

**From:** [Ben Sias](#)  
**To:** [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony Regarding Homeless Crisis  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the homeless crisis facing the city of Portland and the entire Tri County area.

I appreciate Mayor Wheeler's recent announcement to initiate another plan to address the crisis. It's good to see that there appears to be an acceptance of the proposed plan from a majority of the city council. I think it is important to note that this recent announcement and the initial approval by the majority of the city council is driven by your realization that addressing the homeless crisis is crucial, that your efforts to date have been lacking in substance and implementation. More importantly, the residents of Portland are extremely frustrated by the city's progress in addressing the crisis and have run out of patience. This is easily reflected in polls regarding the upcoming election and closeness in races at all levels of state and local government. The homeless crisis is the number one issue for the state of Oregon as you know.

Regarding specific areas to address:

1) Given that many of the homeless folks have mental issues, it's obvious that we have to reopen the state's mental hospitals to provide the housing and services these folks desperately need. This is a major step that needs to be taken with the full support of the state legislature and the governor. Some funding can come from the Metro Supportive Housing Services measure, but the state needs to also provide funding.

2) A major part of Mayor Wheeler's proposed plan is the creation of large camps. This idea is an anathema to many of the homeless advocate organizations, but unfortunately, there is no other choice at this time. It has taken a full year and more for Commissioner Ryan to get only a couple of the planned Safe Rest Villages up and running, and these residences will only accommodate a very small percentage of the homeless population. Extrapolating on these numbers means that it could take decades to house all the homeless folks in Multnomah County. Residents aren't going to wait that long. The reason that it has taken so long for these Safe Rest Villages to become operational is that, let's face the facts, no one wants them in their backyard. It is too difficult to get approval from adjacent neighborhood residents. So the only alternative is to establish large encampments in areas that are not close to residential neighborhoods. I have written many emails to city and county officials to propose sites and have seen no progress on this. I will try again to persuade you to take into consideration the following proposed sites:

A) The Port of Portland's Terminal 2, a 53 acre site totally paved with some covered areas and lighting. In my emails I have suggested that city and county officials meet AGAIN with Curtis Robinhold, the director of the Port of Portland, to discuss the idea of leasing this for 2-3 years to locate a large homeless camp while he negotiates the various contracts he needs for his proposed mass timber manufacturing project. My understanding is that Commissioner Ryan and Multnomah County Chair Kafoury did meet with director Robinhold sometime ago to discuss using Terminal 2 as a site for a homeless camp, but he was not receptive to the idea. This is the time to meet again and take another run at it. Ask Curtis Robinhold if he wants to be instrumental in helping the city and Tri counties with the homeless crisis.

B) Another potential site is the old Kmart on the corner of NE 122nd and Sandy Blvd. This site, similar to the the Port of Portland's Terminal 2, is large, totally paved and has covered buildings. I have mentioned this site in numerous emails to city and county officials but it appears to have gone nowhere. Let's move on it!

C) There are various sites zoned for industrial that could be used for large homeless encampments. One particular site is the old McCormick & Baxter creosoting plant which now is a superfund site and has sat vacant for more than a decade. This site sits at the bottom of Willamette Butte near the St. John's Bridge. This is the site I would use for those homeless folks who refuse to live in other organized camps and also, more importantly, refuse to accept services to help them. This group unfortunately makes up a very large percentage of the homeless. These are the people who cause the most problems in the city and county and the people residents don't want in their neighborhoods. It takes time and effort to go up and down from this site to the top of the butte thus discouraging these homeless folks from making the trip.

D) Currently the strip along NE 33rd Ave between Columbia Blvd and Marine Drive is a very large camp for homeless folks in vans and has been for years. Let's just accept the fact that until such time as a permanent location can be found for these vans, the homeless living in vans there should be allowed to stay They really aren't causing any problems and are not near any residential neighborhoods.

Sanitation and personal hygiene services can easily be brought onto all these sites. In the camps where homeless folks want and need social services, Portables can be brought in to serve as offices for social workers. Homeless

people living in these camps are definitely not going to be getting on public transportation to go to meetings with counselors, so the counselors have to go to the camps in order to provide intervention and other social services more productive.

In addition to finding locations for large camps for the homeless, the Mayor and Multnomah County Commissioners need to meet with Metro officials to discuss the allocation of revenues from the Metro Supportive Housing Services bond measure. The allocation method as stated in the measure is deeply flawed because funds are located to each of the three counties in the Tri County area on the basis of the amount of revenue collected in each county. The result is that Multnomah County receives 45.3%, Washington County receives 33.3% and Clackamas County receives 21.3%. However, if you take a look at the number of homeless in each county, you will see that Multnomah County has by far the largest percentage of homeless people in the Tri County area. Based on January 2022 information from the Joint Office of Homeless Services Multnomah County has 79% (5,228/6,633), Washington County has 12% (808/6,633) and Clackamas County has 9% (597/6,633). As you can see Washington and Clackamas Counties get by far a larger amount of funds per homeless person than Multnomah County. These two counties are in a position to easily meet their goals of providing necessary services and affordable permanent housing to all the homeless in their areas and still have an abundant amount of available funds while Multnomah County has very limited funds to serve a much larger number of homeless folks. This inequitable allocation method needs to be changed. I understand that the current allocation method is written in the language of the measure, so if a metro vote by all residents in the Tri County area is needed to amend the measure to change the allocation method, than it is imperative that this be done. Please make this a priority.

The final point I would like to make is that the Mayor's latest initiative will be far more successful and be implemented more quickly if the city and Multnomah County take actions to discourage homeless camping. Let's first quit handing out blankets, sleeping bags, tents and tarps. This may sound harsh but it sends a message that homeless people are no longer welcome in Portland nor the Tri County area. The other idea to discourage camping and at least divert homeless folks from camping in undesignated areas is to place concrete barriers (Jersey Barriers) in these areas. These may be unsightly but not nearly as unsightly as the homeless camps filled with trash. I would think the cost of placing these barriers in areas where the city doesn't allow camping is the same as the cost of sending in crews from Central City Concern and other contractors to continually clean out and clean up camps that are routinely occupied. Laurelhurst Park is a perfect example where this idea would work. When large camps for the homeless have been located and established, the barriers in the undesignated camping areas can be removed. Again thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments regarding the Mayor's latest initiative to address the homeless crisis. I have spent a great deal of time and written many emails to city and county officials over the past two years presenting the ideas I have expressed in this testimony, and I hope that finally you take some of them into consideration.

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