

# Kanth Gopalpur

**#278892 | March 24, 2021**

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

Re: S2HC Dear Mayor Wheeler and Members of Portland City Council: I am writing to ask the city to remove the recommendation to use open spaces, which would include parks, natural areas, trails, golf courses, parks-related parking lots and community centers, as temporary shelter spaces, except in the case of natural disasters and short term emergencies. The use of these spaces and facilities should not be allowed during a Shelter Shortage as defined in the proposed code. These spaces are meant for recreational, not residential use. The citizens of Portland have voted for significant tax measures to support both houseless services and parks. We need to honor the intent of the voters and ensure the ability for all to use our parks for their intended purposes. The use of these spaces would be a band-aid at best and is not a good solution to our current houselessness challenges. . We also encourage you to rethink your assumptions related to siting of temporary shelters as described in 33.296.030.H. Shelters should be sited so that they can remain in place if they are successful. These sites should be able to evolve, in terms of services and facilities, to meet the needs of the residents. To disrupt all of that and force the entire camp to relocate for no reason, except that 180 days is up, does not make any sense. It is not fair to the campers or the non-profits running the site. If these “temporary” shelters are sited in open space zones, they would continue moving from one park site to another, doing even more damage. This whole idea seems inefficient, expensive, and unfair to everyone. Instead, “temporary” shelters should be sited in locations where they, if desired, can become permanent. Temporary shelters in parks do nothing but move camps around within the city, disenfranchising other park uses and damaging park landscapes. There is considerable funding now available from federal Covid relief and the Metro Homeless Services ballot measure. This money should make it possible to lease property in all parts of the city for establishment of mass camps, tiny house clusters, and safe parking for occupied vehicles. We also ask that you remove Portland Parks & Recreation community centers and other recreation buildings from consideration for use as temporary shelters related to the Shelter Shortage. We support the use of community centers in times of natural disasters and weather emergencies. The use of community centers during a pandemic fit this criteria because Covid is a short-term natural disaster and the community centers are closed—not functioning as intended. Once the pandemic emergency is over, we should all expect our community centers to return to their primary purpose. By recommending that community centers should be available to provide shelter during a Shelter Shortage, you are suggesting that their highest and best use should be as homeless shelters rather than recreation centers for the entire community. By recommending that community center or park parking lots should be available for

managed homeless camps or inhabited vehicles, you are saying that this use trumps general community access to our parks and recreation centers. We strongly reject both of those arguments. We encourage you to seriously investigate the experience of other cities that have looked to their parks as a solution for sheltering their houseless community. Our own research, which we have already shared with you, showed that in all cases, by trying to solve one problem, another was created that impacted even more people. As we said in our testimony, it is almost impossible to put the genie back in the bottle. We are not reassured by your oft-repeated promise that you would never approve the use of park grounds or sensitive natural areas for siting mass shelters. Intent does not make law. If this is truly your intent, we need to see proposed changes to the code language that will ensure your intent is actually what happens. Your decisions will be in place long after you are gone. Please know that we are all committed to helping find alternatives that will be workable and humane. Sincerely, Kanth Gopalpur

Testimony is presented without formatting.