

Catherine Mushel

#279146 | March 26, 2021

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

Re: Using Open Space for Temporary Shelter Dear Mayor and Members of City Council, We are in a housing emergency and a climate emergency. What is different in this moment in history? Not the meaning of emergency, certainly: all deliberate haste is required to save lives in the short term and to enable people to live out their natural lifespans in the long run. This is not a temporary emergency. It is as permanent as the climate emergency is permanent and requires solutions that look far into the future of the city, the region, the country itself. Before you use your power to insist on more executive power, I ask that you look at the future as one of a continued emergency. This means looking into the principles that underlie our civil society and help us to define what we mean by home. The mutually supportive separation of public and private space is crucial to what it means to have a home, even a temporary home, and to what it means to have a functioning civil society. Life in a shelter should be seen as temporary; the shelter itself should be seen as a permanent transitional place on land that the city has purchased or leased for that purpose. Shelters, as well as housing, as much as possible should be safe, stable, and healthy. Shelter, as an interim home, should provide privacy, autonomy, and community--the three factors which the executive director of Human Solutions has used to define "home." Keeping public space public will help to keep private space private and make a home, however temporary, possible. Please think of future city councils. Nothing in the code changes you are proposing will prevent them from using their emergency powers to take over public open spaces rather than addressing the need for permanent shelters as they face the many emergencies we can expect because of climate change alone. Keep public open spaces public in the code without qualification. Instead, buy or lease land that you identify as permanent emergency reserves, and build shelter sites that are safe, stable, and healthy that provide each occupant with privacy and autonomy, and give them the opportunity to think ahead to affordable housing and community.

Testimony is presented without formatting.