

Linda Fogerson

#267182 | March 10, 2021

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

Low-income and Disadvantaged Residents will Bear the Brunt, Again The city of Portland is to be applauded for the way in which it has approached the homeless problem. The city government, and by extension taxpayers, are making substantial investments in finding solutions that provide dignity to the houseless and concrete assistance to those who need and want help in finding their way off of the streets. During this pandemic, at great effort and expense, many of the homeless have found safety in temporary shelters. And, we are all looking forward to seeing how the substantial bond measure we passed to help house the homeless will be implemented. The city should continue to search for targeted solutions like those mentioned above. Please remove parks, natural areas, and trails (Open Space Zone) from consideration for siting of either permanent or temporary shelters except in the case of natural disasters. Our parks need to remain a sanctuary for city residents seeking recreation and respite in the parks. The residents most profoundly impacted by homeless shelters in the parks will be the low-income and disadvantaged. Often parks are the only places where these residents can go to exercise, de-stress, and host large family celebrations. Having lived in low-income housing, I know personally how important parks are for low-income and disadvantaged members of our community. We lived in a small apartment that boasted a view of a stark alleyway. Like many of our neighbors, we used the park as our gym, running and walking in the park daily. Getting out of the stuffy, hot apartment on weekends for fresh air and relaxation was an essential part of our lives. I also found that the best way for me to host a family/friends gathering was to organize a picnic in a park. Had there been homeless shelters in the park, I would not have felt safe exercising in the park and would have foregone hosting family gatherings there. In other words, I would have lost access to the park. Allowing temporary shelters in city parks is not a solution; it is just moving the problem from the city streets to the city parks. This would be at best a temporary measure shifting the problem from businesses trying to protect their storefronts and provide safety for their employees to city residents hoping for respite and recreation in city parks. The proposed change, would shift the very real disruption of homeless camps from those who already have a strong voice in city government (downtown businesses) to those who, because of their lack time or financial constraints, are not affiliated with established interest groups. Will the revenue from Parks levy we just approved in November would be used to clean up after and manage temporary homeless shelters – instead of expanding Park programs and maintenance as was promised in the campaign literature. Locating homeless shelters in our parks will increase crime both in the parks and their surrounding neighborhoods. We have all heard of the Broken Window Theory which states

that visible signs of disorder and misbehavior in an environment encourage further disorder and misbehavior, leading to serious crimes. One of the reasons Mt. Tabor Park is so accessible and safe is because so many volunteers pick up trash in the park -- every day, 365 days a year. This clean environment sends many messages to the park visitor; you are safe, pick up after yourself, and perhaps most importantly, we respect and value you and the experience you seek as you enter the park. Please remove parks, natural areas, and trails (Open Space Zone) from consideration for siting of either permanent or temporary shelters except in the case of natural disasters. This will not benefit homeless in any strategic or systemic way. Instead, this is a create-a-problem-for-someone-else approach that will lead to a further degradation of the limited services we currently provide to the low-income and underserved in our community. Because of the incredibly important role parks have played in my life, I now volunteer as a board member for the Friends of Mt. Tabor Park. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to the proposed amendment.

Testimony is presented without formatting.