



March 15, 2021

Mayor Ted Wheeler- mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Mingus Mapps- MappsOffice@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Carmen Rubio- Comm.Rubio@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty- joann@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Dan Ryan- CommissionerRyanOffice@portlandoregon.gov

RE: Concerns about Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC) proposal

Dear Portland City Council,

We the East Portland Parks Coalition, a self-selected, informal group of residents who care about parks in East Portland, would like to express our concerns regarding the recent proposal Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC). As East Portland residents we do share the concerns of our Houseless Neighbors and do support programs that address those community needs. Families not being properly sheltered and having to face all the issues with living outdoors is not in line with our community values. We do agree that long term solutions need to be explored and we should continue to what we can for them.

However, as a park group we are most concerned about what might be built in parks, open spaces, trails, and greenspaces. East Portland already has fewer parks and less tree canopy compared to the rest of the city and we desire to keep our parks, trees, and natural environment available for community use and healthy environment. Some of our concerns include:

1. Permanent shelters will not be allowed on property zoned Open Space, but temporary shelters could be (for up to 6 months, longer if an emergency is declared). City staff have indicated there is adequate land available for the needed shelters without using park land.
2. They have also claimed that shelters are unlikely to be built in parks because doing so would be very unpopular with the public. However, others have indicated that parking lots at some of our parks are being considered as sites for outdoor shelters. Park advocates would like formal assurance that parks will NOT be used for shelters. They are seeking an amendment to the ordinance stating that parks will be used for temporary shelters ONLY in the event of a NATURAL disaster (e.g., major earthquake).
3. Trails- In looking at the zoning map that is part of the Comprehensive Plan, it appears that the three major trails in East Portland are all zoned Open Space (I-205 MUP, Springwater Corridor and Marine Drive Trail. People need to feel safe using them for transportation and for recreation. I have heard many, many individuals say they no longer feel safe using these trails for walking or biking.

4. We have a number of "undeveloped parks" Several people testified that temporary outdoor shelters should not be developed in "developed parks, sensitive natural areas, etc...". I would advocate they not be built in the "undeveloped parks" in East Portland either. While these properties have not been developed yet, local residents (many of whom have no other open space near their homes) do use these because there is no other option near them. I'm wondering if the folks who developed S2HC have considered them parks -- or merely vacant lots.
5. Equity-There is nothing in the proposal that would make sure that these shelters are not clustered in existing low-income pockets within the city. Staff keep saying that just because most of the vacant or under-utilized land is in East Portland, doesn't mean that area will end up with the majority of the shelters (indoor or outdoor, permanent or temporary). But, there is no guarantee that won't happen either -- in the zoning code, or in other documents.
6. East Portland has been park deficient since we were annexed more than 25 years ago. When annexed, there were a number of small sites that Multnomah County had designated as "Future Parks". In addition, the City has purchased (and land-banked) additional properties for future parks. A few of these have been developed in recent years, but many are still little more than vacant lots. This could make them likely targets for the siting of temporary outdoor shelters. However, these undeveloped parks are critical properties in our neighborhoods; they are used by our residents, many of whom live in multi-housing buildings and have few other options for recreation and contact with nature.

Thank you for hearing our concerns and if you would like to follow up more please contact Linda Robinson at lrobinspdx@comcast.net. Our Coalition meets every first Thursday of the month and everyone is welcome to attend to learn more about our community concerns.

Sincerely on behalf of the East Portland Parks Coalition,
-Linda Robinson, Co-Chair
-Carol Hasenberg, Co-Chair