

August 2, 2018

The Honorable Ted Wheeler
Mayor, City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Avenue Room 110
Portland, OR 97204

RE: Proposed Homeless Shelter Located Under the Broadway Bridge

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Members of the Council:

In the coming days and weeks, each of you will be receiving canned letters from residents of the McCormick Pier Condominiums in opposition to the proposed homeless shelter under/near the Broadway Bridge. The letter writing campaign is supported by the Condominium Board and the Condominium Management Company and suggests that instead of placing the shelter as designated, the council should consider other, better locations. As the owner of one of these condominium units, I received a copy of the canned letters today, requesting I sign my name and send it to each of you. Instead, I am choosing to write you a genuine letter in support of the current placement of the homeless shelter.

In my professional life, I work in residential development and real estate. In my spare time, I serve as the Executive Director of Affordable Oregon.org, a recently formed housing affordability advocacy focused on reducing the cost of housing for all Oregonians. As a member of Affordable Oregon and frequent contributor to our online content, I routinely criticize decisions made by the Portland City Council and City of Portland leadership on affordable housing and homeless issues. While I believe housing affordability to be the most important issue facing the region at this time, of greater concern in this instance is an all too familiar case of neighborhood NIMBYism.

The residents of McCormick Pier, the Condominium Board and Management Company are claiming the Council should revisit the siting of the proposed homeless shelter for the following reasons:

- The site is located on an environmentally contaminated piece of land located under a heavily trafficked bridge next to a train station. Apparently, residents are concerned deeply about the health and welfare of the homeless, so much so that they would rather they have no shelter, no support and no help at all if it is located near their property. Never mind the fact that on a daily basis, these same residents walk right past dozens of homeless people sleeping on dirty sidewalks, defecating in the street and spending their days exposed to the elements offering no support whatsoever.
- While residents want to help the homeless, they feel that a lack of additional security will leave them exposed to more crime. Again, these same residents, who are admittedly living between two well-established homeless camps, manage to navigate the streets of Portland without a personal security detail protecting them. How would a homeless shelter, with staff, bathrooms, showers and a safe place to congregate be any more dangerous than current conditions? Will the Portland Police Department be prohibited from policing the area?
- Incredibly, these same letters suggest that the innovative, cost saving design of the facility is ill-equipped to serve the homeless population because it “doesn’t include proper plumbing or electricity”. You know, as opposed to the twin dumpsters off Burnside they currently call home which include a bidet and outlets for their I-phones.

What my fellow unit owners at McCormick Pier do not want to admit is they just don't want the homeless near them. They don't want to deal with the trash, feces, smell and overall yucky feeling they get every time they see a homeless person and adding more to that would likely feel yuckier. It's easier for them to feign concern for the health and wellness of the homeless while subtly begging the Council to move the homeless to another neighborhood that might be less vocal. It's a special brand of hypocrisy reserved for those of us who believe we are "progressive" but only when it means progress happens on paper, away from our homes and our lives.

All sarcasm and vitriol for my fellow owners aside, they are only following the model for successful advocacy in the City of Portland that this Council and previous councils have fostered for decades. The City of Portland proposes or plans an action that will solve or improve a situation and then when 20-30 people write a letter, show up at Council or complain to the media, the City backs down and tables the solution, leading to complete inertia. When you get these letters from McCormick Pier, just remember that every time you as a Councilor or as the Mayor choose to back away from making hard decisions because a few people don't like it, you embolden future advocacy groups to operate in the same mode. At some point, the City must put its foot down and stop these NIMBY groups from dictating public policy.

As the owner of a condominium at McCormick Pier, I am ready to do my part for the cause. I support the placement of the homeless shelter as planned, right below the Broadway Bridge. The City of Portland is incredibly lucky to have an individual like Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle invest in a forward-thinking plan for helping the homeless. My college age son will be living in the condominium we own at McCormick Pier for the next four years and while I am always concerned for his safety, I don't believe having a homeless shelter near his home makes him more likely to be a victim of crime than he will be as he rides the Portland Streetcar to class every day. Frankly, I hope my son will see the good work being done at the homeless shelter and volunteer to help.

As elected officials, it's time for you to step up and rebuke NIMBYism at the source. It starts here with this homeless shelter and it should continue through the streets of the Pearl to all the high-rise condo owners complaining about their potentially impeded views of the river to every neighborhood association in Portland that endlessly complains about up-zoning and redevelopment next to their home. Its time for this Council to stop pandering and make tough decisions.

Sincerely,

Joe Keizur
Unit Owner, McCormick Pier Condominiums
Executive Director, Affordable Oregon