



October 5, 2017

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

Many of our members grew up in Chinatown, had businesses and week-end outings to the Chinese grocery stores and dim sum restaurants in Chinatown. For reasons too complex to enumerate here, today, that Chinatown is gone. Now we receive news of a possible siting of a 200 bed shelter in what was once our second Chinatown. On behalf of our membership and board, we are expressing our grave concern and sorrow at this possibility.

We continue to support services and affordable housing in Chinatown but we simply cannot support a 200 bed shelter. It would overburden a neighborhood that is just beginning to see a balance of sustainable development and residents who can and do engage in civic and community affairs for they now have hope. It has taken all of us over 25 years since the “no net gain” agreement to reach this stage. Just this past week, the Design Guidelines for New Chinatown/Japantown were passed by City Council.

Whether Chinatown remains culturally sensitive to our Portland history as Chinese Americans or not, we agree with Central City Concern retiring Director, Ed Blackburn, when he wrote that shelters don't ultimately help homelessness. Hopefully, the Portland Housing Bond will provide some opportunities for mixed income housing in our old neighborhood. Meanwhile, an increase of 200 shelter beds in our neighborhood is not the answer. This increase means that we would carry 38% of the permanent shelter beds in a neighborhood that is .1% of the entire city. It is a neighborhood where all crime is above the national average while consumer spending is significantly (20-35%) below the national average. Daily, we see evidence of inadequate safety and support services for our existing providers, our businesses and our residents.

Portland's Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood is a community that has always been supportive of those who have less. Many African American, Jewish, Japanese American, and Chinese American families began their stories in these city blocks. These communities were excluded from settling in other neighborhoods because of housing discrimination and red lining. These city blocks have been deeply affected by racism, and placing a 200 bed shelter here would be continuing a long history of containing the less fortunate to our community. Such a move is a sad instance of white privilege and shows a lack of respect for our community. We ask you to seek a housing solution that is the kind of mixed income housing that will offer a chance for new families to begin their stories in our old neighborhood.

On behalf of our members and board,

Dr. Kent Lee
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The mission of C.A.C.A. Portland is threefold, to develop leadership, serve the community and promote civil rights