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#278429 | March 17, 2021

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

I am deeply saddened by the chorus of community voices that calls for Portland's city council to reject the work that has been done over the last 2 years to create a Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC). During that time I have co-chaired the Downtown Neighborhood Association's Homeless/Houseless Team. After devoting a year to education and advocacy efforts, we launched the Good Neighbor Project in November 2020, where teams of volunteers reach out on a regular basis to our unhoused neighbors throughout the downtown, providing water, cold weather gear and other survival items. These visits have built trust. Volunteers have become a source of information and referral around services and opportunities for a better life. Since 2014 the city and county have pursued a strategy of "a home for everyone" and dramatically increased the rate of construction of low income housing; but the number of unsheltered Portlanders has increased faster than new housing became available. Portland cannot wait for a home to be available for everyone. Faith groups and neighborhood leaders have been promoting a strategy to end ad hoc camping through the creation of safe and sanitary shelter communities which offer a transition to permanent housing—tents, tiny homes, and RV lots, with community water, toilets and sanitary facilities. This strategy is particularly promising for individuals who are victims of mental illness and the trauma of PTSD and rape, for whom a densely packed living environment of a congregate shelter is a terrifying option. But Portland's land use and zoning regulations prohibit the development of these alternative shelter communities. For two years city planners have wrestled with land use and zoning ordinances to make these communities possible. The Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC) is the product of this work. Among its provisions, the S2HC allows land described as Open Space (OS) to be considered for temporary shelters. OS land includes parks, environmentally sensitive land, and public trails. But it also includes a vast amount of other public land which could accommodate shelters without compromising our parks and our environment. This is the land that S2HC advocates hope to utilize for shelters. Sadly, the debate on S2HC has enflamed citizens across our city, who fear that we are giving up our most treasured parkland and compromising our environment in order to provide shelters. This is not the case. But the current crisis of ad hoc camping is doing just that. Campers use our parks, our public trails and environmentally sensitive areas to find refuge. In railing against S2HC, these well intended critics are making it impossible for the city to site camps in Open Spaces are that are neither parks nor environmentally sensitive land. At the same time we are fighting S2HC, our legislature is seeking to put into law the legal opinions that prevent local municipalities from prohibiting camping in public spaces, if no alternatives exist. There is a tragic

irony unfolding here. We are on a path to solidify into law the right to camp on public land and at the same time making unavailable appropriate open spaces to house sanctioned shelter communities, where people are provided the basic necessities for hygiene and safety. It is my hope that our city council can grasp this cruel irony and support S2HC, putting Portland on a pathway toward ending the ad hoc camping crisis and replacing it with a humanitarian transition to permanent housing for thousands of our unhoused neighbors.

Testimony is presented without formatting.