

# Renee Carter

**#278757 | March 23, 2021**

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

I am writing to voice my opposition to the proposal to use open spaces for the houseless as either semi-permanent or permanent shelter. I think it is a terrible idea and a breach in trust to the public who paid for these spaces for community -wide use though voter approved bonds taht set them aside for public use -- not to turn them into encampments. Instead of turning our public spaces into encampments, I support more humane and permanent solutions -- namely moving the houseless into permanent housing, restrictions on foreign real estate investment, new taxes and fees on rental units converted into short term lease (as opposed to airBnB spaces), and public re-investment in trailer park lots and other affordable housing strategies. Turning our open spaces over to houseless people to use as living spaces is wrong on several levels. The community should not lose access, so how do we decide when there are too many campers and it is no longer "fair" use. Or do the needs of houseless people outweigh the needs of toddlers playing int he playground, the middle schoolers who want to play soccer, the elderly playing horseshoes? What about drug needles, feces, the mentally ill shouting expletives next to the toddler playing on the swing set? Who will mediate the inevitable conflicts? The dad? The mom? The 15 year old community center employee? Houseless people often struggle with substance addiction and mental illness. It is not appropriate for people struggling iwth these issues to be alone with children in some cases. My son has worked as a lifeguard at Montavilla Park since he was 15. He has watched the houseless community at Montavilla take over the park. Kids can't play soccer without someone's tent interfering with the ball. Children and dog owners get attacked by camper's dogs. There is human feces, drug use and needles everywhere. The houseless take over the picnic benches and smoke pot that wafts over to the swimming pool, getting families high. Parents don't feel comfortable letting their kids go tot he park or pool alone. Campers try to use the bathrooms and showers for free and there are angry encounters when the campers refuse to pay. My son has had to regularly deal with drug problems and clean up feces. Society is not there to deal with it - it shifts these issues onto a minority of people - namely the other who want to use the park, the pool. And primarily the parks and open spaces along the 205 Corridor. It is not an equitable sharing of open spaces either. Furthermore, this "compassionate" act of allowing the houseless to permanently use a public space as a home is breaking trust with voters. I did not vote in favor of Metro and Portland open space and parks bonds so that these areas could become a haven and magnet for the country's down and out and mentally ill. I voted for clean, safe parks, neither of which you can have if you are 1). allowing unlimited numbers of people to live there (this is a taking by a minority of people of a public resource!) is not actually solving these

people's problems and is inhuman to "normalize" such living situations Who will police and manage this new "public residence"? Who decides which camper gets what area of a park? Who will mediate when there are disagreements between campers about who gets to live where in the park? Certainly there will be better spots than others. Who decides when a park has reached a sufficient number of campers? Children will not feel comfortable approaching homeless people who encroach on soccer fields - there is not "sharing" of spaces with people in a struggle for survival. many parents already do not feel safe taking their children to play at our parks. You would institutionalize that?! seems like a cop out that shifts the problem onto the SE suburbs rather than a real solution. And who has liability when there is violence or conflicts between different park users and the campers who have decided "This spot" is where they want their "home"? Is the city on the hook legally for allowing people to LIVE there? Who will clean up after them? What about showers and other amenities - or are we turning our community centers and schools over to the houseless as well? As a single woman I do not feel safe walking in the evening in my local park anymore... I believe the parks should be held to the highest standards since they are voter-approved public resources. They should be shared equally by all users, and should not be homes to one set of users. It is incompatible with a public use - it is one group living there, and the other visiting. The standard should be set by our most vulnerable users - children. Having people living in our parks and at our playgrounds and other open spaces who are struggling with substance abuse and mental illness (as most are) is fundamentally unsafe and inappropriate for the public use of families and children, not what voters intended when they created these spaces, and and frankly, not in the best interest of the campers themselves, who for the most part need affordable real housing and services that they can not easily access from tents. And we should not be normalizing this state of affairs.

Testimony is presented without formatting.