

4 November 2021

Rochelle Clark
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Council Clerk
1221 SW 4th Ave, Room 130
Portland, OR 97204

Subject: Affordable Housing Expansion

Dear Council Clerk,

My name is Rochelle Clark and I would like to share my story with you. A Portland native, I have always loved this city with its many amenities typical of city life while also prioritizing a strong connection with nature and both our immediate and global environments. While Portland has much to offer its residents, there is much that it is still lacking in basic necessities, namely that of affordable housing. I myself had trouble paying my \$1850 rent on a 3-bedroom house in the suburbs, especially after my partner passed away and I had to raise four children by myself. Working a low-wage job that barely got us by did not allow me to save up any money to afford a new place to move into, so once my lease was up, my children and I were homeless. From October until February, we were forced to double-up with other families in two-bedroom apartments for months and even spent some nights eating meals and sleeping in our car. Once I got my tax return, I was able to get an apartment for my family, but high rents still made it impossible to do anything for my children other than putting a roof over their head and food on the table; even this required that I never miss a day of work lest I be short on money and unable to pay a bill. Now that I have stabilized, I am able to attend Portland State University to finish my Bachelor's degree, and my own experience of homelessness has inspired me to advocate for better living conditions for everyone so that no one has to experience a lack of a bed or a home.

As I am sure you are well aware, the United States and Oregon have a rich history of racism and racist systems, including denying permanent and decent housing to largely Black Americans, but also many other minorities as well, forcing families into a lifetime of renting expensive and insufficient housing while working low wages, unable to afford to pursue education, and with nothing to pass down to future generations. While these systems are rooted in racism, they deny permanent and sufficient housing to all people living in poverty. Living in poverty and homelessness act as constant stressors, putting people at a disadvantage because they have to spend more of their cognitive resources on how they are going to meet their basic needs and less on improving their situations. People living in poverty or experiencing

homelessness are not afforded the same opportunities for betterment for themselves as are so easily afforded to the housed and those in an economic position to enrich their education and lives. Further, the stigmatization that people experiencing homelessness and poverty feel both from the public and from the very service providers that are supposed to help them contributes to their lack of willingness to find and use resources and services available to them.

I am asking that you prioritize getting every citizen into housing as soon as possible. Look into the expansion of the Section 8 program to include more housing in more areas; do away with complexes and communities that have been deemed “for the poor” which segregate them and make salient still their position in society. Require landlords to accept Section 8 from any eligible applicant, allowing them more options and doing away with years-long waitlists. Pause construction on luxury apartments and hotels and prioritize apartments that are affordable for low-income families. Everyone deserves sufficient housing that supports their wellbeing and no one should have to pay more than 30% of their wages on housing; more than that interferes with their quality of life and ability to create more for themselves to contribute to the community at large and pass down to future generations. Providing housing first to people experiencing homelessness removes a major stressor taking up their cognitive resources, freeing up more energy that they can put toward education and jobs. Investing in our citizens who are experiencing homelessness by supporting them with housing first will, in turn, facilitate their integration into and contributions to society.

This opportunity is about justice and equity. Too many Portland families have lived in poverty or homelessness for too long, and more are circling through. As rents continue to rise while wages stagnate, there doesn't look to be any end in sight. I urge you to reevaluate any policies currently in place that stem from a racist housing system and encourage segregation of the homeless and working poor to certain areas. Implement policies that make it easier for low-income families to find and keep housing. It's time to revamp how people get into and afford their housing. This is a step in the right direction to providing a good quality of life to all Portlanders, giving everyone the opportunity to live comfortably, attend to their families, and pursue career opportunities or higher education should they so desire, thereby not only bettering themselves but bettering our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I hope you will consider the implications of the current system on the lives of real citizens and what more affordable housing can do for them.

Respectfully,

Rochelle Clark