

Diana Rempe

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

Mayor and Council members: My name is Diana Rempe and I am the community outreach director and a street librarian at Street Books. Street Books is a mobile library bringing books to people who live outside and at the margins in Portland. After a decade in operation, we have seen a number of “solutions” to the housing crisis come and go. It’s clear that in order for people to receive the care and support they need, a new vision around housing is required--a vision that honors the communities that unhoused people continue to create for themselves. We support the Shelter to Housing Continuum’s proposal to amend City code to allow greater flexibility for people to find stable housing in our city and the amendments put forward by Portland Neighbors Welcome. Since their inception, we have run regular shifts at organized villages like the R2D2 rest area and Hazelnut Grove. We currently operate at the C3PO Villages in northwest and inner southeast. In that capacity, we’ve observed the way people experiencing hardship are able to come together when their daily fear of displacement is removed-- to organize, watch over each other's belongings and create a space where people can get a full night’s sleep and work together to form a community. This community aspect is integral to the work we do at Street Books and we believe it’s essential for people who are transitioning from the streets. Too often a person goes into a shelter, or even into housing and then struggles to stay there because they are cut off from the community they have known and relied upon. The pandemic has forced everyone in Portland to take a stark look at how inhospitable the street can be for people – responding to this crisis means being creative about the spaces we create for people to live and thrive. We need to embrace new village models, offer easy access to hygiene facilities, garbage collection, mental health and social services for those who need that support. There are many dispiriting scenes on the streets of Portland right now as people struggle to find the food and basic, stable, support they need simply to live day to day. Changing City code and envisioning a new way of living and being together is a first step toward building a place where everyone belongs, is cared for and has a sense of stewardship in a community. We urge you to support S2HC and to follow the critical amendments of the Portland: Neighbors Welcome coalition, particularly in allowing sanctioned Outdoor Shelters in appropriate, approved sites in Open Space zones and in the right-of-way (ROW) and the reduction of time and cost for setting up Outdoor Shelters. We also ask that you extend the current state of emergency, as this continues to be an humanitarian catastrophe. Thank you.

Testimony is presented without formatting.