

Marianne Nelson
1644 SE Rex St.
Portland OR 97202

March 15, 2021

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

Your vote on the “Shelter to Housing Continuum” Amendments to the City Code is extremely important. The problem of thousands of Portland residents without shelter is now chronic, not a short-term emergency. And as such, long-term planning is required to meet this crisis. Any expectation that temporary shelters in parks offer a solution is a false assumption.

Please allow the use of Park Open Space Zones for outdoor shelters ONLY in the event of a declared emergency due to a catastrophic natural disaster such as an earthquake, not for homeless shelters. We need to identify and implement new solutions to help our houseless neighbors, but locating shelters in parks is not a solution for many reasons.

- There are adequate vacant and underutilized sites available across the city without the use of Open Space Zones.
- In many areas of Portland, there is already a shortage of park open spaces for use by the community. Allowing shelters in existing parks would reduce even further residents’ access for essential recreation and their own mental and physical health.
- Parks budget and staff are already strained. This would just add to that problem.

Park facilities could provide resources in other ways, for example: restrooms, drinking water, and possibly other services in community centers. Please explore what ways parks could be of assistance to the homeless without offering them shelter.

I commend you for your partnership with BPS, Housing Bureau, and Joint City-County Office of Homeless Services to retool City codes to better address the homelessness crisis. We need to provide fair housing, expand shelter and housing options, and improve city code to aid shelter and housing providers.

Sincerely,

Marianne Nelson

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