

# Steven Rebischke

**#278043 | March 16, 2021**

## 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 21 years. I have been fortunate enough to live by one of our inner city parks and, as such, have a front row seat and perspective on our burgeoning un-housed/addiction/mental health crisis that is evidenced by a proliferation of tents, sleeping bags, trash, needles, fecal matter, broken down cars and RV's throughout our neighborhoods and on our streets. I share the City Council's sense of urgency for finding solutions to this crisis, but the Shelter to Housing Continuum Proposal (the "S2HC") as written falls short. Sanctioned camps are a viable means to provide immediate housing for the homeless - but the S2HC Proposal is deeply flawed for the following 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 sad example of this is the Children's Playground at Laurelhurst Park Annex that is largely usable because of these issues. 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 or simply disgusting. 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 over-saturated. 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. I pray that the Lord will give each of you and all of you much wisdom in successfully navigating these set of issues for all stakeholders. Respectfully, Steven Rebeschke

Testimony is presented without formatting.