

PANDEMIC EDITION



REAL CHANGE

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ESSENTIAL ARTWORK

While most huddle inside, artists have been painting the town, p.5



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MARCHING IN PLACE: Will the coronavirus stop protests for May Day, fair rent and Pride? | **p.4**

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Real Change exists to provide opportunity and a voice for low-income and homeless people while taking action for economic, social and racial justice.

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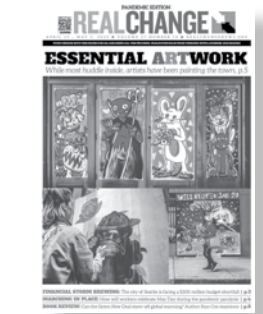


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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have something to say? Real Change accepts letters to the editor. Send them to editor@realchangenews.org or visit realchangenews.org and click "Write the Editor."



ON THE COVER

Murals by @pazuzu810 at 2 Fingers Social in White Center and Madeline Owen at Pho Fuschia in Pioneer Square and @pazuzu810's Smoke Shop mural in White Center are just a window into the fantastic art going up around Seattle during the pandemic. See the story on page 5. Photos by Mark White.

Homelessness and housing in America has been a tinderbox waiting to catch fire for generations

By **ISRAEL BAYER**
Guest Writer

"It's a time bomb": 23 die as virus hits packed homeless shelters

Positive cases of COVID-19 at San Francisco homeless shelter grow to more than 90

One in three among Boston homeless tested positive for coronavirus

These are just some of the many headlines we had this month in the United States. There will be more. The global respiratory disease known as COVID-19 is hitting America's homeless population, and it's hitting it hard.

Unfortunately, it's not a surprise. There is no place for people experiencing homelessness to shelter in place and emergency shelters aren't the most ideal setting to fight a global pandemic. It's a harsh reality for more than 500,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night.

We shouldn't be surprised. The issue of homelessness and housing in America has been a tinderbox waiting to catch fire for generations. We know that housing specifically has been used as a weapon against people of color in America for centuries. To add insult to injury, the massive disinvestment in housing for America's poor during the past 40 years, the lack of mental and physical health care, ongoing racial discrimination and most of all, the lack of leadership at a federal level, has led us to the situation we find ourselves in today.

It's time for change. We must not forget that the one time America did attempt to create a social safety net for all its citizens — creating national jobs and housing programs during the Great Depression — it did so in response to both market forces and social unrest. The federal government didn't just wake up one day and say "we want to help the poor." With the collective circumstances we find ourselves in today, we have a similar opportunity for much different reasons.

There's no question the coronavirus pandemic is a nightmare for people on

the streets, and the poor, among others. The nightmare is far from over. In fact, it's just begun. Without bold action, an entire new generation of people will be thrown into poverty and homelessness without the necessary support and safety nets put in place.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition and other national leaders, including the International Network of Street Papers North America, is calling for the following in the short-term:

- **Emergency funding of \$11.5 billion** to minimize the number of people who live in homeless encampments and congregate shelters and to identify alternative space, including hotels, for isolation and self-quarantine, as well as funding for short-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services. Funds should also be used to provide medical respite care, outreach and street medicine for people experiencing homelessness.
- **A national, uniform moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.** Congress should implement a uniform policy that assures that renters and homeowners will not lose their homes during a pandemic. A lot of tenants will be responsible for paying back unpaid rent. The law should prohibit rent arrears — accumulated during the period covered by the moratorium — from forming the basis of an eviction.
- **Emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention of \$100 billion.** A moratorium on evictions, on its own, is not enough. Congress must also provide tens of billions of dollars in rental assistance to avoid creating a financial cliff individuals and families will fall off when eviction moratoria are lifted.
- **Emergency funds for already existing affordable housing in both rural and urban environments, including tribal lands.** Providing resources for already existing affordable housing efforts is critical in maintaining people's housing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Access to legal services and**

housing counseling. Resources for legal services are needed to protect tenants from unlawful evictions that may occur after any moratoriums are lifted or if moratoriums are not put into effect. Housing counseling can help renters and homeowners remain stably housed during and after the coronavirus outbreak.

• **Moratorium on sweeps of homeless encampments.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise localities to not sweep homeless encampments or force people to relocate during the pandemic if there are no alternative housing options available to them. Federal resources should be tied to a requirement that states and local communities institute a moratorium on homeless encampment sweeps.

It's also important to remember there was a housing crisis in America before the pandemic. Long-term the United States must move to create a new housing strategy that provides massive ongoing investments in supporting the production of millions of new housing units, rent assistance for our most vulnerable citizens, and protections for renters and homeowners nationwide.

The reality is, for millions of people out of work and facing housing instability, surviving the pandemic will only be the first hurdle in the long road that lies ahead. We have the opportunity to do much more.

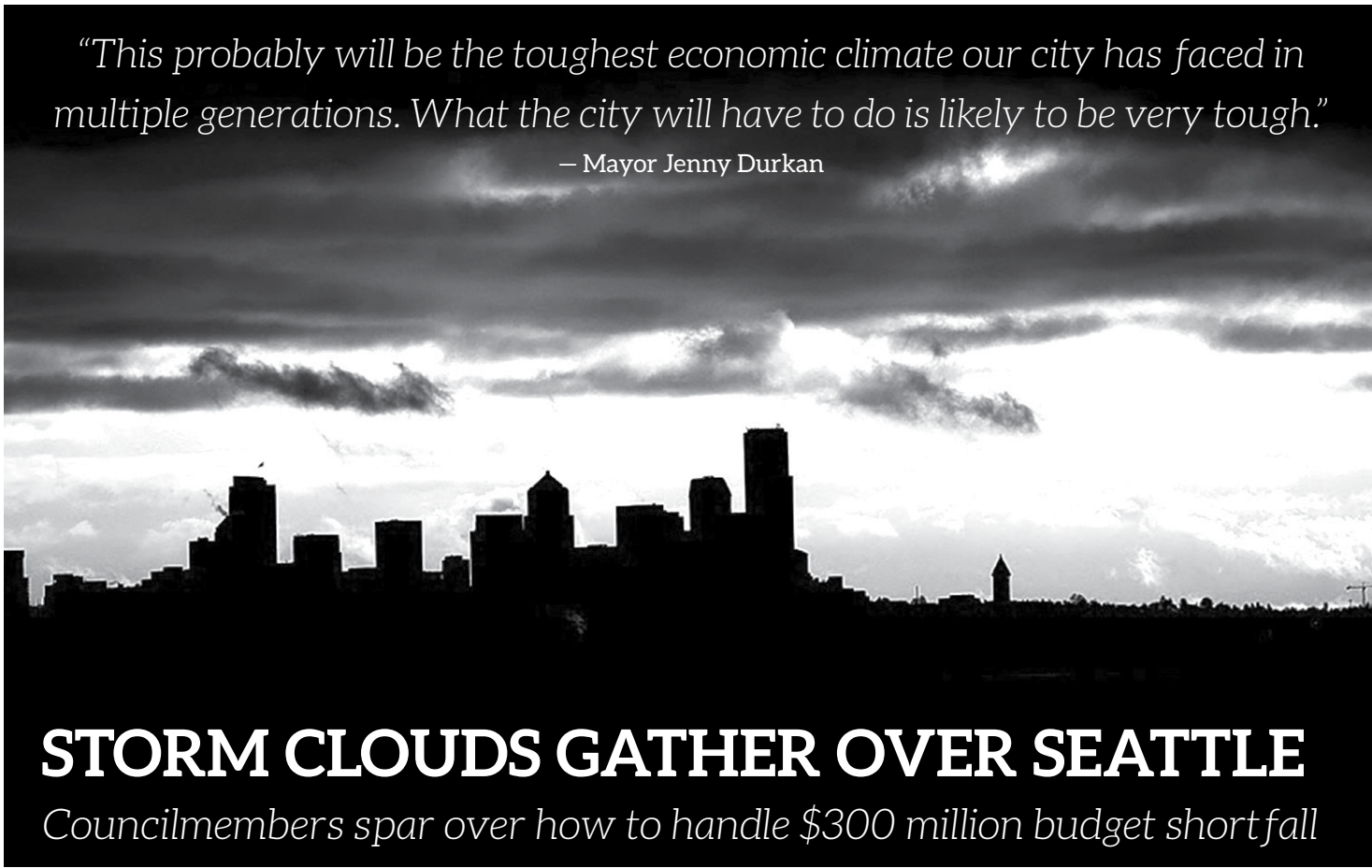
We have the chance to create a national housing justice movement that addresses both systemic racism and the need to provide a safe place to call home for all our citizens.

There's no better time than the present. ■

Many street paper vendors are homeless or struggling with housing. Find out more and help us take action at the National Low Income Housing Coalition website, nlihc.org.

Israel Bayer is director of the North American branch of the International Network of Street Papers.

Courtesy of INSP.ngo



By **ASHLEY ARCHIBALD**
Staff Reporter

The city of Seattle is looking down the barrel of a \$300 million budget shortfall due to the impact of the coronavirus, and a plan to raise \$500 million through taxes on the biggest businesses is receiving short shrift from the mayor.

In an April 21 press conference, Mayor Jenny Durkan and Budget Director Ben Noble told the public that the forecasted drop in revenues as the local economy grinds to a halt means that the city will be facing severe budget shortfalls, and that money spent on the coronavirus response could hit \$100 million.

"This probably will be the toughest economic climate our city has faced in multiple generations. What the city will have to do is likely to be very tough," Durkan said.

The economic picture is bleak. Modeling for the city suggests that a short but deep recession is coming for Seattle, sparked by the economic stall from the coronavirus. Consultants prepared two scenarios, one optimistic and one pessimistic, but the rapidly changing conditions rendered the more optimistic version obsolete, Noble said.

"What is described here is a true economic crisis," Noble told councilmembers the next day.

The city is expected to lose 20 percent of its sales taxes and a similar amount of the business taxes paid. Court fines, parking fees and utilities are all projected to be down. Property taxes, another source of revenue, won't be paid until later, deferring the impact.

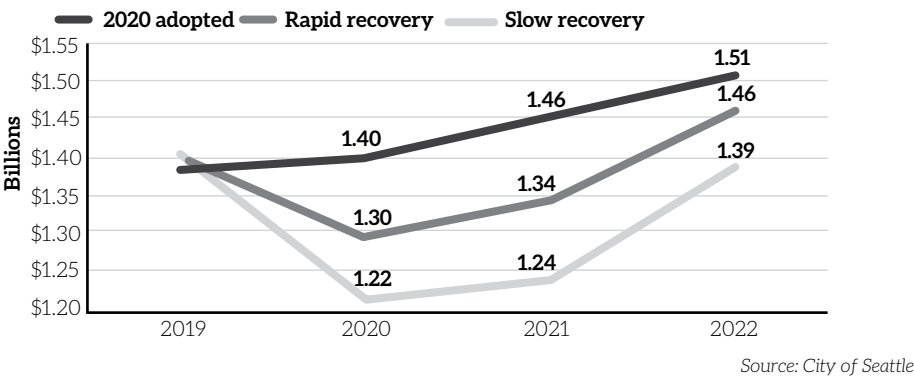
Ultimately, it's hard to say what level of havoc the coronavirus will have on Seattle, Noble told councilmembers.

"We do not have a lot of information about what the impacts will be," Noble said.

Cities in Washington and the state itself do not have the legal ability to go into debt. That means that every outlay to support people hurt by the economic crisis has to be funded in some way.

Councilmembers Kshama Sawant and Tammy Morales proposed a \$300 mil-

Seattle's general fund revenue scenarios



lion tax on large businesses to support housing and other services prior to the coronavirus outbreak. It would directly tax payroll of large businesses such as Amazon, which is a primary target of the legislation.

They've now increased that tax to \$500 million, with as much as \$200 million going to direct assistance to people already on Seattle's low-income programs, such as the Utilities Discount Program and Fresh Bucks, as well as people who have been impacted by COVID-19.

Durkan did not directly address Sawant's and Morales' proposal on April 21, but did say that a payroll tax would not pay dividends fast enough to solve the looming crisis.

"There are no ways, mechanisms or tricks to somehow magically have money appear this year or next year to fix these budget shortfalls," Durkan said.

The councilmembers disagree. They identified \$200 million in potential interfund transfers that would take money from some city accounts and use them to support households in need that would later be repaid with the proposed payroll tax.

The proposal has garnered opposition from Councilmember Alex Pedersen, who said in Seattle Times op-ed that the tax would "further harm Seattle."

In the piece, Pedersen argued that a recession was the wrong time to target businesses with additional taxes and tried to rebrand the effort from the "Amazon tax" to the "Sawant tax."

"Until Seattle's economy further recovers, the City Council should reject the Sawant Tax — or Mayor Jenny Durkan

should veto it," Pedersen wrote.

Washington relies on sales, business and property taxes, since income taxes are currently illegal. However, there is a way that companies who pay their employees handsomely can contribute, said John Burbank, executive director of the Economic Opportunity Institute, a left-leaning think tank.

A different proposal would tax companies with high-wage employees, Burbank said.

"It's not an income tax; it's an excise tax," Burbank said. "It's a tax on employers on compensation over a certain threshold."

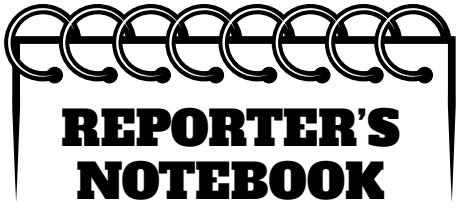
Now is the right time to put a tax on compensation over \$250,000, Burbank said — a standard created during the Great Depression.

"That puts that person in the top 3 percent of earnings in the country, and at the same time we have unemployment that's going to be reaching over 20 percent and desperation over food and housing," Burbank said.

The city tried to impose an employee hours tax to fund homeless services in 2018. This tax would generate 10 times more revenue.

The City Council heard initial proposals at its April 23 Budget Committee meeting. The necessity of the tax in the face of a systemwide failure is huge, Sawant said.

"I urge you to look at the legislation in light of the magnitude of the need in our society and that we pass a tax ... that raises revenues that are commensurate with the need our community members are experiencing," Sawant said. ■



Locked up

In a 5-4 decision handed down April 23, the Washington State Supreme Court rejected arguments to protect local prisoners from the coronavirus by releasing them.

The suit, brought by Columbia Legal Services, would have reduced the prison population by thousands. However, the justices ruled that the organization had not shown that the Department of Corrections wasn't taking sufficient steps to care for incarcerated people.

Nick Straley, the attorney representing the plaintiffs, said that he was disappointed in the court's decision.

"All of the evidence in the court record showed that the Governor's and the Department of Corrections' (DOC) actions to date have been insufficient to meet public health recommendations," Straley said in a statement. "Uniformly, national public health and correctional experts agree that to protect people in prison from the virus, a significant reduction of the prison population is necessary."

The decision comes after Gov. Jay Inslee ordered that more than 1,100 people be released early to reduce the incarcerated population. One of the largest outbreaks in the state occurred at Monroe Correctional Complex, where more than 100 inmates protested the conditions at the facility.

The decision will not end Columbia Legal Service's efforts to get people out of prison and safely at home, Straley said.

"Today's decision is a momentary setback at a moment when there's no time to waste," Straley said.

Lawless

Multiple county sheriffs in Washington state have announced that they will not enforce the statewide lockdown to stay home and stay healthy because, they believe, it violates Washingtonians' constitutional rights.

Snohomish County Sheriff Adam Fortney and Franklin County Sheriff Jim Raymond said that their deputies would allow people and businesses to resume normal activities despite the danger presented by the coronavirus, which has killed 711 people in Washington since it was first documented in February.

The first coronavirus case reported in the United States originated in Snohomish County, although new data shows two earlier deaths in California.

Fortney wrote on his Facebook page that the governor had no plan or details about when the "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order would be lifted.

"This simply is not good enough in times when we have taken such drastic measures as the suspension of constitutional rights," Fortney wrote.

Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson called the decision "disappointing." "People's lives are deeply impacted by this crisis," they wrote in a joint statement. "We are working hard to turn the tide on COVID-19 and begin lifting restrictions. These decisions are guided by science. Our priority is keeping Washingtonians healthy." ■

— Ashley Archibald

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Seattle City Council commences housing projects amid coronavirus

By **ASHLEY ARCHIBALD**
Staff Reporter

The Seattle City Council passed an emergency bill on April 27 that allows certain housing projects to move forward after a similar version of the bill failed to garner enough support to pass just a week before over concerns it would grease the wheels for gentrification.

The bill aimed to modify the Design Review process, which vets new housing projects to ensure that the exterior of the buildings pass muster. Under the temporary rules, certain projects already in the pipeline could opt for an “administrative review” process that forgoes public meetings until city staff are able to set up virtual meetings for public participation.

Affordable housing projects, which already go through an administrative review process, would be exempt from design review altogether. Those projects could be approved by the director of the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI).

The legislation expires after 180 days. Councilmember Tammy Morales became the swing vote, switching to a yes after carving out an exemption for the International Special Review District (IRSD). The board will not meet for at least 60 days in order to ensure people in the Chinatown International District (CID) can weigh in on developments targeted at their neighborhood.

Many of her constituents lack access to the technology and English proficiency needed to participate in a virtual meeting, effectively cutting them out of the process altogether, Morales said at the council meeting approving the bill.

“Speeding up the administrative backlog in the name of progress often has negative consequences on communities of color,” Morales said. She noted that most of the projects proposed for the CID were market-rate housing and hotels, not the affordable housing that the community needs.

The project backlog is growing.

Roughly 20 projects with approximately 3,500 units between them were stuck in the pipeline because they could not get a decision from one of eight design review boards in the city, according to staff.

That waitlist was expected to grow by 20 projects a week, said Councilmember Dan Strauss, the sponsor of the legislation. “This is temporary in nature. The intention of this legislation is to allow housing projects to continue moving forward through the public process in a way that preserves public input and public health,” Strauss said.

Councilmembers Alex Pedersen and Lisa Herbold voted against the bills in

See **HOUSING** Continued on Page 12



Real Change file photo, 2014

El Comité members protest at the 2014 May Day rally. This year, gatherings have been banned but members of El Comité are not willing to concede their calls for justice for immigrant workers.

Protest may look different but more urgent amid coronavirus

By **ASHLEY ARCHIBALD**
Staff Reporter

The afternoon of May 1, 2019, hundreds gathered in Judkins Park for the slow procession from the central Seattle area that was once a rare haven for people of color to downtown, organized by El Comité and the May 1 Action Coalition.

The crowd incrementally flowed into the street, swirling into eddies at junctures to hear speakers call for worker rights and protections. A sprinkling of rightwing provocateurs dressed in black with a paintball gun and two MAGA hats wandered on the outside of the march trying — and largely failing — to catch protesters for inflammatory interactions to play on their YouTube channel.

Such a sight is unimaginable in 2020 while the coronavirus continues to lurk in the community, largely undetected by dint of inadequate testing. Gatherings of more than a handful of people have been banned since March, making traditional displays of solidarity — like the March for Workers and Immigrant Rights — impossible.

But organizers at El Comité and in other communities are not ready to cede their calls for justice, solidarity and inclusion to stay-at-home orders at a time when the virus has laid bare the inadequacies in systems that they have been calling out for decades.

Instead, they are employing new tactics to rally, to protect and to provide support.

Labored industry

The coronavirus shut down economic activity in Washington and

“There’s a historical, underlying ability in this country to have no sentiment for workers and no solidarity with workers, especially workers of color.”

— Juan Jose Bocanegra, executive director of All in For Washington

throughout the country, as government officials made various attempts to slow the spread by limiting how and where people could interact with each other. Millions of Americans were laid off as a result, causing a spike in unemployment insurance claims like nothing seen since the Great Depression.

Congress plumped unemployment insurance by \$600 per week and approved individual stimulus payments of up to \$1,200. Undocumented workers saw none of that, said Juan Jose Bocanegra, executive director of All in For Washington, an effort to right the state’s inequitable tax system.

“A lot of the workers have been unemployed for three to four weeks now,” Bocanegra said. “They don’t have a way

of paying their rent. They don’t have access to the paycheck programs.”

It’s a slap in the face to undocumented workers, many of whom have been deemed “essential” by state, local and federal governments because of their work in agricultural fields. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates as many as half of people hired to pick crops are undocumented, a category which does not include workers in the country temporarily on an H-2A visa, which allows them to stay in the country for certain agricultural work for a period of 10 months.

Even as President Donald Trump announced plans to use the crisis to shut down immigration, his administration made exceptions for workers who ensure there is food available to be stocked on grocery store shelves. Reports indicate that some workers received paperwork deeming them essential.

But it goes past the coronavirus: Undocumented workers pay taxes, feeding into programs and services to which they do not have legal access.

“There’s a historical, underlying ability in this country to have no sentiment for workers and no solidarity with workers, especially workers of color,” Bocanegra said.

California created a \$125 million fund to provide direct cash payments to undocumented workers, and advocates want the same type of relief here in Washington.

Rather than march in the streets of Seattle, they plan to drive to Olympia en masse to deliver their ask to Gov. Jay Inslee.

WORKERS Continued on Page 11



Photos by Mark White

Seattle’s Heartwood Provisions restaurant on First Avenue downtown is home to one of Patrick Nguyen’s many public murals. Nguyen, also known as Dozfy, has created dozens of murals.

THE COLOR AND SHAPE OF SEATTLE’S HEART

Murals remind us that we still hold space for the place that we love, even in quarantine

By **KAMNA SHASTRI** | Staff Reporter

In Patrick Nguyen’s signature image painted on various walls around the city, the Space Needle is a beacon of hope. The heart at its base is a reminder of love and support, colored green to pay homage to the Emerald City. “The present times, dire times, a lot of fear and unknown,” Nguyen said, “creating a Space Needle with a heart is a clear message. What we are doing is helping the greater good.”

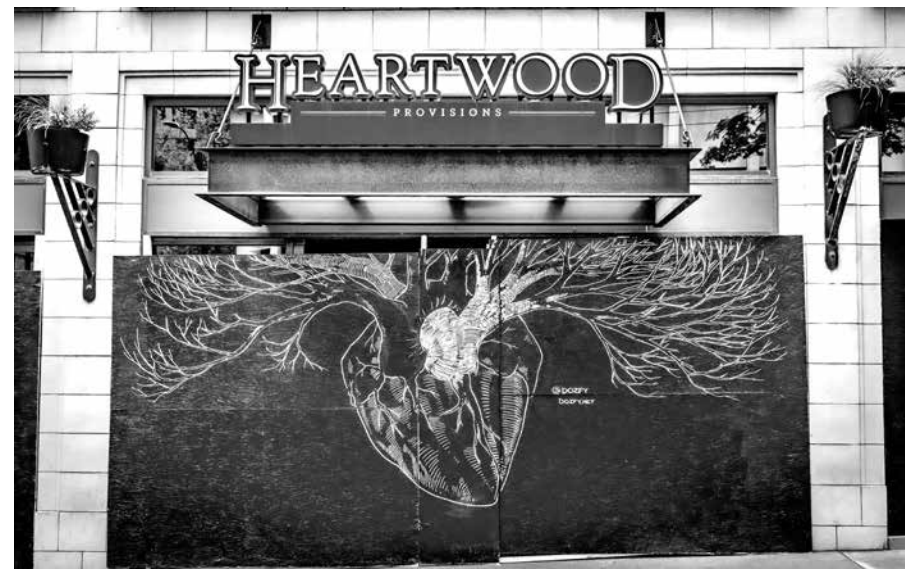
Since Seattle quieted down after Gov. Jay Inslee’s strictest lockdown took hold, Nguyen has painted dozens of murals, the largest of which is a sprawling tree with an anatomical heart at its center.

Protective layer

Shota Nakajima had to board up Adana, his high-end Japanese restaurant in Capitol Hill. He had just done a deep clean of the interior, and “the last thing I want is breaking in. Just wanted to make sure it’s completely protected so I can sleep at night,” he said.

Nakajima asked four artist friends — including Nguyen — to paint the blank boards with each of their unique styles. Unable to provide food for the neighborhood, Nakajima sees the murals as a way to contribute good-will during this time. “At least I am able to provide something that is not super depressing to the neighborhood,” he said.

Indeed, the murals coming up around town are far from depressing. They are an unforeseen public service; the city looks ominous, as if it were waiting for a natural disaster to strike with its quiet streets and boarded-up windows.



When restaurants, bars and small businesses started closing temporarily, owners began reaching out to artists to paint their storefronts. The plywood many were erecting was constantly being tagged with graffiti anyway. In the Chinatown-International District, artists offered to paint a mural for Jade Garden, a neighborhood favorite, after its windows were vandalized.

Seattle Office of Arts and Culture Curator and Collections Manager Blake Haygood said, “Art really has that power to settle things down a little bit. We’re in it together.” Social media users are posting the surprises they find

online, a healing balm to the pandemic’s side effects of shuttered businesses, vandalism and a communal thirst for something cheery and uplifting. The parade of colors is cropping up everywhere, accomplishing multiple goals at once.

Supportive framework

Keith Wilson owns Bon Voyage Vintage in Pioneer Square and had to board up his windows after someone attempted to kick them in. When the Alliance for Pioneer Square reached out to local businesses with a roster of artists to paint their storefronts, Wilson chose an artist who painted animals. She came out to paint vibrant pink sloths lazily swinging from branches with the tagline “hang in there.”

“It is bringing people down to the Square,” Wilson said. “Makes people stop for a second.”

The way the murals have bloomed across the city is unique, Haygood said; it is a process that is happening organically and faster than city arts projects, which take months because they are paid for by taxpayers. “I think it shows resilience of the art community and how it’s interwoven through the community,” he said.

Murals make art more accessible because they are integrated into the daily landscape instead of being cordoned off in galleries and museums. But Haygood said the murals are also a sort of “proxy” for public sentiment: Even if venues are closed, they are not forgotten.

“This is just so unique,” he said. “We can’t help physically with people, as [we would with] earthquake or disaster response. In a way, the artwork is sort of a stand-in for people. A way for us to hold that memory.”

Art as essential

The University District Partnership (UDP) reached out to businesses in their area around the University of Washington who had boarded up and connected them with local artists from University Heights Center Artists Collective. UDP was able to get a local branch of Sherwin Williams to donate paint. Good paint is usually the most

See **MURALS** Continued on Page 6

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK WHITE

Belltown Pizza, right, displays the varied styles of Seattle muralists including Ryan Henry Ward. Below, Pioneer Square's Driftwood building displays the Japanese-wood-block-inspired work of Jonathan Wakuda Fischer of Wakuda Studio.

**MURALS** Continued from Page 5

expensive supply in a muralist's toolkit. UDP is paying the artists at no cost to the businesses.

The murals are a result of a trifecta of alliances among community groups, artists and businesses. In many cases, business associations — the Ballard Alliance, SODO Business Improvement Area and University District Partnership, among others — are acting as connectors between individual businesses and artists. The streamlined approach is responsible for the artistic transformation happening in every corner of the city. Murals on plywood have been spotted in Ballard, Capitol Hill, Columbia City, Pioneer Square and White Center.

Elise Tissot Storey responded to the Artist Collective's call for murals. She had been "resisting an urge" to paint pieces of despair and hopelessness as the COVID-19 crisis continued. The opportunity to paint something cheerful was a welcome respite. Her fashion-model-inspired figure is on the right door of the Buffalo Exchange on 45th and University Way. A tall model dressed in vintage frills with a voluminous beehive

updo is flanked by a pastel, orange-peach background that distracts from the current dreariness and uncertainty of the time.

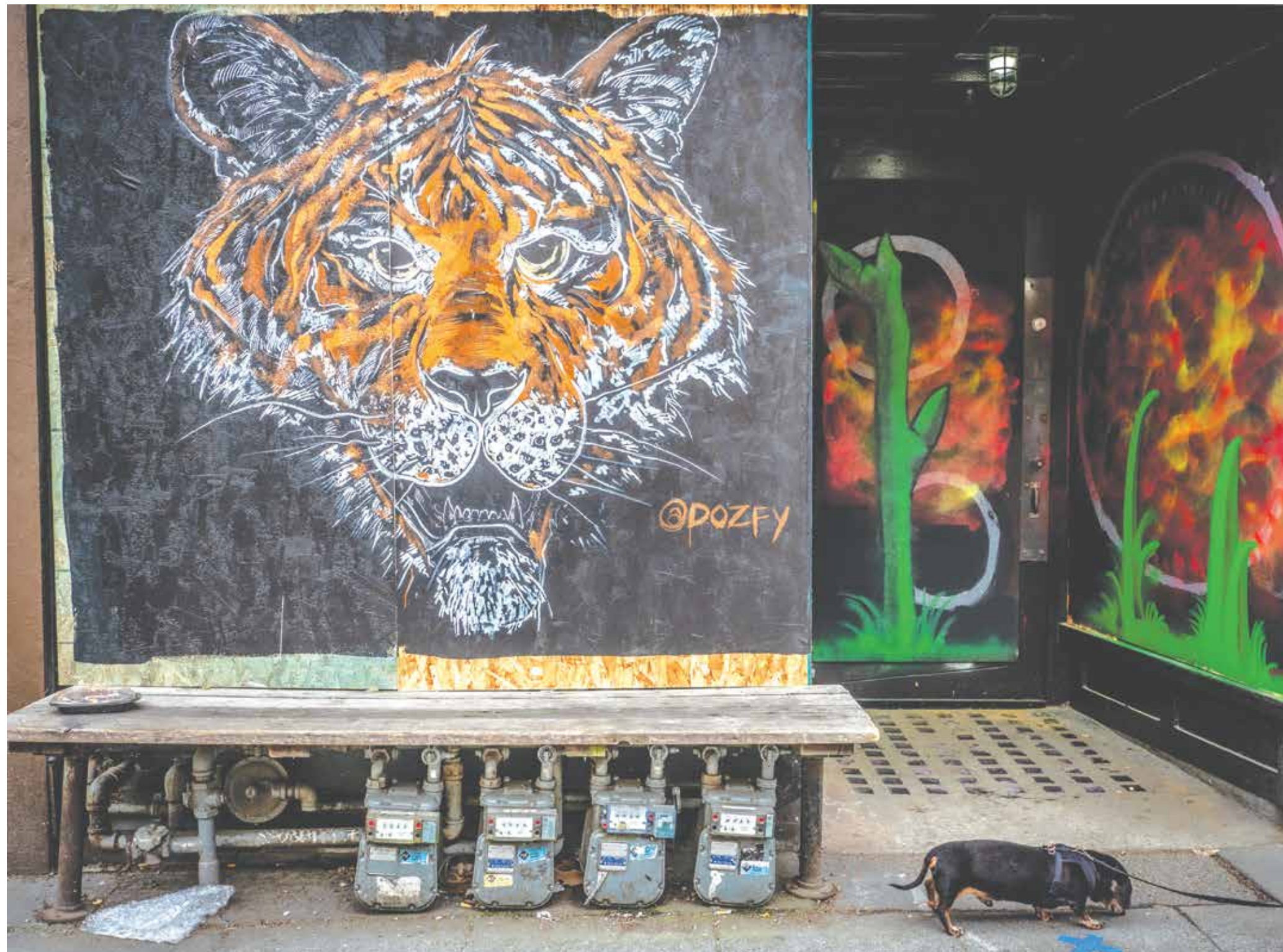
"I was excited to be able to add some vibrance to our quiet, distraught city," Tissot Storey said.

For her, art is as basic a need as food, shelter, air and water. Colors and shapes are life-giving. She saw this firsthand when she traveled to the Soviet Bloc in East and Central Europe at age 17. There, she saw a connection between the crisis and a lack of color. "People really lived in sadness. Every single wall was gray and bleak. It left such an impression on me," she said. "[Art] make[s] us feel that we live in beauty and I think that is a real necessity for humanity."

Murals' future

These public displays of color and texture have implications beyond the current crisis. "I think that public art and murals can do a lot to build and demonstrate community character and identity," U-Heights' Built Environment Community Relations Manager Katy Ricchiuto said.

Ricchiuto says that the public art



A Dachshund passes beneath a Dozfy mural that adorns Rudy's Barbershop on Ballard Avenue.



A man passes by Angel Debate's mural at the Deep Roots Tattoo and Piercing shop in the University District with its spring blossom and Seattle Strong theme.

coming in the U District is also an investment in representing the historic neighborhood's identity. With a new light rail station and the UW's campus expansion, more people will be traveling through the neighborhood and the murals can create an integral sense of place.

The unanswered question is, what will happen to these beautiful works of art when restaurants can reopen and remove the murals, most of which are temporary? Nakajima plans to auction off the murals for local charity to con-

tinue the loop of good-will from which the idea began.

Meanwhile, Haygood wondered, "How do we highlight this once we are ready to start processing? How do we document this?" Haygood said there may be a way for the city to host a public works show sometime in the future.

For now, in the face of an unknown and nebulous sense of tomorrow, Seattle's murals are a symbol of unity. Like Nakajima said, "It's brought people together. Everyone is on the same field." ■



Bon Voyage Vintage owner Keith Wilson poses with a newfangled mural on his Pioneer Square store.

"I was excited to be able to add some vibrance to our quiet, distraught city."

— Elise Tissot Storey



Photo by Mark White

Patrick Nguyen, aka Dozfy, paints a slab of meat on plywood covering the windows of the Metropolitan Grill on Second Avenue downtown.

Art is 'practice, practice, practice' to muralist Dozfy

Artist Dozfy aka Patrick Nguyen's signature style is minimal and breathtaking: a black background with naturalistic line drawings. He has a beautiful black-and-white landscape at Salare Restaurant in Northeast Seattle, and several neighborhoods west, a vibrantly orange and white tiger looking straight on with yellow eyes, jaw open outside a Rudy's Barber Shop.

Nguyen has been painting for 30 years and is trained in fine art, focusing on acrylics and screen printing, with a love for comic and anime art as well. He started working on his project, Menuart, when he lived in Atlanta and engaged often with the restaurant industry. After coming to Seattle, he continued to build relationships with restaurants and has contributed works to many mainstays.

Nguyen formerly gravitated toward color, but his artistic style shifted 10 years ago, after he was inspired by the photography work of Ansel Adams. Nguyen was taken by the black and white tones of Adams' work and wanted to create pieces that borrowed from that style without creating a hyper-realistic image. "[It's] the philosophy of doing more with less. ... You can create things that draw the

eye," he said.

Oftentimes Nguyen already has an idea of what he wants to portray with one look at a canvas. The skill comes from the discipline of drawing for eight-10 hours a day. "I take my process as an athlete — practice, practice, practice," he said. "When it's time to execute, it's nothing you haven't done before."

There are always images running through Nguyen's mind, but he says his Heartwood mural is perhaps one of the most special. In this piece, a tree trunk rises from the anatomical heart where it is rooted; the tree and the heart are one, where branches and veins are almost synonymous. The design had been in his mind for a while and it was simply a matter of finding the right canvas. Now the mural adorns the boarded-up entrance of Heartwood Provisions on First Avenue.

For Nguyen, orchestrating an image is like being a conductor or a composer who can see the structure of a musical piece in their mind's eye. "It's very therapeutic. As you work with painting, it's problem solving at each step. But you are also taking a step back [to] look at the big picture." ■

— Kamna Shastri

BOOK REVIEW: 'The Green New Deal and Beyond: Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can'

By Stan Cox | 2020 | City Lights Books | 208 pages | \$16.95

Is the answer blowin' in the wind?

According to Stan Cox's 'The Green New Deal,' it's complicated

Review by **MIKE WOLD**
Contributing Writer

In 2019, progressive members of the U.S. House of Representatives offered a resolution to frame sweeping legislation to deal with the approaching climate emergency. The resolution called for a "Green New Deal" — a massive effort to invest in renewable energy to replace fossil fuels. To minimize economic dislocation, it called for creating millions of jobs for displaced workers and ensuring that poor and working people would be kept afloat, with the burden of conversion falling on the rich, those most able to afford it and those who had, arguably, benefited the most from our dependence on fossil fuels. Although the resolution didn't pass Congress, and President Trump warned that the supporters wanted to stop people from flying in airplanes and driving their cars, it got significant support from Democrats in the House and has advanced the discussion.

While Trump has a reputation for lying, his warning had a seed of truth: He knew that it's going to take more than a massive investment in renewable energy to avert catastrophe. In "The Green New Deal," author Stan Cox argues persuasively that, while the program definitely is worth supporting, by itself it won't bring carbon dioxide in the atmosphere back to sustainable levels. This is because the program is still premised on growing the economy, which means an increase in energy use that cannot be met solely with renewable energy, at least in the short term.

The Green New Deal resolution assumes that the availability of cheap renewable energy will reduce fossil fuel uses mainly through market forces. Cox argues it's highly unlikely that increasing the availability of cheap renewable energy will be enough to bring fossil fuel use down close to zero in the next few decades. But that reduction is what it's going to take to limit carbon dioxide in the atmosphere enough to avert catastrophe. Expanding solar and wind power to satisfy our current demands would require an improbably massive and ecologically unsound increase in infrastructure — including battery storage facilities.

Cox also cites an extensive 2019 study that showed that "the greater the share occupied by renewable sources in a nation's energy supply, the tighter the link between growth and carbon emissions. ... In the richer nations, most new renewable capacity added to the energy supply; when it did displace another source, it was more often nuclear than fossil-fuel capacity that was taken down." Another study by the European Economic Bureau "found a few cases here and there in which emissions decreased as GDP rose. ... When emissions were found to have fallen alongside a rising GDP in a single country or region, it always turned out that only the emissions generated within that country's or region's borders had been counted; when the analysts also considered emissions produced elsewhere to manufacture goods that the country had imported, all evidence of decoupling [economic growth and carbon emissions] disappeared."

Partly this is because adding additional cheap energy is itself an incentive for more industrial investment and production; and partly it is because the existing fossil fuel infrastructure will continue to function, even if prices fall.

One thing Cox doesn't address is a situation in which the economy isn't growing, which is what's happening right now. As many advocates point out, this could be an opportunity to use Green New Deal ideas to rebuild. We could ramp up the renewable energy infrastructure and create jobs, while replacing fossil fuel use as quickly as possible. However, restarting growth would also restart demand for fossil fuels. The government could use bailout funds to buy majority control of oil, gas and coal companies, which would then make it possible to phase the industry out in a way that didn't cost jobs. That, of course, is very unlikely, regardless of who wins the election in November.



The only way to end the use of fossil fuels, Cox argues, is to put increasingly strict regulatory limits on extraction, import and export of natural gas, oil and coal until those are down to zero. Because there are limits to how well wind and solar power can meet current energy needs, there will inevitably be energy shortages during this transition, requiring government intervention. The shortfall would have to be made up by conservation measures and lifestyle changes. The Green New Deal addresses some of the issues of conversion and dislocation. It would be a good start, but without further government intervention in the economy, it will fail.

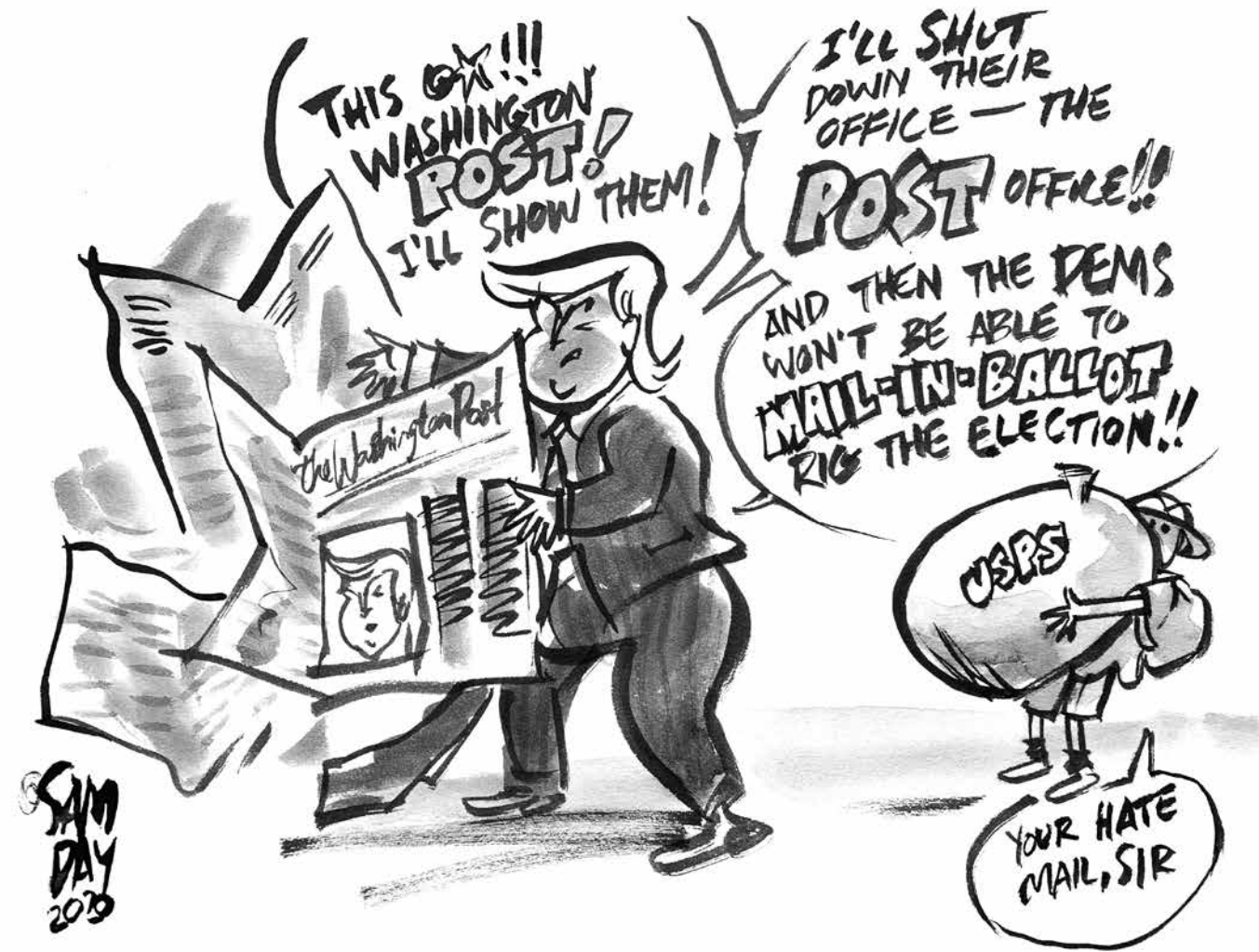
Cox suggests energy rationing — similar to what took place during World War II — to spread the pain, so lower-income families don't suffer unduly and so that it's the upper-income families who take the biggest hits on consumption. Mandatory, funded conservation measures would target industry, favoring those uses that were essential for basic needs and for the conversion to renewable energy.

What Cox doesn't address is perhaps the most difficult question: How to get the public behind this effort. As Trump understood, voters are worried about the life-

style changes that are required to really address climate change. This has been an issue in Washington state since at least the 1990s, when politicians got pushback on any non-voluntary measures to increase car-pooling and transit use. Last year, an initiative along the same lines as the national legislation was defeated, despite major efforts by proponents to work with unions and people of color to broaden support for the program. Opponents were able to convince voters that a Green New Deal, despite being cast as a way to bring prosperity and address climate change, would cost jobs.

In World War II, we had an identifiable enemy that threatened our way of life. We were coming out of a depression, which made it easier to redirect production while instituting rationing. This time, although it can be argued that the real enemies are the corporations that are destroying the Earth, the most obvious enemy is our own lifestyles. Until people are convinced not just that there are shared sacrifices to be made but that those sacrifices are necessary, it will be hard to sell even the Green New Deal, for all its limitations. ■

THE MIDDLE GROUND | By Sam Day



I'm fixin' a hole in New Zealand, where I'll live with the rest of the introverts

"There's no circumstance in which you should take a disinfectant or inject a disinfectant. ... It can cause death and very adverse outcomes." — Former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb

Adventures in Irony

Dr. Wes Browning

important.

Trump must be feeling the heat. He knows old people are his best demographic, but he's afraid he'll lose like Herbert Hoover if the depression starts to look as bad as the one in 1932. What's saving him from that now, ironically, is unemployment insurance that was mostly instituted under FDR's leadership.

How many old people can Trump afford to lose? It's a balancing act.

Trump thinks in practical terms. He doesn't seem to mind losing old people in Blue states, probably calculating that those Electoral College votes won't come his way anyhow, but if he loses a lot of old people in Florida and Georgia, that's serious business.

So, he wants states such as California, Oregon, Washington, Massachusetts and New York to lift their lockdowns, for the sake of the national economy, but when a Red state wants to do it, he calls it a hasty move. Too dangerous. Rash. Lives are at stake. Very important lives.

Some lives are at less risk than others. The Seattle Times has had a story about rich people trying to escape the pandemic in underground bunkers, some in remote areas of New Zealand.

New Zealand has stopped most immigration to their country, but will kindly make an exception if you'd agree to invest

\$6 million in businesses there over a three-year period.

Longtime readers will know I have often reveled in print at the thought of emigrating to New Zealand. I also have had a lifelong desire to live in an underground bunker. After all, I've been clinically tested in the top 5 percent of introverts. But, darn it, I'm a little cash-strapped right now, wouldn't you know it, and even with all my coins in the coin jar, I'm not close to one million, let alone six. And then where would the funds come from for me to build my mansion under the ground? I'd only have enough cash left to buy a shovel and dig my own bunker.

Speaking of odd headlines, there's this one: "Missouri Sues China, Communist Party Over The Coronavirus Pandemic."

Here's a fun little real-world math fact: 18 percent of all human beings live in China. It is therefore to be expected that 18 percent of all apocalyptic pandemics will first appear among residents of China, "all else being equal," as people will say. All else being equal, I'd be as rich as Jeff Bezos.

The first person in history thought to have died of smallpox was Pharaoh Ramses V. Should we sue ancient Egypt on the grounds it was a populous cradle of civilization and therefore an attractive nuisance for deadly viruses? All else being equal.

In other news, I just found out yesterday my editor is working on her Judy Garland impression. This is certainly the best of all possible worlds. [Editor's note: Dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.] ■

Sound off to Dr. Wes:
drwes@realchangenews.org



Rabbi Olivier BenHaim

Practicing social solidarity

In a few days, Jews will celebrate the holiday of Lag BaOmer. This minor holiday marks the death of a towering mystical figure: Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

There is a fascinating story describing Bar Yochai on his death bed as if possessed by a force compelling him to reveal all the mystical teachings he had yet to reveal, teachings that came pouring unceasingly out of him until a fire-like radiance, a brilliant light filled his house as his soul departed his body.

To me, this points to a profound teaching. In these last ecstatic moments, Bar Yochai merged with the One Light of Being and became a fire-like radiance, a burst of Light.

Bar Yochai was one of many of Rabbi Akiva's disciples to die at that time. A plague struck Akiva's students and claimed 24,000 lives.

We don't exactly know what that disease was. The stories mention that, eerily enough, it was a plague characterized by a hoarse cough and difficulty breathing.

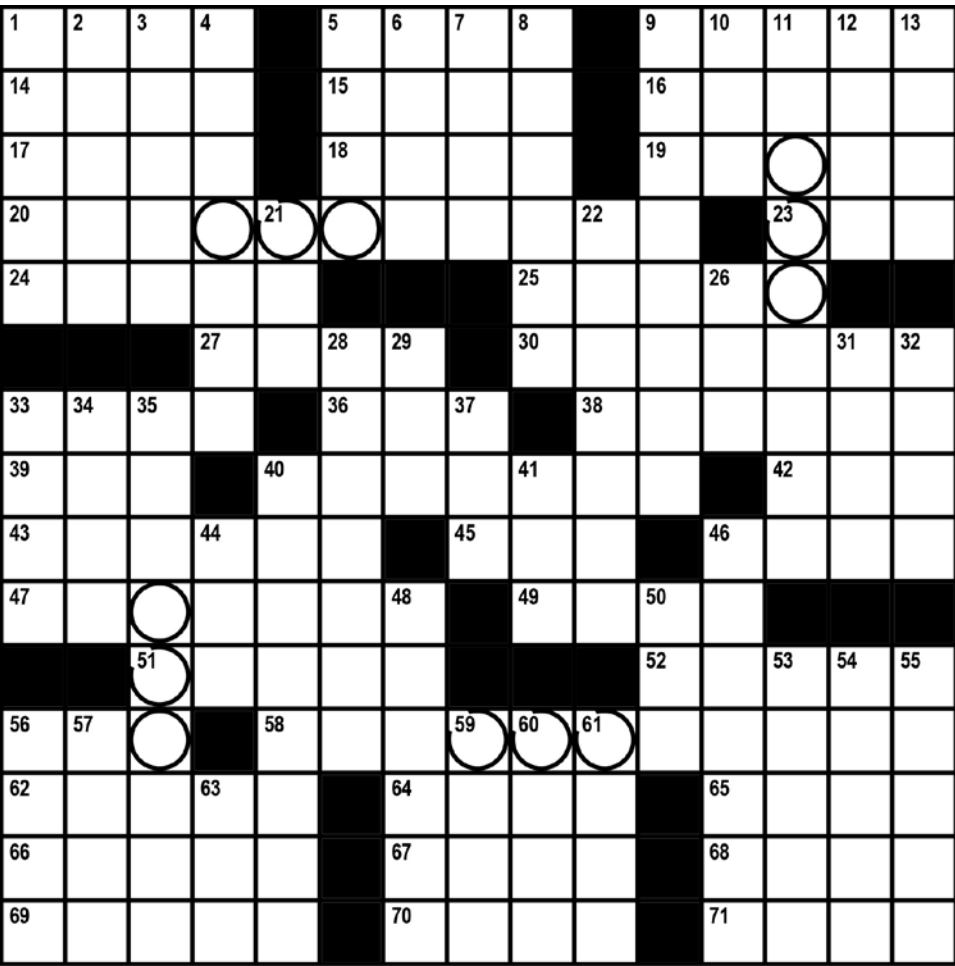
The rabbis explain that both the disease and the failure to contain it was due to great division and disunity among Akiva's students, compounded by their inability to respect one another. The parallels to our current circumstances are shocking.

What our sages are pointing to is that the disease was symptomatic of what truly ailed Akiva's students: namely, social dislocation. Which is why I cringe at the expression "Social Distancing." Not only does it misstate what we are doing, but it subtly reinforces what already ails us as a nation.

What we are doing is "Physical Distancing," not "Social Distancing." But while physically distancing, we must also cultivate Social Solidarity, reach out to one another and nurture the social threads that connect us. We must practice "Social Solidarity" in the context of "Physical Distancing."

This practice offers us a unique opportunity to rethink our relationships with each other, our world and our ecosystem. What is our purpose as humans? What truly defines human success? What does living a fulfilled human life mean? I would submit that it is not about getting the latest iPhone or drowning ourselves in ever more stuff. As we practice Social Solidarity, a true paradigm shift opens us up to the value of authentic human ties. We are not born to be good consumers. We are born to be good citizens, good neighbors, good caretakers of each other and of our environment.

Our mystics would say that practicing Social Solidarity wakes us up to that precious Light within each of us which Bar Yochai awakened to, to the threads of Divine Light that unite us, sustain us. May we use that newfound awareness to usher in a more loving and compassionate world. ■





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Where's the Honcho?

Puzzle by **Patrick "Mac" McIntyre**

ACROSS

- 1 City near Provo
- 5 "You ___, Sir?" (standard butler's line)
- 9 Hi and bye on Kauai
- 14 Hawaii's ___ Coast
- 15 Fashion magazine
- 16 Wayne ___ (Batcave site)
- 17 Hole-making tools
- 18 Castle defense
- 19 "I give up!"
- 20 Hippie's exit line, perhaps (3 wds.) (5,3,3)
- 23 Pilot's announcement, for short (Abbr.)
- 24 The cat's pajamas or the bees' knees, e.g.
- 25 Get up ___ (energy; enthusiasm) (2 wds.) (3,2)
- 27 Caulking gun or chainsaw
- 30 Repudiate (WAS VOID anagram)
- 33 Jar parts
- 36 Big bird of old tales
- 38 The younger of pro tennis's Williams sisters
- 39 Org. with a caduceus logo (Abbr.)
- 40 Hymn part that doesn't appear in hymnals? (2 wds.) (6,1)
- 42 A.C.L.U. concerns (Abbr.)
- 43 Metrosexual tote that may also be called a "murse"
- 45 Old antipoverty agcy. (Abbr.)
- 46 Invitation request (Fr. Abbr.)
- 47 Show a real talent for (2 wds.) (5,2)
- 49 ___ and for all
- 51 Wonderland cake words (3,2)
- 52 Off the cuff, unscripted remark (2 wds.) (2,3) (Lat.)

SOLUTION



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Makeover Magic!

April 22 Issue

Solutions to this week's puzzle will appear in the next issue.

Streaming to stay sane

Almost all King County events are canceled, so we're listing streaming events for optimal physical distancing

Monday, May 4

Online Sing Along/Play Along
7 p.m., Zoom access via link, free
tinyurl.com/y9t2bb8n

Warm up those vocal chords, dust off your instruments and get ready to sing or play along with this musical event. The Online Sing/Play Along is hoping to bring people together through music even though we can't be together in person. Song requests can be made through the chat function on Zoom and there is a songbook provided for you to sing and play along with. If you're feeling shy, don't worry: Your mic will be on mute so it's a great time to practice, let loose and have fun with your musical talents.

Wednesday, May 6
Every Wednesday

Silent Reading Party
6 p.m., access sent via email day of,
\$5-20 tickets, tinyurl.com/yawvpy8z

Before shelter-in-place started, Seattle's Silent Reading Party was so popular it would often have a line formed before the event even started. How lucky to live in a city with a bunch of other weirdos who like to read silently next to strangers? Even luckier for us is that this is an event for which going virtual doesn't seem completely absurd. Every Wednesday, The Stranger will be hosting this silent reading party, and you can grab your tickets at the link above. Whether you're just looking for some company or trying to watch less TV (I feel you), the Silent Reading Party is a

lovely evening activity. Pour yourself a drink, make a snack plate, get cozy and start that page turner.

Friday, May 8 –
Saturday, May 9

Cafe Flora, Friday: 2–6 p.m.,
Saturday: 10 a.m.–2 p.m., order via link,
\$20+, tinyurl.com/yb7d7nze

Cafe Flora, the beloved Madison Park eatery famous for its veggie, vegan and gluten-free options, still wants to help you celebrate Mother's Day. There are four menus to choose from — one vegetarian, one vegan and gluten-free and two kids' menus — and options for pick up throughout the weekend. Truthfully, all sound beyond delicious and it's been very challenging writing this before having had breakfast myself. If you're looking for treats rather than a meal, you can also order cocktail kits, flowers and chocolates to enjoy as well. Help support a homegrown restaurant and show your appreciation for your mom, or yourself.

Saturday, May 9

Emerald City Soul City Presents: Ain't Nothin' But A House Party, 8 p.m., Face-book Live, donations encouraged, tinyurl.com/ybkafdw

Lo-Fi and its Emerald City Soul Club will bring soul music right to your house, setting you up for a great house party, even if it's a party for one. While it is free to access the live music set up,

Lo-Fi is asking for donations via their GoFundMe to help them stay open when the time comes. Lo-Fi has been a fixture in the Seattle music scene since 2004, hosting local live bands, touring acts and the best soul music dance nights. If you're able to donate, you can help keep a small business afloat. If you can't cut it this week, you can support by tuning in and listening to DJs Marc Muller, Michael Christzberg and Anthony Alvarado spinning rare soul tunes.

Sunday, May 10
— Every Sunday

Betty's Body of Knowledge, 7 p.m., Zoom ID: 216-614-9359, tips encouraged tinyurl.com/y7tn9hpf



Betty Wetter

teams). The evening will not only have trivia, but will also feature guest performances from drag queens Michete and Eucalyptstick, as well as a special audio round with Cookie Couture. Support our amazing drag community and have lots of fun in the process!

DOWN

- 1 Rain forest ruminant with striped legs
- 2 What galley slaves did for their keep
- 3 Former Chinese Premier Zhou ___ (2,3)
- 4 Mariner Moose and Blitz the Seahawk, for a couple
- 5 San ___, Italy
- 6 Former MLB-ers Jesus or Felipe
- 7 GPS above-the-Equator abbr. (1,3)
- 8 Blow one's top (2 wds.) (3,3)
- 9 Roald who led the first team to reach the South Pole
- 10 PC linkup (Abbr./acron.)
- 11 Quick visual exams (4-5)
- 12 Anchor Lester of "NBC Nightly News" and "Dateline"
- 13 Domain
- 21 Broody music genre
- 22 Jennifer of "Friends"
- 26 Long-snouted, predatory fish
- 28 Undertaking in which a participant might say "I'm folding"?
- 29 Cyberyuks (Abbr./acron.)
- 31 Where Nipplegate occurred (2 wds.) (incl. abbr./acron.)
- 32 Stinging insect in a colony
- 33 Like some excuses
- 34 Huge-screen film format
- 35 Contests for hoofers (2 wds.) (5,4)
- 37 Boardroom bigwig...or a hint to the answers with circled letter groupings (Abbr.)
- 40 Hog product often used to flavor Boston baked beans (2 wds.) (4,4)
- 41 "The Matrix" role
- 44 Sitcom costar of Betty, Estelle and Rue
- 46 Slang Revolutionary War-era term for a British soldier
- 48 Prepare for solid food, in a way
- 50 What puts the high in high-test coffee, briefly
- 53 "Tootsie" Oscar winner Jessica
- 54 Popular Swedish furniture stores
- 55 Member of a wild bunch?
- 56 Actress Petty or Singer
- 57 Writer Harte
- 59 Prepare to swallow
- 60 Cork's country
- 61 Change for a five
- 63 Fair-hiring inits. (Abbr.)

WORKERS Continued from Page 4

"What we are requesting, along with other major coalitions like the Washington Immigration Solidarity Network, the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, One America and a slew of other organizations, is that the governor put \$100 million to support undocumented workers and their families during this period of time," Bocanegra said. "We know it would be a small amount given the number of folks in the state, but we would also like to look at this money as a bridge for a more permanent solution."

Even that amount wouldn't cover the estimated 75,000 workers with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN), a form of tax ID for people without Social Security numbers, much less every undocumented person, said Carlos Marentes of El Comité.

"Just for the city of Seattle to support all of these people, including ITIN, people with no Social Security number or people who do not qualify for supports, you need an amount over \$25 million a month," Marentes said.

Rent strike

Other interventions such as the moratorium on evictions due to non-payment of rent or freezes on utility shutoffs are a form of triage — they don't get at the underlying problems that allowed the virus to take millions of workers already on the edge and shove them off.

"The freeze on rent, many of us see that as a good thing, but when we say that, we're accepting the status quo about how rents are set," Marentes said. "That's the other part of the issue. It's not just about how we apply triage right now, but how do we solve the structural problem."

Internationally, May Day is about worker solidarity and the fight to improve the lives of the people who produce the economic gains that continue to enrich a small sliver of society.

It's also the day rent is due for millions of Americans, many of whom will not be paying.

Calls for a rent strike have been growing, championed by elected officials like Councilmember Kshama Sawant and pushed by organizers. Groups have papered the city with posters encouraging renters to organize with their neighbors and giving advice on how to present a united front to their landlords.

It's also a cause for @MayDaySea, a "loose collective of folks organizing in different areas" that has been using their Twitter account to amplify the message and strategies.

"We want to recognize the fact that, organized collectively or not, millions of people will not be paying rent on May 1," the group said in an email. "Our calls for a rent strike take this into account, while also suggesting that in this crisis we can get the best results for each other by working together."

Some people simply won't be able to make rent. Even if a person has access to enhanced unemployment benefits, rents in Seattle are notoriously unaffordable.

But if those who can afford to pay refuse to as well, it will make it harder for landlords to take action against the poorest.

A STREET PAPER HERO
IN A PANDEMIC

In Denmark, coronavirus cases and deaths have been kept relatively low compared with other European countries. But, as with elsewhere, its homeless and socially excluded people remain at risk. With a government more used to criminalizing than helping this population, street paper Hus Forbi has implemented radical measures to assist its vendors, and all vulnerable Danes, as the pandemic crisis continues.

By **POUL STRUVE NIELSEN**
Hus Forbi

A street paper hero is emerging: Simon Nielsen. He is homeless and sells *Hus Forbi*. Furthermore, he is chairman of the board of the *Hus Forbi* organization that publishes the Danish street paper.

At the beginning of March, he had not imagined how much he was about to learn about crisis management in the coming weeks. He had not imagined that he would have to advise his colleagues to sell the paper only if it was strictly necessary for them. He had not imagined that he would have to launch a fundraiser for money for colleagues in need. And he had not imagined that he would spend a lot of time driving through Denmark to deliver vouchers for supermarkets so that homeless and socially excluded people would be able to do necessary shopping. All because of coronavirus.

The Danish Social Minister said publicly — with the director of the Danish Board of Health standing next to her — that, of course, it is not dangerous to buy a copy of *Hus Forbi*. You just have to take the same precautions that you take when you interact with any other human being. The vendors have been instructed how to interact as well, so we are happy for the message.

But there is really no urgency expressed by the Danish government to support those who are homeless. The homeless community does not really care, though. They support themselves. *Hus Forbi* is run by the vendors and the homeless; and the decision to take some measures was made by the board on the very day schools and cultural events were closed. While the government distributed a little sum of money to a small variety of organizations three weeks later, *Hus Forbi* responded immediately.

It is an advantage to have people who are themselves the target group for initiatives as decision-makers, because they will take the initiatives they need — and not political decisions or decisions based on what some people who do not know may feel or think. Immediately, *Hus Forbi* started a fundraiser. It was successful, so only a few days later, the three next steps in the plan could be carried out with help from *Hus Forbi's* partners around the country: *Hus Forbi* handed out vouchers for supermarkets to those in need; money was given to cafés and shelters for homeless and socially excluded people so that they could provide take-away; Hus Forbi started to pay for homeless vendors to stay in some Danhostels [the umbrella-organization of Danish youth hostels — they have standards and are much better than the cheapest hotels]. On top of that, hand sanitizer, which is sold out in most pharmacies, was distributed to partners so that they could give it away.

After the fundraiser and a campaign in three national daily newspapers, it was possible to take further steps to support the vendors: the price for the April edition was cut in half for vendors, from 10 Kroner to 5 (the readers still have to pay 20 Kroner). *Hus Forbi* is now supporting the health needs of its vendors — they simply go to a pharmacy, show their vendor card, and get medicine for free. *Hus Forbi* covers the cost. In Denmark, homeless and socially excluded people live 19 years shorter than an average citizen and many do not get the medications they are supposed to because they cannot afford it. Some of the vendors do not want to go out in the streets. Others are still selling the paper. Sales have gone down to around one third of what it should be and would be if not for the looming presence of COVID-19. But we are publishers and we are continuing to publish without trying to channel the readers/buyers into subscriptions or digital papers. This has of course been discussed, but the conclusion is that it is important to remain faithful to our business model. The government measures to stop the spread of the virus seem to have worked in Denmark. The health system is still functioning. One hundred and thirty-nine people have died. Five hundred and seventeen are in the hospital, and this figure is decreasing. If the society had been totally shut down, it may have been impossible to keep selling the paper. Maybe *Hus Forbi* has been a little lucky with the timing, too. We have started a digital project to be more visible on social media and examine possible ways to publish digitally. Because of this, there was a fine-tuned digital marketing machine ready to support the fundraiser. Some of the money raised has been spent on publishing, which has in fact manifested as an extra edition of *Hus Forbi* — a special pull-out in three national daily newspapers on Easter Saturday. The ads in these papers have already proved worth it in terms of increased funds being raised. Most stories in that extra edition are about homeless people coping with coronavirus, but the cover story is an interview with one of the vendors who was a rough sleeper, who was criminalized and prohibited from accessing the center of Copenhagen. His case was taken to court and the judge ruled that the police had broken the law. His compensation was only symbolic, and he is very critical about the way he is distanced and stigmatized by the public. Further negative government measures against the homeless population seem to have been put on hold in this situation. But then again, it does not look good if the government is doing little for a vulnerable, at-risk group, and at the same time just plays tough on them. And the government is already asking a lot. The prime minister said in a speech: "We have to ask those who are weak to be strong in this situation."

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The prime minister said in a speech: "We have to ask those who are weak to be strong in this situation."

Hus Forbi replied on Twitter: "We promise to be strong" — and got a like from the prime minister. This strength is built on solidarity, unity, good leadership, wise decisions and determination. In April, *Hus Forbi* put its own chairperson, vendor Simon Nielsen, on the cover with the donation number so that anyone can use their phone to donate easily and immediately.

A street paper hero is something one can certainly be. ■

Courtesy of Hus Forbi / INSP.ngo

This is compiled by **Michelle Galluzzo**. Got something we should know about? Email it to calendar@realchangenews.org. The deadline for calendar submissions is nine days prior to the date of publication.

HOUSING Continued from Page 4

both iterations.

Decreasing the amount of public comment on design decisions will end in worse buildings, Pedersen said.

“I find it hard to believe that projects that we cannot solve the tech challenge we have here for design review in our highly advanced tech city,” Pedersen said on April 20. “I’m concerned when there isn’t an opportunity for the public to weigh in, the quality of the housing can go down.”

The administrative review process, which most market-rate buildings would use, still invites written public comment at multiple stages.

Herbold told the public that she wanted to support it, but that a change that pushes affordable housing out of the design review process did not appear to comport with guidance from Attorney General Bob Ferguson about the kinds of legislation passed during the coronavirus emergency.

The bills must be “necessary or routine” or directly relate to addressing the coronavirus. Changing the design process to exempt affordable housing from review was an unnecessary policy change given that affordable housing projects are already prioritized in administrative review.

No one knows how long the coronavirus will shut down public meetings and other functions but getting people into housing during the pandemic is crucial to Seattle’s housing and virus-related crises, Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda said on April 20.

“I would propose it is precisely

because of the length of time it takes to build affordable housing that is exactly why we need to include affordable housing under this umbrella of Covid being a crisis that is directly affecting whether or not people can have access to healthy, secure housing,” Mosqueda said.

Design review can take as long as a year. Delays can make projects more expensive or render them dead in the water. That’s of particular concern with affordable housing projects that already operate on tight margins and complex funding streams.

Meetings will continue without public comment until the virtual meeting space can be set up. It’s uncertain how long that will take.

April 20 was the first time in two months that the City Council had a digital system for public comment. Nearly 30 people signed up hours before the meeting took place, and all but one were able to speak.

It wasn’t completely smooth on the council’s end — at one point, Morales lost the connection and struggled to regain it in time to vote.

Strauss said he dropped out of the meeting twice.

Getting a working virtual meeting system stood up will return the process to a “fairly familiar design review system,” prevent a backlog of projects from building up and help rebuild the Seattle economy, Councilmember Andrew Lewis said.

“The department should take the cue that sooner rather than later is better to set up the virtual process,” Lewis said. ■

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