

Dear Mayor Hales and Commissioners Fish, Fritz, Novick and Saltzman:

The Overlook Neighborhood Association strongly opposes establishment of a temporary or permanent homeless camp near the intersection of Greeley and Interstate Avenues. The site is wholly inappropriate for this sort of use.

The Oregon Department of Transportation was correct when it decided to evict campers from its property there. The site sits along the river bluffs, in an area with tinder-dry vegetation that is vulnerable to wildfire. A fire could quickly spread all along the bluff in North Portland.

The bluffs also are at risk of landslides, yet campers already are building structures high up the side, where they are in the greatest danger.

Both Interstate and Greeley Avenues carry high traffic volumes. Encouraging people to live there in an unregulated, ad hoc manner puts both pedestrians and motorists at risk of a tragic accident, especially at night under poor illumination.

There also are significant health concerns for campers on a site that lacks access to sewage, running water and other basic sanitation infrastructure.

The safety of people who live in a homeless camp is paramount, but the problems do not end with just their wellbeing. Pedestrians and bicyclists frequently pass through this area. We have heard reports of people harassed and concerned about their safety when passing the campers. Moreover, trash and human waste already are accumulating, including along the streets and trails.

Advocates for the camp will find it difficult to contain if the city provides an endorsement, whether implicit or explicit. Already the camp is spreading along Greeley and the bluff. A camper vehicle has even taken up position on a nearby property that is strewn with garbage. How far will the city allow this to spread?

Homeless camps tend to attract drug and alcohol abusers. Yet the land in question is close to Overlook Park, a place where children and families often gather. Indeed, campers often use the restroom facilities in the park.

When local organizers first proposed placing a public garden on the site a few years ago, they assured the Overlook Neighborhood Association that they would not use that as a starting point to develop a homeless camp.

Despite the significant impact that this camp would have on our neighborhood, its families and businesses, we only learned about the mayor's effort to convince ODOT not to vacate campers through local news reports. We should have learned about it from the mayor's office.

There was no announcement, and no one from the city has sought input from the Overlook Neighborhood Association about these plans let alone provided the courtesy of a heads up. The city

supports neighborhood associations precisely so that they can serve as conduits for information under circumstances like these. Instead, the mayor's office seems to be avoiding a conversation with Overlook.

We appreciate that the mayor wishes to prioritize addressing homelessness in Portland, but rushing to action without thinking through the consequences and without engaging the affected neighborhood is foolhardy. Portland and its government should be better than that.

Whether or not local news reports have captured the intent of the Mayor's office with regard to this camp, the fact remains that it continues to operate in a dangerous, inappropriate location. The fact that any conversation was underway without bringing the neighborhood association to the table is unacceptable.

If you wish to speak to Overlook residents, our next neighborhood meeting will take place on Tuesday, Oct. 20 at 6:30 p.m. at the Kaiser Town Hall. I would be happy to add you or your representative to the agenda.

In the meantime, the Overlook Neighborhood Association urges you to seek sites better suited to provide services to our homeless population and to support ODOT in clearing the unsafe homeless camps from along Greeley Avenue immediately.

Sincerely,

Dannielle Herman

Chair

Overlook Neighborhood Association