

Kathy Sabel

#279305 | March 30, 2021

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

30 March 2021 RE: PROPOSALS TO OPEN CITY PARKS AS TEMPORARY HOUSING FOR THE HOMELESS Dear Mayor Wheeler and Honorable City Commissioners: I humbly ask that you consider my appeal among the many you receive regarding the homeless crises in general and, specifically, the sentence in the proposed "Shelter to Housing Continuum". According to several news reports this sentence would allow homeless people to shelter temporarily in parks, wetlands, golf courses and other open spaces in Portland. In my opinion, this is a poorly crafted and not well-thought-out, knee-jerk response to a long-term and escalating nightmare. At best it would be a temporary partial fix to a serious problem. The housing and homeless crises in Portland is becoming endemic and was a long time in the making. This is not a new phenomenon. "Street people" have been living and sleeping in public places and temporary shelters here since the end of WWII. You cannot put a Band-Aid on a chronic, hemorrhaging ailment. But, that's what the language in this plan sounds like to me. As you know, homelessness is a complex problem; one that requires multi-faceted, well-coordinated public/private collaboration and a strong commitment to work hard and make difficult (for many citizens) decisions. This determination and dedication to carefully and wisely addressing the historic tragedy of vagrancy in our city will yield positive results in which Portlanders can be proud of our city. To begin, we need to work toward housing, not tenting. As one study observes, "The solution to homeless is simple-housing". People need a roof above their head, not a canvas tent. We need to expand existing resources and develop new ones to move our homeless people out of encampments (sanctioned or otherwise) into transitional housing, SROs, and ultimately safe permanent housing. This is not an impossible dream. It has been done in other U. S. cities. There are many large vacant buildings in and around Portland, which could serve as transitional housing; the former Riverplace Athletic Club, Veteran's Memorial Coliseum, Wapato Jail are three that come to mind. You, of course, have knowledge of many more possible facilities. If/when a major earthquake jolts us, you can bet these places will fill up overnight to provide shelter to the newly homeless-many of whom most likely were home owners the night before the disaster. Well, we have a disaster right now. Let's get started getting people into a safe transitional place, a place with a real roof. continued A quick Google search of non-profit agencies serving the homeless yielded over 160 private charities. This does not include multi-service organizations like Catholic Charities. Can't we coordinate a public/private/non-profit program to more effectively help the homeless? Wouldn't this plan accelerate the transition from temporary sheltering to permanent housing? Wouldn't such a plan make better use of human resources, i.e. social workers and supervision staff? I know public and private entities have different organizational structures, but cooperating-even talking-could help. What I am getting at is this: The homeless crisis in Portland is a lot more complex than finding temporary places to pitch tents. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a gushing gash-and not a very good Band-Aid at that. I urge you to take a long look at the long road, and the many viable solutions, for solving this serious problem. It affects all of us. Thank you, Kathleen M. Sabel 5134 SW Bancroft Street Portland, Oregon 97221 Sources CityLab University: Understanding Homelessness in America <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-07-06/why-is-homelessness-such-a-problem-in-u-s-cities> National Alliance to End Homelessness <https://endhomelessness.org> https://greatnonprofits.org/city/portland/OR/category:homeless-and-housing/sort:review_count/direction:desc/page:6 <https://www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org/services/housing-services/> Portlanders Are Furious at the Prospect of City Parks Being Used as Temporary Homes <https://www.wweek.com/news/2021/03/24/portlanders-are-furious-at-the-prospect-of-city-parks-being-used-as-temporary-homes/> Homelessness in Portland, Oregon: An Analysis of Homeless Campsite Spatial Patterns and Spatial Relationships Krystle N. Harrell https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=geog_masterpapers How 5 different cities are handling homelessness By Sara Weber Jul 2, 2016, 7:00am MDT <https://www.deseret.com/2016/7/2/20591161/how-5-different-cities-are-handling-homelessness#on-any-given-night-in-2015-as-many-as-564708-people-were-experiencing-homelessness-according-to-the-latest-report-by-the-national-alliance-to-end-homelessness> -end-

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