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

By opening our parks and open spaces to be used as places for homeless encampments is short-sighted and irresponsible destroying neighborhoods and the character of our cities. Parks and open spaces are sacrosanct and essential for public use and should not be used as a shelter for the homeless. "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." City Officials need to come up with a more responsible long-term solution for this issue that continues to grow and overwhelm all cities across the country. By opening up parks and open spaces for the homeless does not resolve the underlying issues that are the root causes of the homeless. "The misery and distress that houseless people suffer in our community is a heart-rending consequence of decades of inequality, ill-considered policy and economic failures." These are the issues that need to be addressed. Unfortunately houselessness is not a temporary problem. The fact is temporary shelters placed in the Open Space Zone would most likely not be temporary at all. 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. The long-term impacts would be severe and the resources and time required for restoration would be extraordinary. Portland can and must do better than surrendering its parks, natural areas, and trails to any use, temporary or permanent, that jeopardizes their primary purpose - now and into the future. We need our elected officials to act in a responsible manner. Thank you.

Testimony is presented without formatting.