

First I would like to thank you for working together to address our chronic houseless issues that have been so intractable and that plague our nation and our city. The effort to reach out to those who are experiencing houselessness to find out what their needs are has been an excellent way to begin.

I also want to thank you for the five hours of public testimony that you sponsored and endured, which I listened to in its entirety.

The myriad of ideas being proposed and explored, like villages of tiny houses and parking lots for RVs and cars (that lack hook ups) and backyard RVs and tiny houses are creative solutions that will work for some people. I do hope you continue to require water, electric and sewage hookups for these ADUs through tools such as tax relief and subsidies so that we are not simply creating a large inventory of substandard housing for vulnerable people and a new class of slum landlords. In our haste to get people off of our streets lets not relegate them to invisible substandard conditions in our back yards. I hope that we hold onto our goal to end houselessness - which means building and maintaining houses as we define them in the USA - a place that provides at the minimum a private temperature controlled room with a bathroom, shower, a lock for the door, and a refrigerator.

As a physician who volunteers removing tattoos for marginalized people, many of whom have drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness and other chronic illnesses, I was most struck by the testimony of individual stories that revealed the limitations of these solutions. The personal accounts of rape and expulsion from housing, people dying in tents and backyard RV's without basic services and a person with MS who is finding it difficult to navigate a tiny house with remote bathroom facilities are the cautionary tales that reveal the potential hole in the sheltering strategies being proposed. Verbal and physical threats to park visitors is another.

It is important to recognize that drug and alcohol addiction and mental illness are incurable diseases. They are chronic, relapsing and often progress. When in crisis, individuals with these conditions cannot function in the new sheltering options being proposed. They will continue to flock to our city and our streets where racism, sexual exploitation, thievery and despair reign.

The best practice to treat addiction is 6 months of inpatient therapy followed by supportive housing with drug monitoring. Mental illness is treated with medications that are not always effective, have side effects and when stopped abruptly can result in mental health crises that endanger both the individual and others. Many people with mental health conditions require inpatient services for extended periods, even individuals who come from houses and financial security.

We must pair our sheltering efforts with robust services for this most vulnerable population. According to Outside In, there are insufficient inpatient treatment facilities in Portland and Oregon for those suffering from addiction. Some who are ready to seek treatment die of an overdose while waiting for a bed.

This brings me to my initial concern about this plan. The plan proposes 180 days of "temporary shelters" in our open spaces - parks, natural areas and trails. This proposal comes in the context of 5 years of unregulated dispersed camping in these very places. Camping has been causing environmental damage, while making our natural areas unsafe for visitors and vulnerable to catastrophic outcomes such as forest fires. With chronic lack of enforcement, adding sanctioned campgrounds in Natural areas will only compound the existing risk of fire from camping in our city's Natural areas.

The default solution of dispersed camping in urban natural areas and parks has led to a convergent clash between our Homeless Emergency, our Climate Emergency and our DEIA

goals. If we do not enforce the camping and smoking prohibitions in these protected areas we threaten the climate mitigating function of the canopies and watersheds and make it unsafe for the BIPOC communities to enjoy nature. Unlawful camping already undermines the efforts of groups such as People of Color Outdoors, Unlikely Hikers and Chad Brown's Love is King to get people out into nature safely, when there is a risk of traumatic encounters with homeless campers.

Thank you for your innovative approaches to shelter for the houseless, but please let's remember our ultimate goal is housing that meets the standards of a wealthy country such as our own. We need massive investment in services for those who are suffering from drug addiction and mental illness, who without treatment will continue to find that the only place they are welcome is our sidewalks and woods. Finally, end all camping in our protected natural areas and parks to protect them from environmental threats including catastrophic ones, and make them safe places for all of us, including the houseless, to seek respite during the day.

Catherine Thompson  
thomsoca@gmail.com



FOREST PARK JULY 2020