

Brian Farr

#278335 | March 17, 2021

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

Please remove the Open Space Zone from consideration as either temporary or permanent houseless shelters EXCEPT for a declaration of emergency by the City Council due to a catastrophic natural disaster such as an earthquake. My concern is focused on the recommendation that allows temporary shelters in public Open Space. I encourage that Open Space, including developed parks, natural areas, and trails, be removed from consideration for siting of either permanent or temporary shelters. My rationale is outlined below.

1. Availability of Vacant & Underutilized Land - Because adequate alternatives exist, there is no need to site temporary or permanent shelters in the Open Space Zone.
2. Equity and Access - Allowing shelters in public open space removes that space from use for intended park purposes by everyone else.
3. Physical & Mental Health - 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 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.
4. Negative Impacts on the Resource - The environmental impacts of outdoor shelter are real and are difficult, if not impossible, to mitigate. 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.
5. Long Term Character of this Emergency – Unfortunately houselessness is not a temporary problem. The need to provide shelter options for our houseless population will be required long into the foreseeable future. Temporary shelters placed in the Open Space Zone would most likely not be temporary at all. For the reasons outlined above, 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 the Open Space Zone from consideration as either temporary or permanent houseless shelters EXCEPT for a declaration of emergency by the City Council due to a catastrophic natural disaster such as an earthquake.

Testimony is presented without formatting.