

# Dena Turner

**#267617 | March 15, 2021**

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

To: Portland Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Council Subject: Opposition to Shelter to Housing Continuum proposed zone changes allowing public parks to be used for homeless shelters

Portlanders have long supported their parks as places for recreation, open spaces for roaming, and greenspaces which provide habitat for the wild species we love. Parks were never intended to house humans. Parks are intended to house wild creatures that dwell in our City and to offer humans recreation, fresh air, beauty. There are many reasons why Portland parks should not be used to shelter humans. These are detailed below.

1. Many other vacant and unused sites exist. Parks are not needed to shelter homeless. Using the precious and limited natural environment for shelter degrades that natural environment. Other sites are available and must be used. These sites are noted in the Buildable Lands Inventory.
2. This is a long-term, rather than a short-term problem. The pandemic has created economic hardship, but Portland has many chronically homeless. Other resources must be used to shelter these people. Opening our parks to shelter homeless will open up a cycle of degradation of the parks. Portland must not go down this pathway. Offering shelters in our parks makes the statement that homeless encampments are allowed on our shared park lands, whereas this cannot be a long-term solution. Yesterday, when I was out enjoying nature, I noted that there is a homeless encampment inside the Vanport Wetlands natural area. There is also a homeless encampment adjacent to Force Lake in the area of the Expo Center. Homeless camps have proliferated in Portland at the expense of sacred and precious natural areas. Homeless camps within natural areas threaten contamination with human waste and garbage. Camps threaten native plants and animals that make our lakes and natural areas what they are – a place of beauty and refreshment. Allowing shelters within our parks threatens more and continued abuse of our public lands.
3. Portlanders need green and open spaces. Portlanders need parks. Our parks are bursting at the seams with walkers, bikers, dog-walkers, joggers, birdwatchers. Our parks are already stressed to the limit. There is no room in our parks to add the element of homelessness. The park experience is one of refreshment, breathing in fresh air, rejuvenating our senses with natural beauty. Yes, we must face the fact that we have societal needs, but we need not face that when we are recreating in nature. I go to the park regularly as it refreshes my entire being; I am nurtured in the outdoors of parks. I don't go to the park to be reminded of unsolved needs of society. We must solve homelessness, but that should not be at the expense of the ability to nurture ourselves in the outdoors.
4. Parks and greenspaces are an absolute necessity as habitat for wild species in our City. Birds nest in our parks, and migrate through. Squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, and even coyotes dwell in our parks.

Twenty-four hour human habitation in parks will severely hamper the ability of native species to forage, breed, and raise their young. Three billion birds have been lost in North America in the past few decades. The planet is experiencing mass extinctions, with species going extinct at rates far surpassing the normal rate of extinction. Parks, greenways, and open spaces must be preserved in order to preserve a semblance of biological diversity on the planet. The neighborhood park is recognized as a small island of habitat that is frequented by birders. Portland Audubon has led early morning trips there for decades, as it does in a number of parks. Large groups of people go to these parks to witness the magic of the spring bird migration. 24 hour noise will severely and negatively influence the magic and beauty of spring bird migration in our parks. You may say that one season lost to bird migration through the parks will not matter. Well, it matters hugely. The loss of any habitat on the bird migration route dictates further loss of species numbers at a time when species numbers are plummeting. 5. President Biden has made it a goal to set aside 30 percent of US lands and waters as natural habitat. Setting aside lands and waters preserves the habitability of planet earth. It will preserve the natural biodiversity upon which humanity depends. Portland is a "green" City that is interested in sustainability. Portland must get on board with the Biden plan of preservation of the planet and preservation of species at this unique time in history. We have a unique chance to save greenspaces and to mitigate mass extinction on planet earth. Yes, in Portland. Species migrate, nest, reproduce, raise young in Portland parks and open spaces. 6. There is danger here. I would like to say that homeless do not pose a danger. We must be realistic. Some homeless are long-term and do not want to be sheltered because of alcohol, drug, or mental health problems. The community at large must not be subjected while recreating to addictive and mental health problems. This poses a danger. I am a woman who walks in the nearby park. Sometimes I walk at the end of the day. Many women jog in that park. There have been at least two cases of rape or attempted rape in the park. Park tax dollars were designated for park usage that is recreational and greenspace. I should not have to be afraid of walking in a park at dusk. Other women should not have to be afraid of jogging in the parks. Parents should not have to be afraid to let children play in the parks. 7. If there ever was a time that parks are needed for outdoor recreation, it is now. Parks and open spaces are limited and overused. The nearby park is used more than it has ever been. We must not subject limited parks resources to homeless shelters, degrading the parks as recreational areas and green and open spaces. 8. This use of parks appears hasty. While Portlanders must come to the aid of homeless, Mayor Ted Wheeler and the City Council must not implement a hasty solution. A long-lasting solution is needed rather than a temporary plan. Sheltering homeless in parks puts Portland on the wrong pathway. It gives the message to the community and to homeless that it is OK to camp in parks. Portland must not be forever policing the parks for camping and unintended uses because the City gives the message that sheltering in parks is OK. Parks and greenspaces will begin to look like freeway on-ramps and exits, NE 33rd Avenue between Columbia Blvd and Marine Drive. Yes, our parks will look like the newly named "Dumptown," formerly "Stumptown." 9. Parks and greenspaces are sacred. They are sacred as parks. They are sacred for the rejuvenation of our spirits. Many seek solace in the outdoors. We hope for just and equitable solutions for homelessness. At the same time, life sustaining and rejuvenating gifts which parks give to individuals and to the City as a

whole must not be degraded. Please be reminded that many spend high quality and much needed time in Portland parks. We live in a City, but it is an unalienable right to have parks and open spaces in which to recreate. Please do not degrade Portland parks. Please do not subject Portlanders to fear and danger. Please remember that parks were intended for recreation and greenspace. Parks were not intended to shelter humans. Let's not start down that road. Please find other solutions to shelter homeless. Sincerely, Dena D. Turner

Testimony is presented without formatting.