



## CHINATOWN JAPANTOWN ANKENY PLAZA SKIDMORE WATERFRONT

September 20, 2017

To Mayor Ted Wheeler, City of Portland  
Chair Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County  
Marc Jolin, Director, Joint Office of Homeless Services

On behalf of the Old Town Chinatown Community Association, we are writing to inform the City of Portland, Multnomah County, and the Joint Office of Homeless Services that based on a community vote after two community meetings held on September 6, 2017, we **cannot support** your proposal for a low-barrier, 200-bed shelter at NW Hoyt and NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.

We recognize that there is a housing and homeless crisis in our City; we know that 5.86 per 1,000 residents are experiencing homelessness; we know that Portland housing inventory for the poorest of the poor is less than 10%. We understand these statistics better than most because Old Town Chinatown provides 328+ shelter beds year round (not including transitional housing offered by providers like Blanchet House and Union Gospel Mission), over 1,000 low-income and special needs housing units, and numerous services to support very low-income and homeless people. We have worked as partners with our neighborhood nonprofits and service providers for decades, while simultaneously attempting to preserve our distinct cultural districts and build and sustain retail businesses, offices, tourism, and non-subsidized housing.

### **Public Safety and Putting our Most Vulnerable At Risk**

As you saw in our presentation during the September 6<sup>th</sup> meetings, Old Town Chinatown has the highest crime-rate concentration in all of Portland. You also heard the feedback from our residents that they are not just fearful for their lack of safety and security, but are pleading with the City for more support after having a neighbor recently stabbed to death, watching open drug deals on our streets, and the recent drive-by shooting on NW 4<sup>th</sup> and Everett.

Our neighborhood knows first-hand the unintended consequences of services and shelters being over concentrated in a single area. The issue is not with those receiving services or seeking shelter, but rather with those who prey on vulnerable populations. Drug dealers, sex traffickers, and gangs often target those seeking services, resulting in a confluence of chaos and lawless behavior. In the midst of this chaos, businesses continue to try and operate, tourists visit and watch in shock, and Clean & Safe and Portland Police attempt to respond to the countless calls they receive to this one neighborhood.

Homeless people are some of our City's most vulnerable, and are frequent victims of violence and lawless behavior. Until there is a sizeable decrease in crime in Old Town Chinatown, it is irresponsible for the City to propose that 200 new permanent shelter beds be located here. Consider these statistics that can be found on portlandmaps.com for 203 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR:

- From August 2016 – August 2017, the average Person Crimes total for Old town Chinatown was 252 incidents. The city average is 2.
- From August 2016 – August 2017, the average Property Crimes total for Old town Chinatown was 511 incidents. The city average is 15.
- From August 2016 – August 2017, the average Society Crimes total for Old town Chinatown was 329 incidents. The city average is 2.

As you may recall from our meetings, the community's primary concern was safety. The people who spoke up on September 6<sup>th</sup> did not cite concerns for hypothetical crimes in the future; they were citing actual incidents that nearly every individual had experienced firsthand. They are fearful of the neighborhood as it is now, not as it could be in the future, and they are pleading with the City to pay attention to the unacceptable state that our neighborhood is in at this very moment.

### **Economic Impact**

Locating the City's largest permanent shelter in Old Town Chinatown will have a long-term, detrimental economic impact to the neighborhood and counteract efforts by the City and private entities to revitalize the district. There have been positive investments in the neighborhood in the last 2-3 years, but those who take a risk on our community are often rewarded with financial hardship:

- Brian Wannamaker's investment in the Glisan warehouse in 2015 – *however, four floors of office space remain vacant because tenants cannot be convinced of the safety of the neighborhood.*
- Renovation of The Society Hotel – *however, staff are asking to be moved to a new location in the Gorge in 2019 because of the stress involved at this location, and the need to do their job AND run security detail.*
- Renovation of the Overland Warehouse – *however, they have struggled securing ground floor tenants.*

These are just three examples from developers that were willing to share. There are countless others, not just from developers, but also from small business owners, large tech companies, and educational and cultural institutions. We have lost many local businesses in the last two years (including Alexis Greek Restaurant, the Thirsty Lion, Fong Chong, and Davis Street Tavern), most citing crime and safety as their primary reasons for leaving Old Town Chinatown. One tangible way that the City could have assisted was to take some of the available office spaces in Old Town Chinatown and fill them with staff vacating the Portland Building. It was a suggestion made by City leadership, but was not seen through. Hundreds of staff filling our buildings, walking our streets, and patronizing our businesses would have been an incredible contribution to a neighborhood struggling to stay in business.

### **Promised Changes**

Many of our community members have spent countless hours sitting on committees and workgroups over the years, attempting to work collaboratively with City and County leadership to pull Old Town Chinatown out of its blighted state and into the cultural center that it is striving to be. That work by our community members seems to have been forgotten, as we are told that it is "not enforceable" and that "this is not the 1980s." It is not the 1980s, but unfortunately the problems remain the same, and we are looking to our leadership to care about the legacy of collaboration and the vision that was created for this neighborhood. As Dirk VanderHart of the Portland Mercury recently published, there is a very clear history of the City agreeing that Old Town Chinatown is saturated and that new services and homeless shelters should not be further concentrated here:

- **1987:** The "no net gain" policy began as a groundbreaking truce between businesses and social service providers. The result was the "Clark-Shiels agreement." The agreement committed developers to retain 252 shelter beds within the neighborhood, along with the 1,030 single-room occupancy (SRO) units at the time. In return, social service providers couldn't expand operations. "This program will be a part of a regional program whereby all districts and neighborhoods within the Central City and the city in general will accommodate [sic] housing and social services for resident low- and zero-income persons," the agreement read. It might have been little more than a handshake agreement had city council not gotten involved. In May 1987, the council formally commended the agreement via a resolution. And when the body approved a growth plan for the central city the following year, it explicitly limited the number of shelter beds and SRO units within the district, as set forth in the agreement—including a limit of 252 shelter beds.
- **1993:** "As part of a set of zoning amendments aimed at ensuring Portland wasn't running afoul of the federal Fair Housing Act, officials adopted a policy that sought to 'maximize housing choice' while discouraging 'the concentration of low- or no-income households.' Under the policy, the Old town Chinatown neighborhood was one of 18 districts citywide where new low-income housing and shelter projects were ineligible to be funded with city dollars." (VanderHart)
- **1997:** The Old town Chinatown Vision Plan, adopted by City Council, details an entire section, "Housing, Shelter and Social Services," and support for a shelter reconfiguration plan specifically stating the number of beds per shelter to be in Old

town Chinatown, and for any proposal for new services to “consider the capacity of the neighborhood to accommodate further facilities of this nature.”

- **1999:** The “no net gain” agreement was once again cited in the Old Town Chinatown Development Plan, also adopted by City Council.
- **2015:** As part of charting growth in the central city, council adopted a West Quadrant Plan that said social services wouldn’t be meaningfully expanded in Old town Chinatown.
- **2017:** The Central City 2035 plan, which includes language that says Portland should “limit the significant expansion of these services and ... not locate additional major social services in the district.”

### Conclusion

In light of the City’s repeated, clear acknowledgment that new services and shelters should not be located in Old Town Chinatown, it is unclear how the City can come to this neighborhood and say that it is the only possible location for a new, permanent shelter that would serve all of downtown Portland. That is inconsistent with everything the City has told us over the years. It is hypocritical to continue concentrating high-needs, homeless individuals in this neighborhood using the circular reasoning that there are already services here that they need to access, and it is irresponsible to continue steering vulnerable people into the lowest-income, highest crime area of the City.

We strongly urge the City and the County to refuse to take the path of least resistance and instead to consider the health and well-being of a neighborhood that is already home to four homeless shelters, over 1,000 low-income and special needs residents, two historic districts including the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District that is struggling to revive itself, and many significant cultural institutions that believed the City’s promises about investing in the neighborhood and chose to locate here. The Joint Office should be looking for shelter sites throughout the City that more equitably distribute and dilute the inevitable impacts that a mass shelter will have on a neighborhood rather than concentrating multiple shelter sites in one small geographic area.

In addition, the Old Town Chinatown Community Association respectfully demands that the City and County reaffirm its commitment to this neighborhood by:

- Implementing enforceable, comprehensive public safety plans to mitigate the effects of camping and rampant, illegal street activities that plague the community.
- Creatively and quickly deploying tax increment financing from Downtown Waterfront and River District URAs as set forth in Prosper Portland’s 5-Year Action Plan for the district, and making good on its promise of a three-year matching grant for a district manager to support the heavy lifting being done by so many in this neighborhood.
- Forming a working group with the Joint Office and members of the Old Town Chinatown Community Association to address the operations of existing shelters and service providers in the district and find ways to more effectively support the homeless community.

We appreciate your efforts to house our most vulnerable neighbors. There is no community in the City that better understands or more cooperatively supports these efforts, but for all of the reasons stated above; this is simply not the right place for the City’s new permanent downtown shelter.

Sincerely,  
Old Town Chinatown Community Association Board of Directors



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Portland Chinatown History



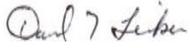
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