

Stan Vernon

#267601 | March 15, 2021

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

Please remove parks and playgrounds from acceptable Open Space Zones to be used for campsites. While well-intentioned, the S2HC Proposal as written will only exacerbate an already untenable, and indeed dangerous, situation. Sanctioned sites are indeed the way to go, but situating them in spaces designed for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people, especially city families who have no other access to open space, is woefully misguided and smacks of seeking to appear to solve a problem. Parks are not equipped to handle the needs of a vulnerable population that requires both basic and specialized services. Once word gets abroad that Portland parks are open for camping, we will end up with Occupy Portland multiplied exponentially. What will it cost the city to repair all the damage down the road? Moreover, you cannot lump the entire homeless population into one group, as if they are all homeless for the same reason. Affordable housing will not solve the problem of people who just want to camp and think they should be able to camp wherever they want. These are often people with mental health and substance abuse issues who refuse shelter because they don't want to abide by rules. If this situation is allowed to proliferate across parks throughout the city, park users will increasingly feel unsafe, especially if playgrounds are littered with used syringes as has happened at Laurelhurst Park. This is a matter of public health and safety versus public endangerment for housed and houseless alike. You don't allow bars, dispensaries, or dirty bookstores near schools. Why would you even consider allowing this to happen in city parks where children congregate? You need to think very carefully about the legacy of this administration. The Hales administration is remembered as the one that allowed this problem to escalate. Will the Wheeler administration be remembered not for actually helping the homeless—which campsites in or near parks and playgrounds most assuredly will not—but for destroying the city's publicly paid-for green spaces?

Testimony is presented without formatting.