

From: [Matthew Storer](#)
To: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: Re: Mayor Ted Wheeler's plan to address homelessness
Date: Tuesday, October 25, 2022 2:19:47 PM

Good afternoon.

I am writing to you today to comment on Mayor Ted Wheeler's proposed plan to address homelessness in Portland through the creation of three, 500-person "campuses", and banning unsanctioned camping throughout the city.

First, let me say thank you for addressing this matter, as it represents a growing, and increasingly untenable humanitarian crisis that is frankly not working for anyone, whether they live in homes or on the street. The status quo is no longer viable. We need change ASAP.

It has been put forth that the only true solution to the homelessness crisis is to build more affordable housing. While this is true and I agree with this, this response conveniently ignores the fact that it takes time - a lot of time - to build as many homes as are needed to accommodate everyone who needs it. I suspect it may be 20 years before we actually have enough housing to meet the need. Even if it's only 10 years before this need is addressed, that's still entirely too long. So how do we handle the crisis until that need is met?

Surely, we must recognize that treating the city commons and our streets as the de facto waiting room for affordable housing, whose residents are forced to live in needle, trash, and feces ridden spaces, and who must tenaciously survive or die by the whims of the environment, is not anything that a humane and just society can tolerate.

And sweeping camps does nothing but kick the solution-can down the road while further traumatizing those affected.

We can do better.

So, what do we do? We must choose carefully and with input from a representative sample of the community. The devil lies in the details, right? We must get the details right.

So, with that said, to the specifics:

I think that consolidating those on the street into a small number of spaces, where services (health, mental health, laundry, showers, jobs, housing, etc.) can be built out and provided, is a necessary first step. Last I read, there are ~3000 homeless people living on the streets, spread across ~700 camps across the city. Trying to bring all the aforementioned and necessary services everyone needs to each of these ~700 camps does not scale even under the best of conditions, but it scales even more poorly due to sweeps that regularly shuffle where everyone is physically located. However, if we can consolidate that number of camps down to a manageable number, real infrastructure can be built in those spaces to facilitate the provision of services in a way that scales several orders of magnitude more effectively than what we have now. So we should do that for sure.

THAT SAID, we need to be REALLY conscientious about how we implement these spaces.

My understanding is that many who live on the streets eschew shelters for various reasons. These reasons must be addressed in meaningful ways so that they are actually attractive options. Safety and security must be prioritized, while paradoxically limiting the presence of law enforcement, as the police tend to have a way of increasing anxiety in people, something we need to reduce, not exacerbate.

Additionally, there is the question of where these "campuses" would be located. In my mind, this is a very difficult problem - probably the most difficult problem. But they need to go somewhere, right? Okay so here's my stab at sorting this out:

First, each needs to be either a) close in enough so that residents can get around on foot, or b) have frequent, free TriMet access to allow residents to get where they need to go. But each also needs to minimally impact those who currently live in the respective communities, because they also matter and we can't forget that. I think the Venn-diagram intersection between these two concepts is very small, so options here are limited. Could somewhere in a more industrialized space be repurposed? People don't currently live in industrialized areas, but those areas are also generally close into things and (I think?) are generally navigable by foot. Maybe? Perhaps as another option would be to pick a rural space out in the outskirts on city, county, or state-owned property, but that is still within TriMet range so that a frequent service line could be established to the space. My thought is that some presently homeless people might prefer a rural environment to an industrialized one, and I think it's important to provide a variety of options to people if we can help it.

Anyhow, that's all I've got on this topic at the moment. Hopefully my thoughts may assist in your deliberations.

Wishing you all the best,

Matt S
Powellhurst-Gilbert resident