

From: [Keith Comess](#)
To: [Clerk General](#)
Cc: [TERESA J](#); [David Tunley](#); [James Tunley](#); [Michael Rosa](#); [greg glarkin.com](#); [Jan Cassetta](#); [Commissioner Mapps](#); [Commissioner Rubio](#); [Commissioner Hardesty](#); [Wheeler, Mayor](#); [Rep Reynolds](#); [Hillier, Lucas](#); [Fire Marshal \(PF&R Email\)](#); [Jacobsen, Matthew](#); [Frances DeRook](#); [saskia Comess](#); [Commissioner Ryan Office](#)
Subject: Testimony for City Council session, November 10, 2:00PM
Date: Saturday, November 6, 2021 12:39:43 PM

Greetings!

The many public health and criminal consequences of the homeless problems are well known to the City of Portland's government. National news reports have amplified the increasingly unsavory reputation of our city. As a result, immediate action must be undertaken to prevent amplification and extension of these problems into the near- and long-term future.

For the record and specifically:

- 1) Since the Portland metropolitan area housing emergency was first declared in 2015, there has been no tangible progress for mitigating much less any serious effort directed to "solving" the problem.
- 2) Unregulated homeless camps have proliferated throughout the city and metropolitan area.
- 3) These camps are plagued with crime, unsanitary/public health problems (including bio-hazardous waste, vermin, general garbage), open fires oftentimes juxtaposed to foliage, tents and sometimes to propane gas tanks, graffiti, and destruction of park ecology.
- 4) Access to public parks (e.g., Laurelhurst Park Annex) has been impeded, with passersby harassed, threatened and sometimes subject to displays/threats with deadly weapons. Illegal activities include trespassing, intimidation of housed residents, Americans with Disabilities Act violations and other irresponsible, dangerous behaviors.
- 5) Haphazard, arbitrary and inconsistent enforcement has squandered city resources, established a pattern of "intermittent reinforcement" for campers (i.e., understanding that rules and regulations can be confidently disregarded and ignored) and has fostered an attitude of cynicism with respect to City of Portland government in large sections of the residential and business community. Several independent polls document the decline in tourism and general bad reputation the city has created in local and national news.
- 6) Appearance of phenyl-2-propanone (P2P) methamphetamine (a non-ephedrine derived, easily manufactured and exceptionally dangerous form of "meth") has added to the danger of homeless camps and to homeless people themselves. P2P meth is directly responsible for severe psychiatric damage (some of it transient and some long-lasting or permanent). This is oftentimes manifested in aggressive behaviors and is closely linked to criminal activity. According to investigative reporter, Sam Quinones, "Different chemically than it was a decade ago, the drug is creating a wave of severe mental illness and worsening America's homelessness problem." (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/11/the-new-meth/620174/>)
- 7) The persistence and amplification of the homeless problem since first officially recognized in 2015 is objective evidence that City of Portland policies to date have been ineffective.

Costly gestures (such as "Safe Rest Villages") have been delayed and, even if constructed according to the original schedule, would offer insufficient accommodation and far too many disqualifying or exempting criteria to make any tangible impact on the problem. Rhetoric from various City Council members, Commissioners, the Mayor's Office and other officials in government falsely represent a panacea is on the near-term horizon.

Given the above:

- 1) Fully funded (i.e., around-the-clock and daily), adequately staffed Behavioral Health Units must be immediately created using already available municipal, state and federal funds. This includes the \$62 million in "excess" funds recently "discovered". These teams must include an armed police presence with trained officers complemented by social workers and an on-call mental health professional.
- 2) Stringent and regularly, consistently and effectively enforced rules that conform to existing criteria for clearing homeless camps (e.g., "Shelter to Housing Continuum") need to be immediately implemented.
- 3) The criminal code must be enforced as it pertains to threats, displays of deadly weapons with intent to harass and/or intimidate, open fires and etc.
- 4) Public access to parks and business facilities must be assured.
- 5) Shelter space must be immediately created and offered. The option to remain in unregulated tents and other camps must not be available.
- 6) Portland Police Bureau staffing must promptly be returned to adequate levels to deal with gun violence and other criminal activities.

In summary:

- 1) Objective data on fires, crime (property, violent, regulatory) demonstrate a close correlation with homelessness.
- 2) Proliferation of P2P meth will and already has aggravated matters.
- 3) Many businesses (e.g., Major League Baseball, the Womens' PGA Tournament) have declined options in the Portland area due to homelessness, crime and the increasingly unsavory reputation of the city.
- 4) Subjectively, many residents and tourists do not feel safe in Portland.
- 5) The service sector has been adversely impacted and unemployment due to self-inflicted inaction will adversely affect the local economy.

Failure of city government to act has fostered cynicism amongst voters. "The City That Works" has, as a result of inaction, devolved into "The City That's Failed".

Keith Comess, MD