

Stop Shelter to Housing Continuum Project In Its Current Form

What's Happening

Portland Planning and Sustainability is proposing amendments to the current city code to address the current housing and houselessness crisis.

In 2015, the city adopted the “Safe Sleep Policy” which allowed people to legally camp overnight along sidewalks and public spaces with several caveats: groups were limited to 6 people and camps had to be dismantled by 7am. Over the years, police periodically performed sweeps of these camps. During Covid, police and city officials have largely taken a hands-off approach to allow houseless communities to stay in place during the pandemic.

As the houseless population has grown exponentially, the city has found itself in the position of having to address these issues and find longer term solutions. The Shelter to Housing Continuum project seeks to address these issues (link for the entire document is below).

- The new plan allows for temporary shelters anywhere in the city with the permission of the landowner. This includes vacant lots, parking lots and city owned land.
- The current plan would allow for temporary shelters in parks and open spaces for up to 180 days

I realize our houseless crisis is complex and continues to grow. I also realize it's easy for me to criticize from the sidelines without a deep understanding of what's been done and continues to be done to address the problems we are facing, but what I see as a resident of this city appears to be a complete failure. These proposed changes appear to be a short-term fix that amounts to a shell game. And, like many of the short-term fixes, will do long-term harm to the economic viability and livability of this city.

The problems we are seeing around this city didn't start with covid. They've been happening since 2016 when the Safe Sleep Policy was adopted. Not enforcing rules around street camping and allowing camping in open spaces are the same thing and do nothing to address the long-term problem. It simply makes the city less livable for everyone.

A large portion of the population camping on the streets are the “hard to house”, people with chronic and serious addiction and mental health challenges. I know this because I'm out there frequently talking with this population. I am asking everyone one of you, if you haven't, please get out and walk around to these camps and talk with these people. Allowing open camping isn't a fix!!! It isn't compassion, it's avoidance and an abdication of responsibility to this community!

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What happens if these changes pass? Is it considered pencils down and no more work is needed? I sincerely wish/hope the same effort and hours that have been put into creating this plan are being put into a long-term plan.

Before anything is passed, I'd like to see the following:

- 1) **This isn't a long-term solution.** What is the longer-term plan to address the needs the houseless and specifically, the "hard to house"? What is the framework for this plan? Is a team in place? Are organizations working together with the same effort that was put into this plan? What is the timeline? How will progress be measured?
- 2) **Existing Camps.** What is the enforcement plan for shutting down existing camps? How will clean-up be managed and on what timeline? What enforcement will be in place to make sure these existing camps don't re-establish? Lack of resources and enforcement of existing camping rules didn't just start during covid. This has been a growing problem since 2016. How will it be managed going forward?
- 3) **Camp Management.** How will camps be managed? Allowing camping in open spaces with no infrastructure to handle the number of houseless we are seeing is creating another crisis. How will sanitation, health and safety, needle disposal, fire hazards and trash and cleanup be managed? Who (what organization) is responsible for camp management? How will that organization be held accountable? The management plan described here is very vague. **A detailed management plan needs to accompany this plan.**
- 4) **Camp locations/distributions.** This plan expresses the desire to evenly distribute camps throughout the city. The argument that most of the designated areas are on the east side is due to the fact that there's more available land is not good rationale or policy. Fair and equitable distribution needs to be found.

Before any changes are passed, I'd like to see concrete answers to the above questions.

Please don't implement another plan that will exacerbate existing problems and create more problems in the future. This will have long term impacts on the economic viability and livability of this city. I am begging you, please pull the necessary resources and organizations together and treat this as the crisis it is. This cannot be treated as a zero-sum game. Please research Rockford Illinois.

Link to Frequently asked questions addresses the main points without having to read the entire document.

<https://www.portland.gov/bps/s2hc/s2hc-faq>

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Link to watch the City Council Meeting live

<https://www.portland.gov/bps/s2hc/events/2021/3/17/city-council-hearing>

Link to provide public testimony (deadline for submission, Mar 17 @ 2pm)

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Mayor and City Commissioners contact Info

Mayor Ted Wheeler

Mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov

503-823-4120

Commissioner Mingus Mapps

mappsoffice@portlandoregon.gov

503-823-4682

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty

joann@portlandoregon.gov

503-823-4151

Commissioner Carmen Rubio

Comm.rubio@portlandoregon.gov

503-823-3008

Commissioner Dan Ryan

Commissionerryanoffice@portlandoregon.gov

503-823-3589