



Commissioner Nick Fish
City of Portland

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Colleagues, I've been a Commissioner long enough to remember when we didn't have a Portland Housing Bureau or a Joint Office of Homeless Services.

Instead, affordable housing was divided between the Portland Development Commission and the former Bureau of Housing and Community Development, and we had a disparate system of services and facilities spanning two governments and many disconnected pieces of the puzzle.

At a certain point we realized that structural problems were getting in the way of doing this work as efficiently and effectively as we could, and that vulnerable people in our community deserved better.

First, in 2009, we created the Portland Housing Bureau to focus on the needs of our community's most vulnerable. That left PDC to focus on economic development, and PHB to focus homelessness and affordable housing.

Next, under Commissioner Saltzman and Chair Kafoury, we undertook a major review of the homeless services system and determined that collapsing the work of the County and the City into one office, governed by both jurisdictions, was the solution.

It didn't happen overnight, but we shared the vision of a joint office, and we worked together to implement our vision.

Today, we have a more streamlined and effective structure that allows us to do the most good for the most people with our limited public resources.

Our commitment to this work isn't dependent on the commitment of any single elected at the County or the City – the Joint Office ensures that we will continue to prioritize this.

Why am I telling you this?

Because I believe we're at a similar juncture with our work on supportive housing.

We've all been at this long enough to understand that supportive housing is *the solution* to reducing chronic homelessness.

The most recent point in time count showed that nearly three-quarters of people living outside are chronically homeless. That means people dealing with chronic illness, drug or alcohol addiction, and/or mental health challenges – in short, the people most at risk of dying on our streets.

They need the *most* help, and require the *most* public investment to achieve safe and stable housing.

That's why, in 2017, the County and the City made a big commitment to add an initial 2,000 new units of supportive housing in the next 10 years.

While we're making good progress to add supportive housing to our system, we also know that we don't have a *structure* in place that will allow us to create supportive housing, at scale, efficiently and effectively.

So last year, we asked the Joint Office to lead the work of building a plan to scale up these investments, to get many more units online, and to establish a system that can continue to produce supportive housing until we're meeting our community's need.

Today, our partners at the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Joint Office will give us a road map. And they will share with us what they believe it will take to get to our shared goal.

I'm very proud of this work, and excited to hear from them.

I'll close with a cautionary note: supportive housing is a significant investment in our future. Failure to invest in solutions to ending chronic homelessness will cost us *even more*.

Thank you.