland’s many bridges made a deal with police to camp out under two bridges without being hassled” (Carrigg 2004). This act sparked the beginnings of Dignity Village, the “United States’ longest running officially sanctioned tent city” (Tafari and Maag 2003). Between December 2000 and September 2001, Dignity “occupied a series of otherwise unused public spaces near downtown Portland” (Dignity Virtual Village 2004). Upon threat of police action, the Village finally relocated at Sunderland Yard, a city owned leaf composting facility seven miles from downtown. The Village remained illegal, under constant threat of dissolution and dispersal. With the help of favorable media coverage and left-leaning council members and church groups, Dignity fought the City for legalization. After nearly four years, Dignity Village was legalized based on a recent state law allowing “cities to designate transitional housing campgrounds for people who lack permanent shelter and cannot be placed in other low-income housing” (Trevison 2003). Though now officially legalized, Dignity Village remains a hot political issue, forming one of the core debating points between Portland’s 2004 mayoral candidates, Jim Francesconi, who vows to shut down Dignity Village, and Tom Potter, an avid supporter. In the next section I will look at Dignity’s current situation and their proposal for the future. The Portland City Council Resolution legalizing Dignity Village is attached as Appendix 2.

The goal of Dignity Village is to create a safe, sanitary alternative to Portland’s “over-burdened shelter system where there are about 600 shelter beds for about 3500 homeless people, [and an] alternative to sleeping alone in the doorways, under the bridges, or in the jails”. This goal is coupled with the aim of creating a “green sustainable urban village” (Dignity Virtual

Village 2004). Since Dignity Village began almost four years ago, health and sanitation standards have steadily improved: the village has installed hot showers, four Port-O-Lets, a waste removal service and several heated common areas (Dignity Virtual Village 2004). Progress towards compliance with city and state health and safety regulations, however, is incremental. Dignity's long-range vision of a self-built, ecologically sound village relies on the provision of donated and/or recycled materials and incorporates the use of solar and wind power, composting toilets, and organic food grown in Dignity's gardens and from Digsville farm, an associated parcel of agricultural land in nearby Vancouver, WA (Dignity Virtual Village 2004).

Ideally, Dignity Village would take up between two-and-a-half and four acres of land, housing a minimum of fifty and a maximum of eighty residents at a time. The operation is designed to be:

> Small enough to maintain a strong system of self-governance without becoming organizationally unwieldy, …[yet] large enough to provide the necessary critical mass of skills…to handle the internal operational tasks (such as intake, cooking, construction, security, maintenance, landscaping, site development, trash and sanitation and internal communications), and to continue to develop micro-enterprise ventures (such as the existing farm and the projected recycling enterprises) which will allow the Village to become increasingly self-reliant financially. (Dignity Village Proposal 2004)

Site features are to include organic gardens, green houses, a waste water treatment pond, rain water collection facilities, runoff streams and swales, amphitheater/teaching, meeting, and performance spaces, a fire pit, bike racks, solar panels, and wind turbines. In addition, there will be meditation/sacred spaces, a communications center, offices for the provision of social services (health, housing placement, etc.), security stations, and storage units (Dignity Village Proposal 2004). The Village's budget for this plan is estimated to be about $178,000[9]. (Dignity Village Proposal 2004)

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[9] Of this investment, $95,000 would be preserved in the event of site relocation (Dignity Village Proposal 2004).

Dignity Village is designed to be self-governed. The eleven member council, elected annually, meets once a week to discuss the state of the village and to make any decisions affecting the Village's future. There is also a four member board of directors, selected by the council, who mediate between Dignity Village and the City of Portland (Carrigg 2004). Four key rules govern Dignity Village: 1. Keeping the site drug and alcohol free; 2. No theft; 3. No violence to self or others; and 4. Making a fair contribution to the overall functioning of the village (Dignity Village Proposal 2004). These rules are strictly enforced with a 'one strike out' policy. Perhaps most importantly, to preserve the organic organizational dynamic and integrity of the Village, there is a stipulation that Dignity receive no government funding.

**4.2 Analysis: The Positive Aspects of Dignity Village**

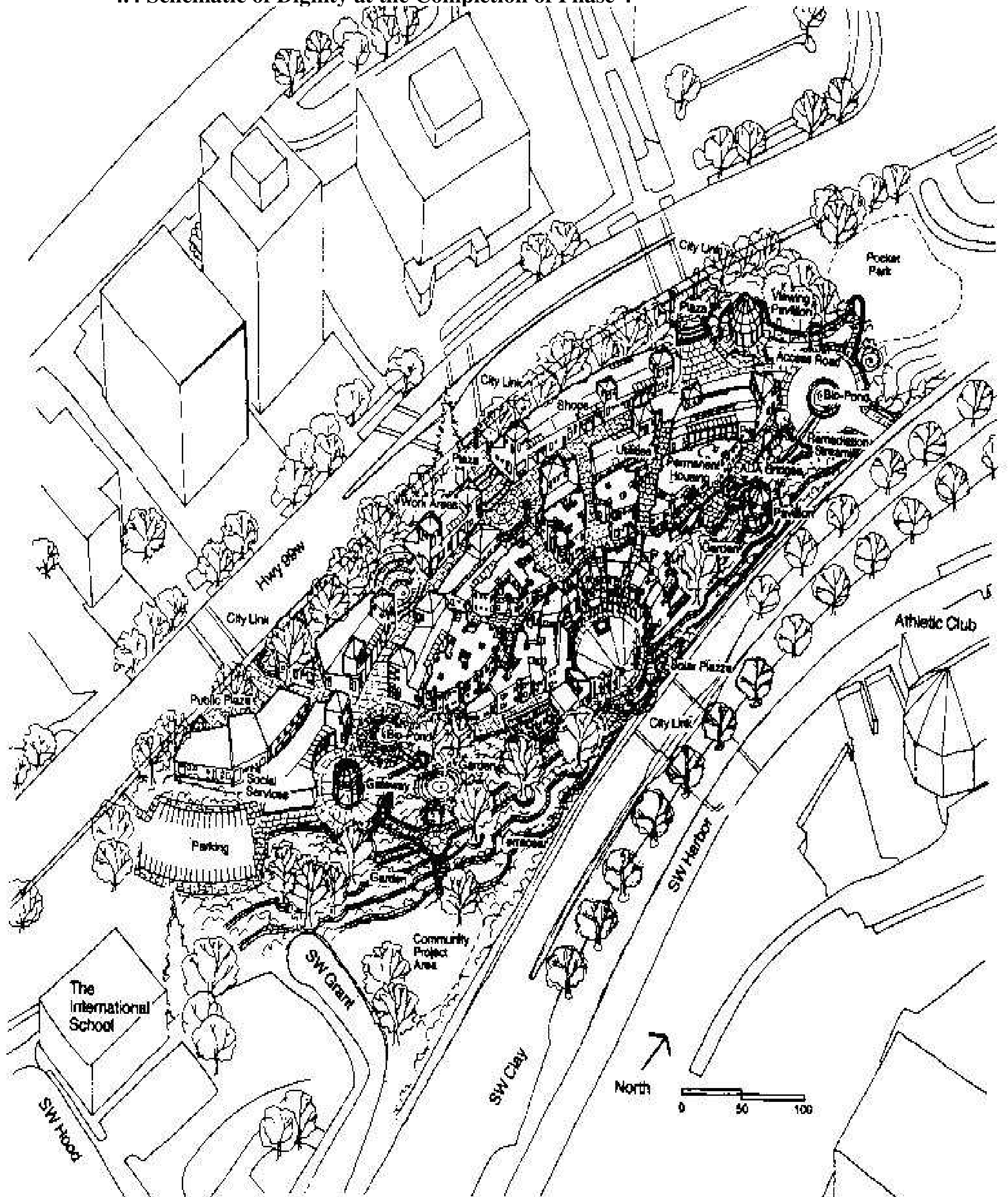
There are many physical, psychological, environmental, financial, and transitional benefits to Dignity's proposal. In this section, we will explore these various positive aspects. Physically, the shelters at Dignity Village are far superior to rough sleeping on the streets. Some of the fifty-two individual shelters are at least 200 square feet and completely waterproofed; others are considerably less chic; "How good your shelter is depends on how much work you put into it" (Carrigg 2004). By Phase four of the planned development, all of Dignity's tent pods will become self-built permanent buildings, designed to meet requirements for structural and seismic safety. In addition, the buildings are designed, with the help of local architects and planners, to be low-cost, environmentally friendly edifices built using strawbales, sand, clay, and water, with "lumber, windows and doors…salvaged from homes being demolished" (Redden 2003). Strawbale's non-technical, non-toxic nature lends itself to community design and construction. This both empowers the villagers and trains them in valuable construction skills (Dignity Village Proposal 2004) Figure 2 is a photograph of one such structure.

In addition, there are several health and safety features on site, including fire lanes, fire stations, and raised platforms to minimize rodent problems. Other self-built structures include an infirmary, a library and school, two certified communal kitchen areas, laundry facilities, and micro-enterprise work stations (Dignity Village Proposal 2004). Figure 3 shows a schematic of Dignity Village at the completion of Phase 4.

**4.3 Example of Dignity's Strawbale Homes**

Source: Dignity Village Proposal: 2001 & Beyond: Outlining Strategies for a Sustainable Future.

### 4.4 Schematic of Dignity at the Completion of Phase 4




Source: Dignity Village Proposal: 2001 & Beyond: Outlining Strategies for a Sustainable Future. 2004.

Physical benefits, though integral to the project, are, in this author's opinion secondary to the psychological advantages of the Dignity arrangement. As John Friedmann puts it "as moral beings we have not only wants or desires, but also needs, among which are the psychosocial needs of affection, self-expression, and esteem that are not available to us as commodities, but arise directly from human endeavor" (1992, 22). It is my opinion that Dignity Village contributes to the fulfilling of these basic human needs in a way that the shelter system or individualized living on the street do not.

In a study[10] "aimed at understanding how [Dignity Village] affects the well-being of residents" Robert Biswas-Diener found that it is likely that "the self-sufficiency and autonomy of life at DV is psychologically beneficial" (Biswas-Diener 2002, 3). Residents reported "high levels of affection, [felt] relatively physically safe in their daily life, and generally [trusted] their peers" (Biswas-Diener 2002, 3). Residents' most common complaints were of limited bus service, difficulty accessing downtown, health concerns, flooding of the Sunderland site during winter, stress about employment and the future of the encampment, and boredom. In spite of these grievances, Biswas-Diener's "take home message" was that:

> Dignity Village is showing early signs of success. It appears to be a viable alternative to traditional homeless intervention with positive personal and social consequences for its residents. The DV model works as well as it does because the members are relatively high functioning people[11]. They have been successful in increasing the quality of food distribution, housing, and social aspects of life above and beyond the standards typically associated with homelessness. Because they are relatively self-sufficient and autonomous, the residents of Dignity Village are receiving psychological benefits including increased self-esteem, personal satisfaction, and feelings of competence (2002, 4).

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[10] In order to understand the relationship between income and happiness Dr. Edward Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener, M.S. have "undertaken a large international research project with communities of people living 'materially simple' lifestyle. To date…they have collected data with homeless people in Fresno, California, slum dwellers and prostitutes in Calcutta, India, Amish farmers in Illinois, Maasai tribe people in Kenya, and Inuit hunters in Greeland" and, of course, residents of Dignity Village (2002,1).

[11] I will explore the ramifications of this in section 5.1.

Organizational, decision-making, and leadership skills are gained in the participatory process of developing Dignity Village. These skills can be both socially and politically empowering; an essential ingredient for real change in the endeavor towards social justice. As Susan Finley and Angela Barton put it,

> The residents of DV…have demonstrated that the potential for the very poor and the unhoused to live in a democratic society can only be realized if homeless people recapture primary control over their own lives. Village residents have discovered that democracy encourages all citizens to actively construct and share power over institutions that govern their lives (2003, 486).

Environmentally, Dignity Village is a prototype not only for other encampments, but for society as a whole. It is the opinion of this author that the leaders of Dignity Village have utilized the discourse of green development in order to increase their chances of receiving support from both left and right wing Council and community members; smoothing the overall political environment. This discourse manipulation has two major benefits including: contribution to the goal of sustainable development and the provision of social benefits to Dignity members and the Portland community more broadly. As discussed above, the Village's structures are designed to minimize damage to the environment. The use of solar and wind power to generate the village's electricity, the presence of greenhouses to contribute to year round food production, the use of bio-shade and shelter systems for crop growth (including bamboo for construction materials) (Dignity Village Proposal 2004) contribute to the goals of sustainable development. In addition it is a "walkable community, not dependant on or invaded by cars, with a localized economy which encourages communication and cultural development" (Dignity Virtual Village 2004). Though it has been through unfortunate necessity, homeless individuals are models for the minimization of resource use, recycling, and production with limited access to economic capital.

Financially speaking, Dignity Village is far less expensive to build and maintain than conventional shelter housing. According to the Village Council, “DV spends about $3 to house one person one night. Shelters typically spend ten times that amount without providing anything like the sense of caring and community” provided at the village (2004). A typical Village shelter, built for one person, costs around $500. This is an outstanding example of the provision of affordable housing (Tafari and Maag 2003).

In addition to these benefits, Dignity Village provides transitional assistance to residents, and also limited assistance to non-residents. Dignity Village provides job training and income opportunities; continuing education facilities; healthcare (through a local care facility); housing placement assistance; and legal assistance regarding the procurement of public benefits (Dignity Village Proposal 2004). In all, more than “500 DV ‘graduates’ have found jobs and apartments” in the last four years (Estes 2002). Dignity Village requires that those who “live there look for work or go to school” (Kershaw 2003). The transitional benefits to residents are evidenced in the fact that “social service agencies and some government officials make a point of referring people who are down and out to the village. It’s not uncommon for inmates from the state’s Columbia River Correctional Institution…to be nudged in the camp’s direction upon their release” (Austin 2002). So far, Dignity Village has provided its services at “no cost to the public purse” (Dignity Village Proposal 2004). Despite these positive aspects, there are a number of negative aspects as well as valid critiques.

**4.5 Analysis: Negative Aspects and Critiques of Dignity Village**

Concerns for health, safety, and property values comprise the majority of critiques against Dignity Village. Other critiques include its diversion of scarce human and financial

resources from other, less experimental solutions. Rant N. Irishman, a contributor to the Moynihan Institute's discussion forums said of Dignity Village:

> I could smell the stench of body odor, feces, urine, and patchouli. As I turned the corner I was shocked to witness a sea of tattered tents and cardboard shelters in the park across from the church. After inquiry, I was informed that it was 'Camp Dignity'…a hobo camp for bums that won't work…Wherever it is located it will increase communicable disease, violent crime, property crime, and drug use. The losers in this scenario will be the working people, whose homes and families must contend with the threat that these indigents pose (2003).

In addition, one of Dignity Village's neighbors in Portland's Buckman neighborhood, complained of feces, needles, and trash (Katu News 2003). Furthermore, many families find the Village daunting; one neighbor noted "If I see a whole field of blue tarps and people looking a certain way...right or wrong, I'm intimidated by that" (Trevison 2003). However, Lt. Ron Schwartz of the Portland Police Bureau's Northeast Precinct has commented that "there is nothing going on there that would attract police interest" (Trevison 2003). Also, Assistant to City Commissioner Erik Stein, Marshal Runkel is quoted as saying:

> There haven't been any serious problems in the Village for some time. In the beginning, the village had a number of police calls related to domestic violence. The village [subsequently] brought in specialists on domestic violence and trained security officers on how to deal with it...as far as the city has been concerned, there hasn't been an incident that raised a red flag. (Trevison 2003)

Property values are also a major concern for the Village's current and future neighbors. Catherine Trevison, reporting on local resistance to Dignity Village, recounted a story of one family among many:

> The Donnerbergs spent years developing their marina. The development was wrapped in red tape and sacrifice, and at one point, it brought them close to bankruptcy…Now they feel their achievement is threatened by an untested experiment… "I don't think having a homeless camp across the street from what we feel is a very nice residential neighborhood is compatible" said George Donnerberg, developer of the McGuire Point Marina, where typical floating homes cost $300,000 to $500,000 (2003).

Preconceptions of homelessness and poverty have led to the circumstance that 'Not-In-My-Backyard' (NIMBY) attitudes in Portland are alive and well. When Dignity held a meeting regarding the rental of a parcel of land in the Creston-Kenilworth neighborhood in Southeast Portland last October, neighbors silenced Dignity speakers. The meeting culminated in an arson threat and Dignity's subsequent decision to remain at the Sunderland Yard site (Dignity Virtual Village 2004). Indeed, a certain degree of apprehension is understandable and to be expected; as Talmadge Wright says of homeless mobilizations more generally, "fearing a decline in property values and crime, many otherwise progressive community groups often work to exclude shelters and group homes" (1997, 56). Certainly this statement could be extended to include Dignity Village as well.

The criticisms, however, do not stop with NIMBYism; some of the most powerful arguments regard the state of the Village itself. A fire in the village in fall of 2003 was touted "a city sanctioned disaster waiting to happen" (Village Council 2004) and raised grave doubts as to the safety of the camp, and the competence of those in charge of the encampment. In addition, the camp's environment on the tarmac at Sunderland Yard has been decidedly unsavory. "In the dead of winter, the raised garden beds full of mud and the villagers burning dried bread for fuel in the commons' fireplace, Dignity seems a pretty deflated version of the rhetoric and…rosy pictures" (Preserving Dignity 2004). Jim Francsesconi, one of Portland's mayoral candidates, voted 'no' against the Council's resolution moving Dignity Village towards becoming a permanent City sanctioned homeless camp (February 2004), saying that Sunderland Yard was not the best solution for homelessness on the grounds that the conditions were "less than subhuman" (Stern 2004).

Other criticisms concern Dignity Village's use of resources. One position argues that the village is diverting scarce donor resources, for example from traditional shelter arrangements or the provision of affordable housing. Conversely, some critics argue that donors to Dignity Village are essentially subsidizing the City's bill arguing that "the City Council can't count on benefactors to offset the city's costs forever" (Stop Indulging Camp Dignity 2004). In the next section, I will analyze these positive and negative aspects of Dignity Village as a response to the overarching problem of homelessness in Portland and in the United States more generally.

**5.1 Conclusions**

The positive aspects of Dignity Village discussed above are subject to four key criticisms. The first, and most obvious, is that many of the positive aspects are hypothetical. As many of DV's plans have yet to be implemented and the Village has yet to require a permanent site, the benefits are only conjecture, and possible harmful consequences are unknown. However, even if we assume the benefits are realistic, there is a second problem of permanence and proliferation. After building a secure, comfortable, and edifying environment, it is possible that many residents will prefer to stay in the Village, rather than move on to more permanent housing. In 2002, the average stay time in the Village was eight months (Biswas-Diener 2002). However, average residence time is increasing; some residents have lived in Dignity Village more than three years. In the opinion of this author this is problematic as the Village is unacceptable as a permanent housing solution; it is transitional housing, not adequate permanent housing. Also, given the Village's popularity among people experiencing homelessness, local business owners and tourist operators fear that Dignity Village will provide an unwelcome precedent and a proliferation of tent cities around Portland.

However, if we assume that the positive aspects are authentic, and that the Village will remain a transitional rather than a permanent residence, Dignity Village's experimental solution appears to be a promising alternative to traditional American approaches. The potential for exporting the Dignity model to planners in other municipalities remains uncertain. One must ask whether this unusually innovative and hard-working group produced an anomalous success story, or whether the Village was created by average individuals who thrived in Dignity's edifying environment. Successful grassroots projects may not be easily generalized because the charisma and leadership associated with the first project is difficult to duplicate. In addition, some cultures

can accept what others cannot—for example, Dignity may have thrived because it was nurtured in Portland's highly left political environment. Robert Biswas-Diener's statement that the Dignity Village model works "because the members are highly functional people" (2002) raises some doubt as to whether this experiment could be replicated. Vancouver, Canada is currently considering the implementation of a similar strategy. However, 85 percent of Vancouver's homeless population is addicted to drugs (Carrigg 2004). To serve this unique population of homeless individuals, the proposed 'Hope Village' will tolerate drug use; supporters believe that "if drug use is contained within [Hope Village's] shelters, the drug users won't have as much of an impact on the rest of the residents, as they would in a hotel" (Carrigg 2004). In a city with a high percentage of heroin addicts, Vancouver's Hope Village could be a recipe for disaster, instead of the constructive transitional atmosphere provided by Portland's drug and alcohol free encampment.

As for the negative aspects explored above, most revolve around NIMBY attitudes based on preconceptions and prejudices against this subsection of the very poor. Though this is politically difficult to manage, Dignity's actions have demonstrated that they are respectful and decent neighbors. Poverty isn't pretty, and the City should not turn its back on this project simply because a wealthier subsection of its population is afraid of declining property values. Other critiques are centered on health and safety issues, which, in the opinion of this author, can be combated quite easily with minimal donated resources and a good deal of sweat equity on the part of residents and volunteers.

After researching the nature of homelessness and examining the positive and negative aspects of Dignity's experimental approach, my main critique is that Dignity Village, while an adequate solution for a small number of people, does not go nearly far enough. In a country that

houses more millionaires and billionaires than any other, 3.5 million Americans experience a situation of homelessness every year (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). Dignity Village is a step in the right direction for three reasons. First, it recognizes both individual and structural causes to the City's homeless situation. Second, it helps to reverse prejudices held against the very poor, and reduces the stigma associated with being without a home. It is an improvement on conventional approaches which treat homeless persons as passive recipients of aid, rather than as active agents capable of effecting real change. Tom Potter, one of Portland's 2004 mayoral candidates and ardent Dignity supporter, held that in all his time acting as a Portland police officer (and later Portland's Chief of Police) this was the first time he had seen homeless people taking control of their own lives (Stern 2004). Finally, Dignity Village's physical environment is an unqualified improvement over rough sleeping in the streets or under bridges. This is an improvement for local residents, businesses, and, of course, for the City's homeless population. Despite all of these benefits, however, the legalization of self-build, ecologically sound campgrounds, though progressive, remains an insufficient long-term solution.

Though local action is the starting point for global change, "it is severely constrained by global economic forces, structures of unequal wealth, and hostile class alliances. Unless these are changed as well, alternative development can never be more than a holding action to keep the poor from an even greater misery" (Friedmann 1992, viii). It is the opinion of this author that Dignity Village must ally itself with external agents such as popular organizations and NGOs. "Spontaneous community action is limited in scope. External agents are needed as catalysts for change, to channel ideas and resources to the community, and to serve as intermediaries to the outside world" (Friedmann 1992, 58). In addition, Dignity Village must involve the state. The Village Council has stipulated that, in order to maintain its collective and creative integrity, it

will not accept any government funding. This is an understandable decision for the community; a decision required to maintain integrity and prevent external manipulation through state funding control. However in the opinion of this author, to effect comprehensive change it is imperative that the state be included. Working with the state, rather than against it, increases the possibility of universal change, rather than merely improving the conditions for one small community in the Pacific Northwest. In fact, working against the state is a sure-fire way to ensure that it will not become a universal movement on the path towards alternative development. More likely, the state would disperse the Village, perhaps offering affordable accommodation to Dignity's current residents, as in the dispersal and simultaneous re-housing of Tranquility City residents in Chicago (Wright 1992) and Tent City residents in Toronto (Reinhart 2003). This would signify the ultimate demise of this movement and the unfortunate abandonment of the ideology behind it.

Networks, coalitions, and the involvement of the state are necessary if local grassroots initiatives, like Dignity Village, are to become catalysts for the transformation of societal understandings of poverty and the redevelopment of governmental policy. To be local is not enough; universal access to decent, warm, and weatherproof homes should be a priority for Dignity Village but also a priority for the government of the United States and the American population.

The most effective and immediate strategies would emanate from White House leadership and the newly appointed Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Alphonso Jackson. Incentives for developers and local governments to produce and deliver low-income housing, coupled with the stimulation of the private sector into the recognition and assumption of partial responsibility would play an integral role in the provision of urgently needed solutions. In

addition, the Federal government of the United States should, once again, play a role in the construction of affordable housing.

> For over half a century, America had a federal low-income housing program that worked: this program built houses. The near-elimination of that program beginning in 1981 has been a major cause of homelessness, and the resumption of some federal support would greatly help now (Coates 1990, 128).

A "steadily expanding supply of new housing and the continued circulation of this housing" are to key factors to a healthy housing market. "The difficulty with building housing for the poor is that it often ends up being poor housing; built with cheaper materials to minimal standards" (Tucker 1990, 90). Government construction could ensure that low-income housing does not mean poor housing; and that a continual and adequate supply is maintained in the market. The current system of vouchers and certificates has proven too little, too late; however, the prospects for improvement are grim as the President's fiscal year 2005 budget:

> Would cut $1 billion from the Housing Voucher program. The proposal contains no money for new vouchers despite research by the Department of Housing and Urban Development showing that the number of people with severe housing problems has gone up. In fact, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, this proposal is $1.6 billion short of what is needed to maintain the program at current levels (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002).

Due to political factors and the difficulties associated with the American values discussed above, redirection of federal policy and resumption of low-income housing construction remains a distant prospect. There is, however, great scope for local action with a substantial and necessary role for urban planners.

Urban and regional planners are in a unique position to effect change at the local level. Working closely with public, private, and community sector groups, planners may use land-use regulations to zone "for low-income housing up-front…With no discrimination and clear rules applicable to all it [would be harder]…to block valuable projects" (Coates 1990, 142). Giving

density bonuses to developers for the construction of affordable housing, increasing zoning densities or requiring that every new housing development be comprised of a certain percentage of low-income houses are three such tools that planners can utilize to effect the availability of affordable housing in their jurisdictions (Coates 1990, 138). Planners must endeavor to make housing more affordable for their citizens.

Planners must also accept their role in the reproduction of systems which exclude disempowered sectors of the population. An urban planner must be cognizant that s/he is imposing his or her own view of what is and what is not acceptable within the boundaries of a city and realize that a city is comprised of many and various parts. Citizens in any city will range from the extremely wealthy to the impoverished. A pristine and exclusive downtown merely shuffles the very poor—those with nowhere else to go—to refuse spaces; this exclusion denies the very poor their right to the city and, moreover, their right to a basic minimal level of human dignity and respect.

The industrial and occupational structure of our society has deemed many of America's very poor largely redundant. In spite of this, we must press for a more caring society through an alternative development that emphasizes environmental sustainability, appropriate economic growth, and the reinforcement of the principles of social justice. We must make room for the poor, the deprived, and the sick, and endeavor towards inclusive livable cities for all citizens. I do not claim that planners or officials, or, indeed anyone, can operate outside dominant social understandings and systems of poverty and homelessness. I do, however, claim that to be a thoughtful and effective urban planner, one must realize that, despite the complications, difficulties, and likely resentment, those who have no voice must still be represented. Those who have fallen through the cracks must be reached.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I recommend that the City of Portland continue to allow the existence of Dignity Village as part of a broader strategy endeavoring towards the alternative development described above. As for other municipalities, I recommend that they too embrace grassroots efforts to provide transitional low-income housing that offers a similar set of physical, psychological, environmental and transitional benefits.

## 6.1 Appendices

### Appendix 1: Some Urban Planning Explanations for the Shortage of Affordable Housing

The housing industry is robust and versatile, capable of producing any variety of desired housing. What is that has created this housing supply shortage? Many researchers blame urban planning. Some researchers blame Portland's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), a tightly controlled zoning band designed to increase density and reduce the price of infrastructure provision surrounding the city. From a "theoretical perspective, the UGB will put upward pressure on land and thus housing prices" (Philips and Goodstein 2000, 334). In a recent study however, Philips and Goodstein have found that:

> the effect is relatively small in magnitude…The large price increases Portland has experienced over the past 7 years most likely reflect the conventional housing market dynamic. (2000, 342)

Urban planning is not out of the doghouse yet, however. William Tucker argues that NIMBYism and resultant exclusionary zoning is responsible saying that:

> Housing is housing and the only thing that makes it affordable is if there is plenty of it (1990, 22)…the bottleneck is at the municipal level, where communities have decided they don't want new housing, particularly housing of a low-income cast. These exclusionary practices now essentially determine what happens in the housing market. (1990, 80)

Indeed, QuantEcon, an economic research company, commissioned by The National Center for Public Policy Research, found that Portland's restrictive growth policies have had a severely detrimental effect on the affordability of housing in Portland (2002). QuantEcon goes so far as to say that:

> Had Portland's policies been applied in major metropolitan areas nationwide over the last 10 years, over a million young and disadvantaged families, 260,000 of them minority families, would have been denied the dream of home ownership. Portland-like site restrictions would have increased the average cost of a home by an additional $7,000 – over $10,000 in 2002 dollars (QuantEcon 2002, v).

Clearly, there are myriad causes of this affordable housing crisis; however, it is important to recognize that urban planning has had some role to play. Correspondingly, urban planning can, and should, play a significant role in resolution.

## Appendix 2: City Council Resolution Legalizing Dignity Village

**RESOLUTION No.** **36200**
**As Amended**

Designate a portion of the property known as Sunderland Yard at 9325 NE Sunderland Road as a campground under the terms of ORS 446.265 (Resolution)

WHEREAS, homelessness is an ongoing national dilemma with an estimated three million people sleeping outside at some time during any given year;

WHEREAS, in May of 2003, a study of the homeless within Portland counted 1,571 people sleeping outside or in vehicles in Portland;

WHEREAS, people who are homeless are more likely to become victims of violent crime and homeless women are significantly more vulnerable to sexual assault than are housed women;

WHEREAS, a 2003 report ranked Portland as the 7th most dangerous city in the country for homeless people;

WHEREAS, Portland's publicly funded year round homeless shelters have permanent waiting lists;

WHEREAS, because of the lack of shelter space and affordable permanent housing, many people in Portland have no practical alternative to sleeping outside;

WHEREAS, due to the on-going shortages of adequate shelter space and affordable permanent housing, the transitional housing accommodations provided by Dignity Village are used by persons who lack permanent shelter, and who have not been placed into low-income housing;

WHEREAS, Dignity Village has legally incorporated itself as a not for profit entity with a democratically elected system of governance that administers day-to-day operations and discipline among the community;

WHEREAS, Dignity Village is as an independently developed proposal from the homeless;

WHEREAS, Dignity Village has provided a safe alternative to sleeping outside for the homeless within Portland;

WHEREAS, in addition to basic services like kitchens, bathrooms and telephones, Dignity Village provides residents with job training opportunities, continuing education opportunities, healthcare, housing placement assistance and a supportive environment in which homeless people are able to address the issues that led to them becoming homeless;

WHEREAS, the land that Dignity Village proposes to occupy is located along an established public transportation line, which provides access to groceries, other commercial stores and potential job opportunities;

WHEREAS, local religious organizations, schools, philanthropists, architects, and others have coalesced to help Dignity Village develop into a functioning community with a positive vision for the future;

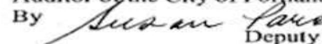
**36200**

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the City of Portland designates approximately one acre in the southeast corner of the property known as Sunderland Yard at 9325 NE Sunderland Road, Tax Lot 100 1N1E12B (Tax Account R-315196), as shown on the attached Exhibit A, as a campground under the terms of ORS 446.265;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the City of Portland will negotiate the terms of an agreement with Dignity Village for it to occupy City of Portland owned property.

Adopted by the Council: FEB 2 6 2004

Prepared by: Marshall Runkel

GARY BLACKMER
Auditor of the City of Portland
By 
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