

# JR Merrick

**#278238 | March 16, 2021**

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

Your opposition to this irresponsible project in its present form is appreciated. I ask for your consideration and a no vote. The issue of homelessness is both tragic and complex. Without many qualifying conditions, the shelter to housing proposal only guarantees that there will be increasing friction between impacted residents and their homeless neighbors and an ongoing breakdown of trust between Portland residents and their elected and appointed officials. The homeless problem is not a land use problem and it will not be addressed by entitling ad hoc occupancy. This initiative should never have been placed in the hands of the PSC. The proposal fails to address any of the underlying problems of unemployment, mental health, addiction, criminal behavior, and the shortage of sanctioned and managed housing for those who are struggling to get back on their feet. For years, Portland and Multnomah County and their joint task force have spent substantial tax dollars with little effect on reducing the scope of the homeless problem. One positive development is the implementation of providing facilities at the Wapato site which is close to making a difference but this came as a private initiative in the face of neglect by the governmental agencies responsible for managing the problem. To continue to tolerate temporary ad hoc camping in our public spaces or private lots including parks, highway abutments, and natural areas and to encourage proposed state law HB HB 3115 as cover, not only doesn't solve the problem but creates significant new ones. Not the least of these is our growing reputation not as a compassionate city but as an irresponsibly mismanaged city. The erosion of our precious parks and natural areas with sewage and trash and the abandonment of these spaces by community members, including children will only further erode trust. That serious environmental degradation occurred in the Spring Water Corridor and where unmanaged homeless camping is tolerated is evidence enough. Unfortunately, experience demonstrates that without on-site management by an accountable agency, homeless camps are not benign places –“temporary” or otherwise. Mapping the city for distributed campsites in the name of equity ignores the main justification used to oppose opening Wapato as a shelter. Opening Portland's parks and golf courses to homeless camping should not occur at the expense of 665,000 Portlanders and our precious natural environment. The fact that some parts of the city are park-poor doesn't justify the degradation of other parks. The idea that widely distributed camping will improve the situation for the homeless or dilute the opposition is unfounded. These are some questions I would hope you are asking: Who is to be housed and who is to be excluded (is the shelter for the mentally ill and drug addicted or only for those selected as most capable of transitioning to permanent housing)? Who is responsible for managing the camps (in a new Denver camp there is 24

hour staffing by 2 persons for about 50 residents while Dignity Village is self-managed, reportedly filthy, and attempts to exclude new comers)? How permanent is the camp (long term camp sites roll into occupants' rights; consider the resistance to closing a camp on West Burnside in order to build low income housing)? Who is deprived of use of the space (is a vacant church lot unable to be developed or a neighborhood park made too risky for children to play unsupervised)? Who is paying the bills and who is not (are the costs born by emergency federal funds or by property taxes paid by renters and homeowners with periodic renewals)? Your opposition to this irresponsible project in its present form is appreciated.

Testimony is presented without formatting.