

# Mary Sandell

**#278275 | March 17, 2021**

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

My concern is focused on the recommendation that allows temporary shelters in public Open Space. I recommend that Open Space, including developed parks, natural areas, and trails, be removed from consideration for siting of either permanent or temporary shelters. Because adequate alternatives exist, there is no need to site temporary or permanent shelters in the Open Space Zone. The Buildable Lands Inventory shows that we have plenty of land to meet the City's housing needs, for everybody. If we have enough land to house everybody, it is logical to assume we can fund space for the facilities used to shelter people currently not housed. We do not need Open Space to meet that need. Allowing shelters in public open space removes that space from use for intended park purposes by everyone else. 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. Nature is not just a nice thing to have – it is fundamentally important for our health, wellbeing and happiness. Study after study has confirmed that regular contact with nature is required for mental health and wellbeing. 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 environmental impacts of outdoor shelter are real and are difficult, if not impossible, to mitigate. Sadly, these areas are already under stress. We see around us the negative environmental impacts resulting from unsanctioned camping in open space. It does not take long for the things we value most in our parks, natural areas and trails to be destroyed by overuse or inappropriate use. Siting larger, sanctioned camps or shelters in parks or natural areas, even on a “temporary” basis, is a policy decision that would do irreparable harm. I believe there is no compelling rationale to support inclusion of Open Space for siting temporary or permanent shelters. 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. Please remove Open Space Zones from consideration for either temporary or permanent houseless shelters EXCEPT for a declaration of emergency by the City Council due to a catastrophic natural disaster Thank you.

Testimony is presented without formatting.

