



The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

Volume 61, No. 9

Summer 2016

ROSELAND LECTURE

Erin O'Brien to Deliver 3rd Annual Roseland Lecture

Fred Hewett

The Boston Ethical Community is pleased to announce that, on June 12, 2016, Professor Erin O'Brien will be our speaker on the occasion of the third Ed and Ruth Roseland Memorial Lecture.



Professor O'Brien has been chair of the Department of Political Science at the Boston campus of the University of Massachusetts since 2014. Her particular areas of interest

include the politics of poverty, social welfare policy, and urban politics.

O'Brien holds a Ph.D. in political science from American University in Washington, D.C.

In addition to her academic pursuits, O'Brien is a frequent contributor at various media outlets, including [WGBH](#) in Boston.

In 2013, Professor O'Brien served as lead policy consultant in Marty Walsh's successful mayoral bid in Boston.

Professor O'Brien is a Regional Leader for [Scholars Strategy Network](#), an organization whose mission is "connecting scholars and their research to policymakers, citizens associations, and the media." The group furnishes leading-edge research from the nation's colleges and universities, enabling lawmakers and other stakeholders to take advantage of important

developments in the academic arena.

In this election year, we are excited to have such an astute observer of the political scene, both in Boston and nationally, and we look forward to Professor O'Brien's analysis of current politics.

Ed and Ruth Roseland were longtime members of the Ethical Society of Boston. Both were very active contributors and highly valued in the community. The annual lecture pays tribute to their efforts to further the goals of the organization. The memorial lecture is supported by their son, Mark Roseland.

So, please mark your calendar for June 12. Professor O'Brien will be sharing her thoughts on a range of interesting subjects.

NEWSLETTER TO RESUME IN THE FALL.

**This is the last issue of
Volume 61 of *The Ethical
Humanist*. The next issue
will appear in September
2016.**



The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Homelessness

The Boston Ethical community has recently been giving its refreshment basket donations to Boston Health Care for the Homeless. We have given our Humanist of the Year award to people involved with providing services for homeless people, dating back to 1983. But why, in 2016, in the richest country in the world, are some people homeless?

Housing is one of the universal human rights in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The right of every family to a decent home is one of the rights that President Franklin Roosevelt said, in his 1944 State of the Union message, that the United States has accepted.

The obvious answer to why people are homeless is that the cost of housing is high and their incomes are too low to afford it. This replaces one question with two, both of which have their origin in the market economy. There is very little housing space available in our cities for people with little income, though there is plenty of residential housing space for people with high incomes. That's because housing, like most goods, is a market commodity, and those who offer it for sale or rent want as high a price for it as they can

get. And some people have little income because their bargaining power is weak, so they can't demand adequate wages for their work and have little or no non-wage income.

The foregoing suggests that non-market intervention is necessary to counter the effects of the market economy in producing homelessness. From time to time government has stepped in to provide such intervention. According to my encyclopedia, petitions to government to provide free land began as early as 1789. This was supported by the Free Soil party in the 1850s and then by the early Republican party. The Homestead Act was passed during the Lincoln administration. It granted land to would-be farmers. During the New Deal the federal government created the FHA and FNMA, which insured mortgages for people who otherwise wouldn't be good enough risks to get them. This was an indirect government subsidy.

Government assistance for housing was expanded by the GI Bill after the second world war, and later the Department of Housing and Urban Development provided direct subsidies. These were sharply cut back during the Reagan administration, with the predictable result that

homelessness increased substantially then.

People need homes. A home is more than shelter from harsh weather. It's a place where one has the right to be whenever one wants to be there. It's a place where one can keep whatever one wants to keep there. It's a place where one can be secure against unwanted intrusion. Having a home means being part of the community where the home is located. As the UN Declaration says, it needs to be treated as a universal human right.

As long as housing is predominantly a market commodity, its price will be "what the traffic will bear". As long as there is great disparity in purchasing power, that price will be high and there will be homelessness.

Tax policy, which requires localities to finance necessary services through real estate taxes, contributes to the creation of homelessness by raising the cost of providing housing.

Action by government through housing construction and subsidies, as well as by non-government institutions, like housing cooperatives, is necessary to reduce and ultimately eliminate homelessness.

ANNUAL MEETING

Annual Members Meeting Set for June 5

Brian King

We will hold our Annual Meeting of the membership on Sunday June 5 at 10:30 a.m. instead of our usual Sunday morning program. We have a couple of important items of business this year that you should be aware of.

Last December we held a workshop with Bart Worden, the Executive Director of the

American Ethical Union, and one of the things we learned was that we need to start thinking of ourselves as a smaller group. What worked for us when we were larger will drag us down if we are not careful.

The Board of Trustees has proposed reducing the size of the board from nine to seven members and eliminating the five member board of administrators of the Endowment Fund. This needs to be done because we are down to about twenty active members. This will be

discussed and voted on at the members meeting.

Looking forward to next year we need your feedback on the changes we made to our programs this year. Last year we decided to continue meeting every Sunday but to only have outside speakers twice a month to make sure those meetings were well attended. On other weeks we had alternative programming, including colloquies, book discussions, and videos. We will revisit that decision and see what changes or suggestions you have for the upcoming year.

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~ Program Schedule for June 2016 ~

<p>June 5</p>	<p>BEC Annual Members Meeting <i>See page 3</i></p>
<p>June 12</p>	<p>Roseland Lecture: Erin O'Brien, Political Scientist, UMass Boston <i>See page 1</i></p>

Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge

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