

# Amy Valentine

**#277835 | March 16, 2021**

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

Please do not allow camping in our public parks!! I think that there should be shelter available for those who need it, but not in our parks. It would make our parks basically inaccessible to the people who pay for them! If you think that is not the case, just drive around town to witness the destruction on our sidewalks and roadsides. Go to the Irvington Post Office and look across the street. The severe damage would last for years to come (please refer to testimony by PPR horticulturists Lance Wright and Paul LaCroix, below) Lance Wright, February 25th, 12:16pm "Mayor Wheeler and Council, you are currently discussing a recommendation to provide emergency and 'temporary' housing for our 'houseless' population on lands which will include our Parks and natural areas....From my perspective, this is a bad idea. The housing crisis is not temporary. It is a result of long term policies and an economy that has both excluded people from the housing market and undermined their own financial security, their abilities to meet their own needs. This is not temporary and dedicating Park land already in need by the community, will effectively remove and sadly, further degrade it, discouraging their use and central purpose for existing. Studies done by the City have shown that there are already adequate open/vacant lands available to meet our housing needs. Don't do this! As a former horticulturist for the City of Portland who spent his last 16 years of service caring for our downtown Parks, I have seen what this can do as this problem has worsened. I had to deal with it every day on the ground. Parks have been chronically underfunded and understaffed and it has only been due to staff's considerable and extraordinary efforts that our Parks have been as good as they are. With COVID, the economic downturn, the consequent large reductions in revenues to pay for their care, the unfilled staff vacancies and loss of seasonal worker positions, the significant erosion of staff morale, our Parks are already in a sad state, a state of deterioration I have never seen over the last 35 years. Parks landscapes are already degraded today, many are in the process of being 'lost'. A Park cannot simply be weeded later and begun anew. A landscape is not like a computer which can simply be 'rebooted'. Plants are already being lost while weeds are coming to dominate Park landscapes. Many weeds are perennial and difficult to kill and control. They cannot be scraped away. Their root systems remain on the site from which they will return. Others produce seed by the hundreds of thousands which can remain viable on site for years and re-establish in a rejuvenated landscape. Bringing a Park back under such circumstances is not like building new, it is much more difficult and expensive. Native or not landscapes are complex, living communities. Add to this the issues of sanitation, the inevitable soil compaction this will bring from over-use, the trash and broken plants and you will create a problem that will continue for years to come if not decades. I do

not see a huge pot of money at the end of this that Parks will have available to tap into when the housing crisis ends, indeed, I don't see where the money is going to come from to get out of the current crisis...even without the additional burden a houseless population will put on it. I urge the Mayor and Council to remove Parks and Open Spaces from the lands available for temporary housing. I strongly urge any and all Parks supporters to urge Council to do the same. There are other workable alternatives to Parks land, land that will not, if so used, cause irreparable harm to our Park system, an asset which Portlanders are ever more dependent upon for recreation opportunities and peace of mind. Parks provide the space and opportunity for necessary and legitimate activity, an increasingly rare and difficult green respite for us in a built, hard surfaced, urban world...not to mention their role as a refuge for our regional wildlife that itself is coming under ever more survival pressures." Paul LaCroix, February 25th, 8:45pm "I retired from PP&R after 30 years of service in 2017. Lance and I worked together in many of the same parks over the years. I was a Union Steward and constant activist for protecting PP&R budgets over the length of my career. It makes me extremely sad to see the condition of Portland Parks today. Ever since the Mortgage Backed Securities/Banking crisis that started in 08/09 there have been ever increasing numbers of people living without shelter in and around our public spaces, because they don't have anywhere to go and they want to be close to the public services and transportation they've become dependent on to survive. I have cleaned up numerous homeless campsites over the years, it's always an unpleasant and potentially very dangerous task. You never know what you might find; you learn never to open cooler-chests. So I second every word of Lance's letter and encourage all my friends that live in Portland to resist this misguided humanitarian effort to address Portland's housing crisis."

Testimony is presented without formatting.