

Mary Scherer

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

Please vote No. This project will change our City for the worse for years and years to come. Parts of the language in the Shelter to Housing Continuum recommendations from the Planning and Sustainability Commission essentially allows homeless tent camps in Portland parks for up to 180 days. This will undoubtedly remove parks from public use -- parks that are currently a shining gem to residents and visitors alike. Homeless camps have a detrimental impact on the safety and livability of surrounding spaces - history has shown this to be true, and we also are currently living it every single day. These camps are an eyesore and a danger. Long-term camping, which often is coupled with drug use and mental illness, results in the accumulation of garbage to disgusting degrees, not to mention the safety hazards of open fires, needles, theft, rape, assault, and spread of disease. The provision is not merely permission for people with no other option to use Open Space along with other members of the public. It also will cause our Open Space zones to turn into a health and safety hazard and be a significant deterrent to their recreational use by children and adults. This has already been proven and is currently a prime example around the city. The Continuum Project is NOT the answer to our homeless problem, which has gone sorely unaddressed for entirely too long -- to the extent now that it is driving long-time and recently arrived residents out of the city. Yes, I have compassion for the unsheltered, but using our public spaces for camps is not the answer. We need to focus on funding in the highest use available for aid. Dispersing camps throughout the city not only will keep families and others out of the parks and damage those areas, but also will require city agency staff to actually travel and use valuable time moving around the city to the camp locations. The highest use of the available funds is to have camps located on City, PBOT or Metro grounds that are un-used by the public, not taxed on the public, and where camps can be monitored for safety and services are central, available and supportive of getting the campers the help they need, and want. How is this so difficult for the City to realize? Open space, as stated in our current code, "is intended to preserve and enhance public and private open, natural, and improved park and recreational areas." It goes on to list the functions of Open Space zones, none of which include allowing camping on taxpayer property thereby making it unusable by the majority. It takes only days to negatively impact a natural area or urban forest and their scenic qualities, watersheds, water quality and drainage systems, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. And this Continuum Project endorses this highly potentially negative impact for 180 days at a stretch. We've already seen the impact of camps having gone largely unchecked for months upon months. Our city will be changed irrevocably -- and not for the better -- if left to continue and even more so if voted into our charter by

way of this Project.

Testimony is presented without formatting.