

# Barbara Cason

**#279140 | March 26, 2021**

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

We appreciate that the City continues to search for solutions to the growing problem of houselessness. We, however, oppose the City's proposal to use Portland's open spaces for houseless shelters and service areas. We 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. As taxpayers, we have supported new measures to fund Portland parks and recreation areas and when we utilize these facilities we obey all regulations regarding behavior and use. We appreciate Portland's historic concern for preservation of public spaces in nature and in the community, and have done our best to help with maintenance and with following all rules regarding littering, leash laws, etc. 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. There are examples of what appears to be clean and efficient shelter areas - the lot on Water Street by the I-84 interchange comes to mind. The area appears clean and tidy and well-thought-out, unlike the spillage of waste that is seen from random encampments lining the streets of our city and the freeways. This is the type of measure the City should be pursuing, rather than throwing more taxpayer dollars at temporary, band-aid solutions. We thus 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 not only to the houseless residents, but to public spaces, which in many cases include sensitive habitat. 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 and sensitive natural area. 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 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 fits 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. The City of Portland, until recently, has been seen as an exemplar of civic preservation of places of pristine natural beauty, of respect for the environment, and of progressive ecological and environmental regulation. The current proposal is a drastic step backward from decades of park and environmental stewardship. One need only look at the streets downtown to imagine what the parks and community centers will look like with yet another poorly thought out band-aid "solution."

Testimony is presented without formatting.