



South Portland Neighborhood Association

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March 4, 2021

Mayor Wheeler
Commissioner Hardesty, Ryan, Rubio, Mapps

Re: S2HC report and its associated recommendations

The South Portland Neighborhood Association supports the city's efforts to explore additional ways and sites for shelters for the many who need it. However, **we strongly believe that Open Space, including developed parks, natural areas, and trails, should be removed from consideration for siting of either permanent or temporary shelter.**

Our parks and designated natural areas are not surplus land to be inhabited. They have been designated (and purchased) as public spaces because of their intrinsic value as wildlife habitat or public recreation opportunities or, more often, both. They are lands to be valued. And protected. They have been hard-won by parks advocates and nurtured by volunteers and park employees. Public spaces have been set aside for everyone to enjoy.

- There is ample available vacant and underutilized land within the city for shelters *without* using natural areas and parks.
- Allowing shelters in public natural areas and parks removes public uses by everyone else.
- The negative effects of shelters on natural areas, open space and parks is massive, including soil compaction, decimated wildlife habitat and garbage.

We must do more to find shelter for the home/houseless. Not just housing but social and medical services need to be a part of this solution. But usurping our public parks and natural areas for camping is not the right nor the appropriate answer.

SPNA hopes the city will continue to protect our public parks and natural areas while simultaneously working to increase housing and services for those who need it.

Respectfully,

Michael Kaplan, chair
South Portland Neighborhood Association