

Athen O'Shea

#278497 | March 17, 2021

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

PDX Trans Housing Coalition is a trans and queer-led organization dedicated to building community and organizing for housing justice with unhoused trans and queer community members. Our collective experience stems from working in projects and organizations such as the Oregon Trans Health Coalition, the Montavilla Emergency Warming Shelter, Glitter Squadron Disability Justice PDX, and Greater Portland Trans Unity, and through our affiliations and histories with organizations such as Q Center, SMYRC, the Legacy Gender & Sexual Health Program, Right 2 Survive, Community Alliance of Tenants, and the C(3)PO Villages Project. We are here, as a coalition, because our unhoused trans and queer siblings are uniquely targeted in traditional shelter systems and social services and desperately need the alternative shelter options that the Open Space zone changes would provide. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, one in five trans people experience houselessness at some point in our lives. Up to 46% of houseless youth are trans or queer. As our youth age into the adult houseless continuum, they lose access to youth services that have helped them survive. Adults who transition frequently face employment and housing discrimination where they were previously stable. Unable to find or keep work, they end up living outside. Intimate relationships change with transition, and sometimes become violent. Many of our community members become houseless while fleeing domestic abuse or unsafe relationships at home. Unfortunately, social service and homeless shelters are also not safe for trans and queer people. Most shelters spaces are segregated by sex, and federal legislation—the Equal Access Rule amendment— currently leaves it up to shelter staff to decide where our community members can sleep. Trans women, men, and nonbinary and gender nonconforming people are not safe in sex segregated spaces such as open showers and sleeping and changing areas. Those who would choose sex-segregated shelters over sleeping outside face interpersonal violence and abuse from other residents and staff. Marginalized people are typically the first to be kicked out when there is a conflict, and this is true for our community members. For all of these reasons and more, trans and queer people often find that living outside or in a vehicle is a safer alternative to traditional shelter systems. Trans and queer people don't need more spaces that require skillful navigation and gender conformity in order to survive. Those spaces are literally killing us. We do need more spaces, and more types of spaces, where we can create safety on our own terms. PDX Trans Housing Coalition is strongly in favor of the Open Space zone changes because many of our community members do want and thrive in community-based alternative shelter spaces like C(3)PO. Others prefer the independence of living alone in a vehicle, and removing the restrictions for vehicles or tiny houses

on residential lots would support that. National studies show that co-housing and other group living options are also strongly favored by LGBTQIA+ people of all ages, incomes, and identities. We need more spaces and more options for our community members who are struggling to survive multiple unjust systems. The Open Space zone changes are a move in the right direction. We urge Portland City Council to support these changes.

Testimony is presented without formatting.