

Steve Bozzone

#278557 | March 17, 2021

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

Hello Commissioners-- My name is Steve Bozzone and I live in Northeast Portland. In my spare time I join with a network of volunteers who provide mutual aid to our neighbors living outside. We source basic survival materials and distribute them directly to our neighbors, so they can survive the elements and hopefully experience a level of dignity day to day. We try to help meet their needs where they are. I speak for myself and my experience and enthusiastically support the Shelter to Housing Continuum. You have heard many great reasons to support this effort. I'll use my time to share a brief story about my houseless neighbor I recently met during the recent winter storm. We'll call him Roger. On a night of icy winds I found Roger sleeping in a torn tent with no sleeping bag or warm clothes, near the MAX tracks. He was confused and scared, visibly shaking. As my partner poured hot tea and readied supplies, Roger was on the verge of tears as he shared that most of his cold weather gear was taken from him during a recent sweep. Roger lost his sleeping bag, winter coat, gloves, hat and most of his possessions. Roger lost his tools for survival in an instant, just before the cold winds and snow would set in for the long, brutal weekend. While we did what we could for Roger that night, I have not been able to stop thinking about him. Roger's experience is unfortunately all too common as we have heard during heartbreaking testimonies today. We have to do better for Roger, we have to help stabilize his living conditions without relying on the current status quo of sweeps and exclusionary policy. I've sat here and listened to some testify that the sight of folks living outside is unacceptable and offensive to them. When I consider their complaints alongside my neighbors like Roger, who is forced to rebuild his life every few weeks as he has his possessions stolen or swept, who faces trauma after trauma, indignity after indignity, I am quite offended we would center those concerns over folks like Roger. The Shelter to Housing Continuum is a major step in the right direction. Let's give Roger a fighting chance. We need the flexibility this effort provides Let's normalize welcoming houseless neighbors in all of our communities. Let's normalize building and organizing new facilities for our neighbors to take care of their basic needs. Let's not exclude our neighbors from the stability they need to climb up and out of the steep slope of poverty. Yes to the Shelter to Housing Continuum. Yes to using all of the tools in our toolbox to do more for our most vulnerable neighbors. We can and we must. For Roger, and for our city. Thank you.

Testimony is presented without formatting.