

From: [Au Nguyen](#)
To: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: November 3, 2022 Council meeting: Written testimony for Agenda Items 927-931
Date: Wednesday, November 2, 2022 10:20:17 PM

I strongly urge you to support:

- Hardesty Amendment 1 to Agenda Item 927, to see "how the City can best utilize its power of eminent domain to rapidly house Portlanders during this housing emergency;"
- Hardesty Amendment 9 to Agenda Item 930, to "convene a planning coordination summit;" and
- Hardesty Amendment 10 to Agenda Item 930, to call "upon the State of Oregon to consider allocating up to \$1 billion of kicker funding towards rent assistance and affordable housing production during the 2023 legislative session."

The fundamental reason why people are homeless is because they cannot afford a home. All other problems are ancillary. Addiction? Mental illness? Even if they are present, nobody would rather deal with those demons while living in a tent instead of a home. Simply put, a permanent home is the foundation on which you build stability, recovery and prosperity. Anything else is a stop-gap measure at best, and a waste of time and money at worst.

Seven years ago, then-mayor Charlie Hales declared a housing state of emergency in Portland. Then-candidate-for-mayor Ted Wheeler immediately derided Hales as clueless: "we have a full-blown crisis on the streets of our city and we are glad that after three years in office Charlie Hales is finally acknowledging that fact." (1)

So how are we doing with all this self-declared urgency?

We now have over 5000 homeless people, up from 1800 seven years ago. (1) (2) And by the estimate actually in Agenda Item 927 for today's meeting, Portland is still short 20,000 units of affordable housing. (3)

That's an abysmal record. Maybe Mayor Wheeler should not have judged his predecessor so harshly.

What has the city been doing in the last seven years?

They certainly had time to facilitate a luxury high-rise. According to the Oregonian, Mayor Wheeler texted Commissioner Ryan "It's very important that [the Ritz-Carlton] project move forward without delay." (4)

They also willfully turned a blind eye to the developer's shell games with his affordable housing obligations. Portland's newspaper of record concluded "Bowen got his quid, the city is still waiting for its pro quo." (4)

Too much urgency, but on the wrong things!

To paper over this shameful record, the Housing Commissioner last year rolled out an initiative called Safe Rest Villages. These are temporary shelters by any other name. They are expensive, and after a resident exhausts their welcome, there is no guarantee they will not be back on the street and still homeless. SRVs ran into opposition from neighbors all over the

city. Only one of the six proposed SRVs is open so far. At this rate all 6 will be operational in 2030. Maybe.

If the small SRVs are that hard to situate, how are you going to convince neighbors to put up with the much larger camps you are now proposing?

To put the timescale of this multi-year failure by the city in perspective, consider this: everybody knows how hard it was for school children to miss a whole year of in-person learning during the pandemic. Imagine a 5th grader who was housing-challenged in 2015, at the beginning of this pretend state of emergency. If their family were waiting for the city to deliver, they would still be waiting today, as the child is about to graduate high school. That is, if the child persevered enough to go through 5th - 12th grade while homeless!

Mayor Wheeler declared "I am not here to make friends." Mr Mayor, we don't need to get on your Christmas list either. But we do need you and Commissioner Ryan to come to the table for good faith discussions with all the county, state, federal and NGO stakeholders, and to take tangible actions. The time for more blah-blah-blah is over.

Sincerely,

Au Nguyen
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(1) Portland Mercury, "Mayor Charlie Hales Wants to Declare A Housing State of Emergency", Sep 23, 2015.

<https://www.portlandmercury.com/Housing/2015/09/23/16545907/mayor-charlie-hales-wants-to-declare-a-housing-state-of-emergency>

(2) KOIN, "Latest 'Point in Time' count shows Portland's updated homeless numbers", May 4, 2022.

<https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/6k-homeless-surveyed-across-portland-metro-area/>

(3) Portland Council Agenda for Thursday, November 3, 2022, "Establish key actions to increase affordable housing construction"

<https://www.portland.gov/council/documents/resolution/key-actions-increase-affordable-housing-construction>

(4) The Oregonian, "Portland Ritz-Carlton developer waffles on affordable housing pledges", Feb. 04, 2022.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2022/02/portland-ritz-carlton-developer-waffles-on-affordable-housing-pledges.html>

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