

# Ken Meyer

**#279178 | March 28, 2021**

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

I'm writing to express my opposition to the zoning code change being proposed that would allow parks and open spaces to be used for houseless camping. I want to make it clear that my opposition to this proposal is not about crime. The real issue is about preserving our parks and natural areas for the purpose for which they are intended. Portlanders have voted time and again to fund parks, proving how much we value our parks system. Allowing long term camping in the parks and open spaces will have unintended consequences and destroy so much work that we have invested in for the long term health of our parks. According to advocates for the zoning change, these temporary outdoor shelters would be managed, but that will prove to be a daunting task. How, for example will rules about capacity be enforced? Spillover from sanctioned camping sites is sure to happen, and the result will be irreparable damage to plantings and fragile streams as well as garbage and waste. Supposedly camping will only utilize parking lots in parks that have community centers, but how will everyday users of these facilities then access the centers? For example, the SW Community Center in Gabriel Park has no adjacent street parking. There are other more suitable sites that need to be utilized, such as unused buildings like Wapato, large parking lots that sit empty most of the time. In these instances, utilities such as water and electricity are either already present, or they utilities can be brought in. We do need to address the chronic problem of houselessness, and providing shelter is one small part of dealing with the issue. The bigger issues of low wages, lack of opportunity, access to mental health treatment are much more difficult and must be addressed. As well intentioned as this proposal is, the process is too hasty and does not consider what could go wrong. As a recent article in Willamette Week pointed out, this idea has been tried before in other cities with disastrous results. Why in the world would we want to repeat the same mistake?

Testimony is presented without formatting.