



March 12, 2021

**Testimony Regarding Shelter to Housing Continuum Project
City Council Agenda Item #166
Council Hearing Scheduled on March 17, 2021**

To Mayor Wheeler & City Council:

This testimony is on behalf of the SW Neighborhoods, Inc. and is being submitted by leaders of our Equity & Inclusion, Land Use, Parks, Schools, Public Safety, and Watershed Committees. We are residents of Southwest Portland who would like to help our houseless community members find the supportive housing, services, and shelter they deserve. Several of us have family members who are living on the streets due to mental illness or other disability, so understand these challenges first-hand. We are also advocates for our parks and natural areas and those who enjoy them.

As such, we support the Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC) project but do not support inclusion of Open Space Zones for consideration as temporary shelters, except for a declaration of emergency by the City Council due to a catastrophic natural disaster. Our reasons for this position are as follows.

1. There is no need to use Open Space Zones, including parks, natural areas, and trails, for shelters as there are adequate vacant and underutilized sites available without the use of Open Space Zones. Our coalition members are interested in working with partners to help identify available sites in our neighborhoods, if needed.
2. 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.
3. Siting of shelters in parks will adversely impact the surrounding park area and intended land use, with possible harm to wildlife and other natural resources. City parks were not designed and are not appropriate, respectful places for people to live.
4. 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.

5. 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.

In summary, the residents of Southwest Portland would like to help work towards expansion of housing, services, and shelter solutions for houseless Portlanders. We value the work that has been done to prepare the Shelter to Housing Continuum proposal, and request that the proposal be changed to reflect that City Council would retain the authority to site temporary shelters in an Open Space Zone only during a declared emergency due to a catastrophic natural disaster such as an earthquake.

Thank you,

Leslie Hammond, President
SW Neighborhoods, Inc.