

Robert Meyers

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

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners Hardesty, Ryan, Mapps, and Rubio: I have lived in inner SE Portland for over 20 years. The current state of our beloved city is shameful and sad - as evidenced by the sheer number of denizens unhoused everywhere (many of whom have significant addiction and/or mental health issues) and the accompanying proliferation of tents, sleeping bags, trash, broken down cars and RV's throughout our neighborhoods and on our streets. That you'll have allowed this situation to devolve into the crisis before us is a failure in leadership writ large. Let your solutions not exacerbate the situation - the Shelter to Housing Continuum Proposal (the "S2HC") does just that. It will exacerbate this crisis, just as your decision to Defund the GVRT did to shootings and murders - with a disproportionately negative impact to communities of color and those in lower socio-economic status neighborhoods. Absolutely shameful. Sanctioned camps are a viable means to provide immediate housing for the homeless - but we need to reject the S2HC proposal, as written, that would permit the siting of such camps in and around schools and parks. The S2HC Proposal is deeply flawed for the reasons: 1. Parks and open spaces should NOT be used for camping or shelters. Portland is a large, dense urban setting. The need for open space and parks has never been greater. Homeless camps damage these areas making them unusable for their intended purpose. Garbage, used syringes, human feces, fires, damage to park settings and threatening behavior have all been continually reported and documented at illegal park camps. A good example of this is the Children's Playground at Laurelhurst Park is largely usable because of these issues - if you think otherwise, you are either an unfit parent or willfully ignorant. Green spaces in which to recreate are especially important now due to the confinement from the pandemic but citizens will not use the parks if they feel they are unsafe. The S2HC proposal needs to be revised to prohibit camping in and around our schools and parks. 2. Camp siting criteria should address livability, health and safety issues that would affect the surrounding community. For example, children's safety is imperative and no camps should be located near schools or playgrounds. Also, business areas will not be able to retain employees or attract customers due to safety concerns if camps are located adjacent to them. The S2HC proposal needs to be revised to prohibit camping in and around our schools and parks and take into account the impact on adjacent businesses. 3. New camp placement should consider how many camps/shelters already exist in an area so that no neighborhood or city area is oversaturated. For example, currently Southeast Portland has 82 reported camps versus 40 reported camps in Northeast Portland and fewer than 25 reported camps in North, Northwest and Southwest Portland. 4. There is no exit strategy. The proposed zone changes

clearly state how encampments can be established but fail to address how they will be dismantled. 5. S2HC fails to provide services to address the underlining issues for homelessness, like drug abuse therapies or pathways for economic independence. 6. The S2HC fails to establish any type of structured enforcement mechanism for desired conditions. 7. The proposed distribution for encampments is highly skewed for lower socioeconomic communities. I support well placed, sanctioned, monitored, larger camps that utilize economies of scale to help contain operating costs. These sanctioned camps should provide the residents with resources to satisfy their basic hygiene needs and make social services available to help with mental health and addiction problems, as well as job counselors to assist those seeking employment. We citizens are weary of the chaos that envelopes our city when unsanctioned camping is permitted or ignored in our neighborhoods. We all benefit when our neighbors, especially our seniors and families with small children, feel safe. If passed as currently written, S2HC will exacerbate our inability to keep our neighborhood parks clean and safe for everyone's use and accelerate Portland's deteriorating livability. Please consider all stakeholders and amend the S2HC proposal to exempt city parks and school and playground areas from camping. Thanks for listening, Robert

Testimony is presented without formatting.