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QuickPoint! – New Portland Design Guideline Will Place Responsibility for Homeless Crisis on Private Property Owners

By Rachel Dawson

There is a homeless crisis in Portland. According to a recent count by Portland State University, the number of people found living in “unfit” conditions, such as in a tent outdoors, under a bridge or overpass, or in their car, has [increased by 20% between 2017 and 2019](#).

Instead of providing sound and beneficial policies to help get homeless individuals on their feet and off the streets, Portland officials are pushing the issue onto private businesses.

The Portland Planning Commission recently [affirmed a proposal submitted by Oriana Magnera](#) that would require new private downtown buildings, including stores and apartment complexes, to have a space where homeless Portlanders can “rest,” essentially pitching tents and sleeping. In fact, she stated in a November meeting that buildings may have “[benches](#) but not a lot of place to pitch a tent.”

Magnera blames the current homeless crisis in part on a housing shortage. It would thus make sense to provide shelter to those living on the streets and reduce restrictive city codes and laws that make it difficult to build homes in the Metro region. One such change could include enlarging the current Urban Growth Boundary that limits the amount of land available for new homes and artificially raises prices.

Portland officials should not place the responsibility for the homeless crisis on private developers. They should remove this new design guideline language and create policies that will tackle the root of the homeless crisis.

Rachel Dawson is a Policy Analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

