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#267147 | March 9, 2021

Testimony to Portland City Council on the Shelter to Housing Continuum Project, Recommended Draft

The City of Portland's Shelter to Housing Continuum proposal that will be presented to City Council on March 17, as currently written, would allow temporary outdoor homeless shelters in park open spaces. I am against this ill conceived thoughtless policy proposal. For example, Open Space Zones should only be used for outdoor shelters in the event of a declared emergency due to a catastrophic natural disaster such as an earthquake. Following are some of the reasons for this testimony. There is no need to use Open Space Zones for shelters as there are adequate vacant and underutilized sites available across the city without the use of Open Space Zones. In many areas of Portland, there is already a shortage of park open spaces for use by the community so use of these spaces for any non-parks purpose should be restricted. Residents across the city, especially those without their own gardens and yards, depend on park access for essential recreation and their own mental and physical health. Siting of shelters in parks will adversely impact the surrounding park area and intended land use, with possible harm to wildlife and natural resources. City parks were not designed and are not appropriate, respectful places for people to live. The houselessness of thousands of Portland residents is not a short-term emergency, rather it is an ongoing crisis. As such, the long-term planning that is required for this crisis cannot include an expectation that temporary shelters in parks offer a solution. While park open spaces are not appropriate for shelters, park facilities could be resources in other ways, for example, informational signs on where/how to get services could be posted in restrooms and community centers, community centers could provide drinking water, showers, and possibly computer stations.

Testimony is presented without formatting.