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March 17, 2021

Portland City Council
1221 SW 4th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

SENT VIA E-MAIL

**Re: Shelter to Housing Continuum – S2HC
Public Comments**

Dear Mayor and City Commissioners:

The Council's concern for our most vulnerable citizens is laudable, and you should use all of the tax funds collected in the City and available through the County and Metro to house the houseless and provide them with vitally needed services. However, do not turn over the City's parks and openspaces to camping. This would cause disastrous deterioration of our public spaces, that could become a permanent conversion of vital public recreational resources or at least would be extremely difficult to reverse AND would not help this extremely vulnerable component of our society that vitally needs services not an open invitation to occupy our parks and openspaces.

The City's parks and openspaces provide a vital recreational outlet to everyone in the City, but to allow homeless camping would cause the conversion of these precious public spaces to something only the super hardy could use. At a minimum, conversion of our parks and openspaces to campgrounds would exclude children, families, and most individuals on their own. A short tour of the City's many homeless encampments already in place in numerous parks and public spaces, shows what would happen if the gates to all City parks were opened to camping. The City's parks and openspaces would be become strewn with garbage, syringes, human feces, rats and all the detritus that we already see every day scattered throughout our City. It would be a terrible loss to urban life for all of us.

Moreover, simply allowing unchecked camping in City parks and openspaces does no good for those homeless people who desperately need services and help. Use the money that City and county tax payers have already paid-in for services and housing that are needed. Opening up City parks and openspaces may be a short-term feel-good gesture, but it will not help those who really need help, and it only prolongs the delay in these people obtaining the housing and services they really need.

There is also a legal impediment to opening up City parks within designated historic districts. As the stewards of these public lands within the Irvington and Laurelhurst Historic Districts, you are obligated to protect these park lands from degradation and to implement preservation plans to enhance them. On this point, ORS 358.653 applies to you with regard to these public lands within designated Historic Districts:

358.653 Conservation program; leases. (1) Any state agency or political subdivision responsible for real property of historic significance in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer shall institute a program to conserve the property and assure that such property shall not be inadvertently transferred, sold, demolished, substantially altered or allowed to deteriorate.

(2) State agencies and political subdivisions may and are encouraged to lease real property of historic significance to private businesses and nonprofit organizations for purposes which are consistent with the nature of the property.

(3) Where possible, the Oregon Department of Administrative Services shall acquire or lease buildings of historic significance for state use.

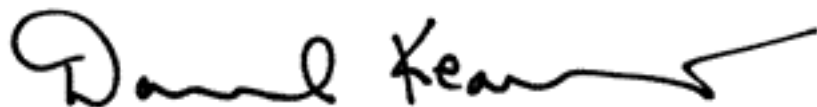
(4) As used in this section, "political subdivision" includes counties, cities, school districts and any other governmental unit within the state not included in ORS 358.635.

Opening City parks and openspaces to homeless camping will clearly cause the rapid decline and deterioration of these public spaces. Allowing homeless camps in these Historic District parks violates ORS 358.653 and your obligation to protect these public spaces from deterioration. The S2HC proposal already prohibits triplexes and 4-plexes from designated historic districts. The amendment package should expressly prohibit homeless camping in any park or public space within a designated historic district.

We have already seen the massive deterioration in every City park and public space where homeless camps have been allowed to become established. The garbage piles up; the used syringes proliferate; human feces and rats are everywhere, and the public space suffers an immediate and conspicuous deterioration. If homeless camping is allowed to become established, it will be impossible to remove these camps and reclaim the space for the greater public good. While the current problem may seem great, it is really miniscule to the problem that will evolve in City parks and openspaces if camping is allowed. The numbers of homeless camp dwellers will expand and what is a relatively small problem will become impossibly large. What we certainly risk is the loss of the City's parks and openspaces for the use and enjoyment of all people, irretrievably sacrificed to the homeless.

Please do not allow camping in City parks and openspaces. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Kearns". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Daniel Kearns