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March 16, 2021

Honorable Ted Wheeler, Mayor
City Council Members
City of Portland
1221 SW Fourth Avenue, Room 130
Portland, OR 97204

Re: Objection to Inclusion of Open Space Zones for Either Temporary or Permanent Housing Shelters

Hearing Date: March 17, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Members of the Portland City Council:

I am a long-time resident of our City and have both a home and also with my son, a condominium in the Pearl, where he lives.

I, of course, support efforts to help the homeless in our Community. I voted in favor of the Metro Ballot Measure that is raising an estimated \$250 million annually to provide shelter, housing, care, and related services for the homeless. I submit this letter to strongly object to the existing language in the Shelter to Housing Continuum recommendations from the Planning and Sustainability Commission, and request removal from that proposal of the language “open space zones for either temporary or permanent homeless shelters.”

My concern, and of everyone I have spoken to, includes the following reasons:

1. Loss of trust in our City-elected officials.

I voted with others in good faith to adopt a \$250 million annual fund to support paying for services that would not require any “open space zones” in our City to be used for temporary or permanent homeless shelters. I am sure that voters and the business community of our City would not have supported this bond measure if they knew the City would, after such Bond measure was approved, adopt a duplicative plan to use precious “open space” in our City to house homeless people, even temporarily. Doing so, would create a terrible loss of trust in our elected City officials that would become an impediment to asking the Community for help in the future.

2. There is available and under utilized land already in our existence in our City.

A BPS staff report to the PSC makes this abundantly clear: “The Buildable Lands Inventory showed us that we have plenty of land to meet the City's housing needs, for everybody.

3. Equity and Access—Allowing shelters in public open space removes that space from use for intended park purposes by everyone else.

Increasingly, Portland residents live in spaces with no yard or outdoor area whatsoever.

As our population increases and densifies, the role of parks, natural areas and trails becomes more and more essential. Looking ahead, the need for even more parks and open space will be critical to maintain our region’s livability for all. Changing the allowed uses for properties in the Open Space Zone makes it unavailable for its intended use.

Over the past twenty years, Portland voters have consistently approved tax measures to address inequities in access to parks, natural areas, and trails, most recently approving a new Parks levy in November 2020, in the midst of the pandemic. Obviously, access to these special places is important to our citizens. We cannot betray that trust.

4. Physical & Mental Health - Nature is not just a nice thing to have – it is fundamentally important for our health, wellbeing and happiness.

Study after study has confirmed that regular contact with nature is required for mental health and well-being. When people visit parks and green spaces, they benefit from a reduction in anxiety, depression, and stress. Ensuring that these places are always there for *everyone* is critical for the health of our entire community.

The pandemic has highlighted the immensely important role that parks and natural areas play in a densely populated urban environment. On July 31, 2020, a *Washington Post* article entitled “Pandemic underscores how public parks shape public health” reported that “Traffic to local parks is up dramatically [in the pandemic] as people seek safe outdoor places for recreation. Online searches for terms like “trails near me” . . . have spiked to unprecedented levels in recent months.”

5. Negative Impacts on the Resource - The environmental impacts of outdoor shelter are real and are difficult, if not impossible, to mitigate.

Chapter 33.296 of the Portland City Code “allows short-term and minor deviations from the requirements of the zoning code for uses that are truly temporary in nature, will not adversely impact the surrounding area and land uses, and which can be terminated and removed immediately.” Siting permanent or temporary shelters in the Open Space Zone would be in direct conflict with the intent of this chapter. When protected and well managed, urban wildlife habitat makes important and measurable contributions not only to urban wildlife, but also to clean air and clean water. Sadly, these areas are already under stress. We see around us the negative environmental impacts resulting from unsanctioned camping in open space. It does not take long for the things we value most in our parks, natural areas and trails to be destroyed by overuse or

inappropriate use. Siting larger, sanctioned camps or shelters in parks or natural areas, even on a “temporary” basis, is a policy decision that would do irreparable harm.

I respectfully request that you do not include the Open Space Zones language for either temporary or permanent homeless shelters. There is ample reasons not to allow Open Space Zones and parks to be used when there is funding available to deal with the issues presented and there are other City properties that can be used that will not take away open spaces and parks that the citizens and guests of our Community depend on for their own mental and physical care.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Maloney".

Bob Maloney