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QuickPoint! – Repeating Mistakes Is Not a Housing Strategy

By John A. Charles, Jr.

The Portland City Council has approved a plan for the Housing Bureau to lease industrial land in North Portland for \$10,000 per month, beginning October 7. The site is to be used for the construction of a large homeless shelter that potentially could serve up to 1,400 people. This idea, pushed by developer Homer Williams, was rushed through with virtually no due diligence.

Before additional money is spent, the City Council should carefully analyze what went wrong in two previous construction projects. First was the \$58-million Wapato Jail built by Multnomah County in 2004, but never operated. With 525 beds in pristine condition, one would think there is potential for this site to temporarily house at least a few people now living under bridges.

Second, in 2011 Portland opened the \$47 million Bud Clark Commons, which includes 130 studio apartments and extensive social services for low-income individuals. It was a nice idea, but the police have been called so often to the Commons that in December 2013, then-Chief Mike Reese told the Portland City Council that he was considering filing a chronic nuisance property complaint against the shelter.

Both structures were built with good intentions, but things did not go as planned. Let's learn from the past before repeating mistakes in the future.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.