

ann mcmullen

#267379 | March 15, 2021

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

I am not opposed to opening alternative shelters. Just the opposite. We think it is imperative alternative shelter options like villages and supervised outdoor camps be made available to unhoused residents as quickly as possible. This code change will give people currently living on sidewalks and in their cars a safe place where they can recover from the trauma of living on the street and begin to heal with dignity. Given escalating crisis I understand the need for the changes, but I have grave concerns this code change will be implemented in a way that results in BIPOC communities and economically marginalized communities, which are located primarily in East Portland, bearing the brunt of this code change. In fact, both BPS and Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) have already signaled their intent to do this in their current rhetoric and actions:

- BPS: “The provision of outdoor shelters will not be limited by the supply of suitably zoned urban land. The impediment will be costs, the cost of purchasing land, the cost of development, and the cost of operations.”
- “But availability alone does not guarantee that new shelters and sanctioned camps will be equitably distributed across the city. More important is how such properties are obtained, developed and operated.”
- “A shelter in Northwest Portland would've cost the joint office \$10 million to renovate, Theriault says—a lot more than comparable space east of 82nd Avenue. "That kind of math has to go into things too," he says.”

JOHS has a history of migrating downtown homeless populations to East Portland. Here's how:

- a) It began with the Peace Shelter residents relocated to the Hansen Shelter and has continued with the opening and operation of Blackburn.
- b) Between Blackburn and the Wy'East Shelter, located within 8 blocks of each other, Hazelwood and Mill Park are already housing almost 400 unhoused community members. That's 20% of the county shelter beds. And if you have doubt about how that has impacted the neighborhood, come out 122nd and Burnside and see for yourself.
- c) Three of the six permanent facilities opened in the last 5 years have been located in East Portland and outer SE. This includes Wy'East Shelter, Blackburn, and Laurelwood Center.
- d) The average shelter size is significantly larger in East Portland which is already clustering large populations of unhoused in marginalized communities in East Portland and SE.

I also have concerns with the RFPQ for shelter proposals. In addition to our concerns about equitable placement of the houseless, I've read the RFPQ the JOHS put out for shelter proposals and it does not inspire confidence for humane shelter solutions.

- Lack of sanitation requirements -- RFPQ does not stipulate minimum services such as sanitation or trash collection be attached to alternative shelters. Will neighborhoods have to absorb these services?
- Neighborhood outreach and engagement is missing -- I have not been able to find anything indicating the county will require

shelter operators to do outreach to neighbors or engage community stakeholders to ensure these shelter options are embedded into neighborhoods to ensure the unhoused are truly integrated into the community in a way that promotes positive interactions between housed and unhoused. In fact, the new unconditional use designation means shelter operators will not have to do this at all. • Safety frameworks and requirements are nonexistent -- I have not been able to find anything indicating the county has any kind of framework, plan, goals, minimum safety requirements, or standards as a pre-requisite for opening these new alternative shelters. And again, the county will have no authority to regulate these private shelters. Before any code change is made permanent the city and county must do the following: 1. Avoid concentrating shelters in already compromised locations -- add geographic restrictions or filters to limit the number of outdoor encampments sited in poorer, denser neighborhoods to avoid concentrating even more vulnerable populations in certain geographies. 2. Extend the State of Emergency -- so the county is still able to site shelters on an accelerated timeline. 3. Ensure code change gets intended humane results -- delay the code change until a better framework is in place for shelter implementation ensuring a fair distribution of shelter placements as well as better managed facilities for humanely sheltering community members. The JOHS and city are punting on the homeless issue and have signaled they intend to put it on the backs of poorer neighborhoods. Both housed and unhoused neighbors will be left to fend for themselves, at the mercy of unregulated camps. For a city that claims to be focused on righting systemic and historic inequities this feels like politics as usual. Pushing the unhoused out of sight to East Portland is not good policy. And proliferating unregulated camps is merely a tool of survival, not a tool to change lives. Let's do better for our houseless community and the neighborhoods.

Testimony is presented without formatting.