

Nancy Loss

#278491 | March 17, 2021

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

Dear Council Members. I strongly oppose the Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC). I am against allowing public parks and golf courses to be used as places for homeless encampments for the following reasons: 1. Normalizing encampments in response to a housing crisis is a failure of governance. City resources have been used in a stop-gap manner that have proven ineffective for years. Citizens in-need deserve to be treated with dignity and deserve access to comprehensive services that will mitigate, rather than continue, their circumstances. In the richest country in the world, we should never settle for, nor believe, that living in tents, cardboard shelters or roaming encampments is the best we can do. Stop-gap measures facilitate this erroneous and dangerous belief. All monies should be directed toward sanitary and secure housing with centralized services that deliver directly to those who need them. Citizens have proposed very reasonable ideas such as converting properties for shelter and RV parking (e.g., vacated Kmart on 122nd & Sandy Blvd). 2. Sanctioning public encampments stands in direct opposition to strict community health standards, especially during COVID-19 (C-19). Encampments are consistently characterized by mounds of garbage, used needles, and human waste (I find these on my property weekly, one that is not near a public park). Asking citizens to follow strict C-19 health standards while ignoring those posed by encampments is governmental hypocrisy. 3. Although “parks are for everybody”, it is disrespectful and dismissive to negate the value of well-maintained public parks to our citizenry. Rather than expand known problems into otherwise protected spaces, the Council should ensure that parks can be accessed and used by all without fear of accidental needle sticks, encounters with fecal matter, filth of strewn garbage, and interpersonal harassment. People of all ages, ethnicities, and economic circumstances should be able to jog, play, golf, or do other stuff freely and without concern for safety. Indeed, the science of Environmental Psychology has linked positive experiences in nature with better mental health and improved ecological awareness. Especially during the stress associated with the C-19 pandemic, it is not surprising that park usage has increased dramatically over this past year. Council should be actively protecting public access to safe and clean parks as one of the most cost-effective means to promoting community mental health. 4. Portland citizens who are fortunate to have secure housing are not insensitive to those who do not. They have consistently supported tax initiatives, volunteered in clean-up crews, donated and distributed clothing, supplies and food, etc. Stop demeaning these efforts and act to keep a balanced perspective of protecting the rights of ALL Portland citizens.

Testimony is presented without formatting.

