



Resources for Working with the Houseless

August 2019

There are nearly 5,000 unhoused people in Portland, Oregon today. Although there are social services available, the system is difficult to access and navigate, and housing placement programs often have very long wait lists, up to 6 months. Additionally, the City of Portland and Multnomah County Sheriff's Office have a combined total of four staff people whose job it is to respond to reports of homeless camps and provide outreach to the unhoused.

We believe that it is all of our responsibility to solve houselessness in Portland, and we know that there are many groups, individuals, and organizations who would like to help, but are not sure where to begin. This guide is meant to serve as a starting point.

How this Resource was Developed

This work was made possible in part by a grant from Oregon Humanities (OH), a statewide nonprofit organization and an independent affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds OH's grant program. Any views, findings, and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Oregon Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

This guide is the result of a series of community listening sessions in the Parkrose Neighborhood in 2019 organized by the Columbia Slough Watershed Council (Council) and Historic Parkrose and supported in part by a grant from Oregon Humanities. The original purpose of the project was to bring community stakeholders together to determine how to reopen a boat launch access point along the Columbia Slough at NE 112th Ave in a manner that protected local business' and residents' safety while creating a community amenity. The site had been closed to neighbors and residents since a homeless encampment called, "Slough Town" was swept by the City of Portland in 2017. The goal was to come together to determine how access could be managed in order to give locals an opportunity to bird, picnic, boat, and visit a natural area while minimizing risks of violent crime, pollution, and habitat degradation that they experienced with the Slough Town encampment.

However, when interviewing the City of Portland during project planning, the Council discovered that the City was mandating the site be reopened without any opportunity for landowners, adjacent tenants, and neighbors to have a choice in the matter or to influence



the terms. Unfortunately, this was news to everyone: local businesses, residents, and project participants alike. Thus, the project pivoted from a participatory design process for a neighborhood green space to a mediation process among stakeholders and the City.

Our listening sessions brought together stakeholders with very different opinions and interests, who had diverse perspectives on homelessness and what should be done for homeless campers. Participants included local business owners concerned about crime, government employees working with limited resources and authority, neighbors worried about safety, environmental groups wishing to restore access to nature but also worried about damages to the environment caused by camps, grassroots groups advocating for dignified and humane treatment of campers, among others. Listening session participants included:

- Adjacent neighbors to the Slough in Parkrose
- Parkrose Neighborhood Association
- Historic Parkrose
- Parkrose Business Association
- City of Gresham Community Health Services
- Parkrose School District
- Portland Police sergeants working in Parkrose
- City of Portland Public Safety
- Portland Bureau of Transportation
- City of Portland's One Point of Contact program
- City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services
- Columbia Slough Watershed Council
- Wisdom of the Elders
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- Knowing Me Ministries
- Central City Concern

It is important to note that there were no local houseless people involved in these discussions, although there were organizations advocating for the homeless. This exclusion was not intentional, and some were invited but did not respond. It is important to acknowledge that we could have done more to ensure homeless community members were represented.

Over the course of five listening sessions, the focus was on understanding why the City failed to reach stakeholders and alert them to the access restrictions on this property; the implications of these particular land use and property right conditions; and what options, if any, stakeholders had to influence the terms for public access at this green space.

By the fifth listening session, the participants determined that the best way to move forward was by learning from others who are working on community solutions to homelessness. Thus, the sixth and final listening session was a panel discussion featuring local experts. Their recommendations are the basis for this resource guide.

Although the surprising and complicated land ownership and access rights at this site stymied the process, progress was still made.

By the close of the project, local land owners, residents, and business owners, environmental organizations, social service providers, houseless advocates, and city officials - who otherwise would not have come together - learned more about each others' interests in and concerns for public green spaces; the complexities of homelessness and social services; and the limitations of City resources. Residents learned how to approach and engage city officials and even received separate training from one participant in how to best approach city government. And stakeholders learned of creative ways they can help address homelessness in their community, a critical step towards reopening the boat launch access point at NE 112th Ave in a manner that meets the needs of local businesses and residents, the environment, and those experiencing houselessness.

Who Do I Call About a Camp?

The City and County programs below have staff who are specially trained to help assess public safety, de-escalate tensions, help campers access resources, and conduct clean-ups after a camp is vacated. Note that these programs will not necessarily remove campers off of public property. They will visit the camp, conduct outreach with campers, and make an assessment. *If there is an immediate and dangerous situation, call 9-1-1*

On City of Portland Property

File an online report using PDX Reporter at [PDXreporter.org](https://pdxreporter.org)  You will need to log in using your City of Portland website log-in information, or first create an account.

From the City of Portland website: "Please note: Not all reports will result in immediate action by the City. Every report is reviewed and analyzed. Before a cleanup can occur, the City will work to move the camp, and will do so in the least traumatic, most compassionate manner possible. That process, mandated in the settlement of the Anderson v. Portland lawsuit, requires the City to post notification at a camp before cleanup. For more information see Frequently Asked Questions: ENFORCEMENT."

For further assistance or help in filing a report:



503-823-4000



reportpdx@portlandoregon.gov



<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/toolkit/70039>

On Multnomah County Property

Contact the HOPE Team of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. *From the HOPE program website:* "MCSO's Homeless Outreach and Programs Engagement (HOPE) Team works day-in and day-out to build networks with service providers and create trustworthy relationships with vulnerable populations in the field to connect them with needed services. The Team also conducts and facilitates clean-up efforts to mitigate public health hazards in our community. HOPE's goal is to provide a peacekeeping response to neighborhood and business livability complaints through a process which treats everyone involved with dignity and respect."



Troutdale Sheriff's Operations Center, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office 234 SW Kendall Ct, Troutdale, OR 97060



hope@mcsos.us



503-823-3333 (ask for the HOPE team)



<https://www.mcsos.us/site/hope.php>

On Private Property

Private property owners are also welcome to contact the programs above to help navigate questions about a camp on their private property. These programs are well connected and can help direct private property owners to resources and talk to them about the situation.

How Should I Approach Campers?

Before speaking with campers, remind yourself that those experiencing homelessness are not stereotypes but individuals worthy of dignity, compassion, and respect. A goal for reaching out should be to let them know that you see and hear them as people deserving of attention and assistance, if help is desired.

Do not approach an encampment if there are safety concerns for yourself or others. In an emergency situation, call 9-1-1. For a non-emergency in Multnomah County, call 503-823-3333.

Programs conducting routine outreach with houseless campers recommend always approaching campers in teams of at least two people for your own safety. It can also help to wear bright safety vests to distinguish you. You may need to loudly say hello as you approach. One outreach organization, *Neighbors Helping Neighbors* (NHN), emphasizes that making eye contact, using a friendly tone, and introducing yourself by name, but not requesting their name unless they offer, are important methods when making contact with unhoused neighbors. NHN also makes the point that unhoused campers experience abuse from housed people, resulting in mistrust and causing unhoused people to seek shelter in natural areas. Developing authentic trusting relationships with campers can be transformative, and often leads to ongoing talks and agreements that both parties can live with in their community.

How Can I Help Campers?

Community members and organizations are coming together to conduct outreach and support for houseless people in Portland. You can join these organizations in their work as a volunteer, and several programs also offer free training to organizations and groups who would like to begin their own outreach and support programs for the houseless in their neighborhood.

Houseless community members are experiencing a variety of barriers to security in their lives. Social services organizations work to help the houseless access resources for housing and improved income security. These resources often include food, medical and mental health services, phones, permanent or transitional shelter, addiction treatment, and employment opportunities. Homeless service providers participating in this project strongly recommend that outreach workers are able to provide access to as many services as possible at once, to be able to meet each camper where they are that day. This is helpful because it can be very difficult to navigate the social services system, especially if you are experiencing trauma, which can affect your ability to process and retain information.

When conducting outreach, it is important to be aware of the barriers people experience when trying to access services. Additionally, sometimes people are not ready to get help. Kevin Dahlgren from the City of Gresham expresses that persistent compassionate outreach often encourages people to accept help eventually, but that this takes time and trust. He offers that it helps people to trust you and the system if you return over and over again, even if they say no. It is important for them to know that you are there and that they haven't "blown" their chances for help.

Get Free Training and Mentorship to Conduct Services Outreach to the Houseless

Michael Davis, formerly of *Knowing Me Ministries*, provides free training and mentorship for volunteers who want to help their houseless neighbors. Michael has worked with the houseless for 26 years. His work often results in community conversations and agreements that help improve life for everyone. Michael can help groups set up neighborhood-based houseless outreach projects. Michael trains groups of two people each to be specialists in one type of service need, be it housing, jobs, or medical. He also trains a team lead to oversee all the sub-teams, then provides mentorship for the team. His methods are now also being used to help refugees in Portland.

Contact Michael to learn more at  (503) 310-0966.

Get a Stack of Rose City Resource Guides from Street Roots to Hand Out to Campers

From the Street Roots website: "The Street Roots Rose City Resource is a 4 x 4, 104-page guide and is the most comprehensive, updated list of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties. More than 200,000 guides are published annually by Street Roots and distributed to more than 500 organizations and entities working with people experiencing homelessness and poverty in the metro region. Pick up Rose City Resource Guides in person from the *Street Roots* office. Call first to make sure there are enough supplies."



503-228-5657



211 NW Davis St. Portland, OR 97209-3922



<https://streetroots.org/about/work/resourceguide>

Set Up a Free Trash Collection and Unhoused Neighbor Outreach Program

Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) is a Nonprofit Public Benefit Organization that serves the 11 neighborhoods in North Portland. *NHN* is a 100% volunteer-based organization that provides trash bags to houseless encampments, collects the trash bags on a regular schedule, and provides food and water when available on collection days. They have found that camp residents frequently welcome the opportunity to clean up their camps and do most of the work to fill the trash bags. This program offers an opportunity for housed and unhoused community members to meet one another, break down barriers, and keep their community safe and livable. *NHN* will meet with groups to help them set up a free trash collection and unhoused neighbor outreach program for their community. Contact them to learn more.



503.978.0540



NeighborsHelp12@comcast.net



www.facebook.com/NeighborsHelpingNeighborsPDX

Learn About Supported and Self-Governing Villages like the Successful Kenton Women’s Village

The Kenton Women’s Village is a permanent gated community of tiny homes, called “pods” in the Kenton Neighborhood of Portland. Each resident has their own “pod” and access to social services through an on-site Catholic Charities case manager and site manager. The Village also includes a communal kitchen. This project was originally a temporary agreement between Catholic Charities and the Kenton Neighborhood Association, which eventually became permanent as the model proved successful and relationships were formed between the Village and the Kenton community. Learn more:



<https://www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org/services/housing-services/kenton-womens-village/>

Advocate for Solutions

Let your elected officials know that you care about people who are experiencing houselessness and the types of solutions that you support. For example: increasing City staffing for houseless outreach; projects to help the houseless more readily access social services; tactics for reducing the wait time for housing; support for neighborhood groups who assist with encampment clean-ups, and more.

Portland Mayor, Ted Wheeler



503-823-4120



MayorWheeler@PortlandOregon.gov



<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/wheeler/>

Portland City Commissioner, Chloe Eudaly, Office of Community and Civic Life



503.823.4682



Chloe@PortlandOregon.gov



<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/eudaly/>

A Home for Everyone: A United Community Plan to End Homelessness in Multnomah County: A program of the City of Portland (Mayor Wheeler and Commissioner Eudaly)



(503) 988-2525



ahfe@multco.us



<http://ahomeforeveryone.net/>