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

In September 2015, then-mayor Charlie Hales declared a homeless emergency in Portland. In the 5 1/2 years since then, the emergency has grown into a catastrophe, as the city has completely lost control of the homeless problem. Some of this is due to economic factors, but much of it can be attributed to bad government policies, mismanagement of resources and failed leadership. Contrary to what we are led to believe by our elected city officials, homelessness has not spiraled out of control across every other major US city as it has in Portland. Salt Lake City reduced their homeless problem by 90 percent by providing housing to those who need it. Dallas, Texas has few homeless on their streets because there are laws in place that prohibit camping in public places, among other no-tolerance policies. Meanwhile, Portland city government has enabled the problem to worsen by tolerating hundreds of homeless camps across the city. Many of the residents of these camps are hardened addicts and career criminals who steal from the communities they reside in to support their alcohol and drug addictions. They have no desire to change their behavior and the city requires nothing of them. Their crimes go unpunished and these criminals are allowed to reoffend. These camps are allowed to degrade into unhealthy and dangerous environments filled with trash, used needles and human excrement. Now our City Council is proposing that this failed model of lawlessness and unsanitary conditions be extended to our pristine parks, golf courses and other green spaces across the city. This plan unfairly places a disproportionate number of proposed permanent encampments on the east side of Portland, which is already shouldering the brunt of the problem and is stretched to the breaking point. Citizens feel unsafe in their own homes as property crimes have skyrocketed. Many are threatened with violence by homeless campers who live in their neighborhoods. In green spaces near the Portland Airport, car theft rings are allowed to proliferate, as campers who live here steal cars, dismantle them and sell them for parts. Catalytic converter thefts are rampant. Every time these crimes are reported to police, victims are told “there are no resources” to deal with these problems. The proposed zoning changes which would allow unregulated homeless camps in parks, golf courses and green spaces is a continuation of these failed policies that will only make the problem worse. In the Springwater Corridor, which includes Johnson Creek, homeless residents have severely degraded the environment with human waste, drug paraphernalia and tons of garbage that spill into the creek and surrounding woods. This used to be a nationally-recognized bike trail known to cycling enthusiasts, making Portland the envy of other cities. Now it’s a toxic waste dump. When 100 campers took over the southeast corner of Laurelhurst Park over this past winter, that entire area of the park including the pond was severely

damaged. Neighborhood residents didn't feel safe bringing their children to the park. Vegetation was killed, and it's unknown how much pollutants spilled into the pond, which is home to waterfowl, turtles, fish and other wildlife. Now the city wants to allow this same destruction to happen all over our city. It's outrageous and irresponsible to accede our parks and green spaces to lawless campers at the expense of the safety of taxpaying citizens and our environment. City leaders need to start thinking outside the box. Now that the problem is clearly out of control, it requires an outsized FEMA-type response, no different than if Portland had experienced natural disaster such as a severe earthquake. This IS a disaster. A manmade humanitarian disaster. The problem needs to be managed much the same as a triage response, calling upon Federal agencies and other outside resources for help. Allowing more camping throughout the city without any accountability from homeless campers and without any real plan to solve the problem is untenable. We should not be normalizing long-term homeless and permanent shanty towns. Leaving people to die on the streets by freezing to death in a tent or burning to death in an RV fire is not compassionate. It's cruel and inhumane. We all deserve better. Janet Loughrey Northeast Portland

Testimony is presented without formatting.