



City of Portland

July 26, 2021

Media Contact: CityCouncilComms@portlandoregon.gov

The situation at Laurelhurst Park is a tragic display of growing economic inequality and lack of resources currently available to support the houseless humanitarian crisis on our streets. The City has attempted to balance the public health and access needs with the safety of both housed and unhoused Portlanders in mind.

Our efforts have spanned City bureaus. Council staff have visited Laurelhurst on a near-daily basis. The Impact Reduction Program, through its contractors, has routinely picked up trash and hazardous materials, including a clean-up for larger items earlier this month. Parks and Recreation has provided porta-potties, cleaned restrooms, cared for the park, and addressed non-emergency park issues. The Joint Office of Homeless Services' Navigation Team visited the park at least weekly from August 2020 until July 2021; they referred people to shelter service and provided health care and addiction support. PBOT has provided car batteries and mechanical support to ensure Portlanders living out of their vehicles are not blocking the right of way and to maintain emergency vehicle access. The Fire Department has monitored fire hazards, including removing propane tanks and keeping fire lanes open. Portland Police have responded to emergency and non-emergency 911 calls. Together with nonprofit partners, our goal has been to compassionately support the people living near Laurelhurst Park until we had a better solution beyond just moving people from one part of Portland to another.

A recent incident involved multiple firearms being drawn and their use threatened in the presence of a service provider. Prior to that incident, we increasingly struggled to maintain public safety and health standards as the camp grew larger and demanded a greater and greater share of the City's limited resources. The situation has devolved into something unsafe and unhealthy for everyone involved. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to serve the unhoused community near the park.

Therefore, we made the difficult decision to authorize the Impact Reduction Program to post vacate notices along Oak and 37th Streets. Those notices were posted this morning. We will work with the unhoused community to find shelter beds and services for those who are interested. If personal property remains, we will diligently inventory every piece. The Navigation Team from the Joint Office will support houseless residents throughout the process, and we have planned to ensure that we are intervening to help people access the services they need. We ask that members of the public and media respect peoples' privacy throughout this process.

We recognize the challenging times we are in and that vulnerable populations have many historic and recent reasons to distrust government. As such, this decision was difficult to arrive at and is also not a solution. It is necessary to intervene at this moment to maximize public safety, but it is not a solution.



Unhoused people at Laurelhurst Park and at numerous other sites across the city, state, and country are trying to survive. In this, unhoused people are no different from housed people. They are trying to work in an economy built on paying people inadequate wages. They are trying to access mental health care from the state that is one of the worst in the nation at providing it. We can keep moving people who are living outside when their environments become unsafe or unhealthy, or offering alternative housing options as they become available, but this does not address the root causes that brought us to this point.

The forthcoming Safe Rest Villages—along with new outreach teams, new shelter beds, and new rent assistance vouchers coming online through Supportive Housing Services funds—will help some, but not all, Portlanders experiencing houselessness. The responsibility also lies with the state and the federal governments—and together, we need to work collaboratively across all jurisdictions to build a system that delivers much better results for all Oregonians.

City Council is unified in our decision to act immediately at Laurelhurst Park in the interests of public safety and public health.

Sincerely,

Mayor Ted Wheeler

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty

Commissioner Carmen Rubio

Commissioner Dan Ryan

Commissioner Mingus Mapps