

Gerald Segal

#267711 | March 15, 2021

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

Because my work schedule does not allow me to testify in person, I am using this format to express my strong opposition to the proposed Shelter to Housing Continuum zone changes that would allow for public parks and golf courses to be used as places for homeless encampments. I only recently learned of these proposed zone changes. I don't play golf but, since my family and I moved to Portland in the 1980s, we have extensively used Portland parks, including Laurelhurst Park, one of the crowning jewels of the Portland Parks system. My wife, now deceased, was one of the neighborhood activists that helped enact the policy which prohibited public consumption of alcohol in parks. This policy effectively discouraged the use of Portland parks by individuals with alcohol abuse disorder as a venue for their antisocial and disruptive behavior, greatly enhancing the ability of Portland's citizens, including families, many with children, to enjoy our parks. Moreover, many of the users of Laurelhurst Park don't live in Laurelhurst, but travel from other neighborhoods to enjoy the park's beauty and amenities (i.e., the dog park, tennis courts, soccer field, hiking and jogging trails, etc.). Laurelhurst Park and our other parks have served as a respites for citizens who been impacted by the pandemic and economic downturn. The proposed S2HC zone changes represent a much greater threat to the our beautiful parks than the public use of alcohol which had been condoned when we moved to Portland. Laurelhurst Park has already been the site of homeless encampments, which continuously re-emerge after they are cleared. These homeless encampments are major sources of waste (see yesterday's Oregonian article on Portland's transition from "Stumptown to Dumptown"), including garbage, decaying food, human waste, and drug paraphernalia (including used needles). This waste represents a public health menace, both to the homeless and the many individuals, including small children, who try to use the parks. Many of the homeless individuals aggressively panhandle, use open fires, and are threatening and intimidating. In contrast to the stated position of councilman Hardesty, who apparently lives in a "park deficit" neighborhood" and, therefore, is not subjected daily to the problems which are associated with homeless encampments in and around parks, the proposed zoning changes will make an already bad situation much, much worse. To think that encouraging homeless encampments will not negatively impact, in a major way, the safety and environmental benefits of our parks, is naïve at best and dangerous at worst. Adoption of these zoning changes is tantamount to the city "throwing in the towel" with respect to the homeless situation. The revenue generated by measure 16-210 should be used to immediately expand the city's homeless shelter capacity and to provide services which address the root causes of homelessness, including addiction, mental illness, and joblessness. As a

health care provider who regularly encounters the challenges of the medical problems of the homeless, I know that Portland can, and should, do much better than the S2HC zone changes.

Testimony is presented without formatting.