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For Immediate Release

Overlook Neighborhood joins lawsuit against City of Portland over homeless camping

The Overlook Neighborhood Association (OKNA) Board on Tuesday voted unanimously to join a coalition of businesses, neighborhoods and residents in legal action against the City of Portland's ineffective homeless camping policies. OKNA will continue to work with the City and Hazelnut Grove residents to develop a temporary permit for the camp and on policies affecting the homeless community in general.

"We're frustrated with the slow pace of the city's response to the homelessness crisis in general and toward Hazelnut Grove in particular," OKNA Board Chair Dannielle Herman said. "Portland's homeless residents and its neighborhoods deserve better communication and more effective strategies from City Hall."

Representatives of both OKNA and Hazelnut Grove have come to the table to develop a temporary permit that includes reasonable restrictions for the camp on city-owned, public land near the intersection of N Interstate and N Greeley avenues. Representatives of the mayor's office have allowed those discussions to languish for months at a time, limiting progress. OKNA still hopes that the process will lead to a mutually agreeable conclusion, but it wants to keep all of its options open, including legal action.

"We hope that the lawsuit will spur Mayor Charlie Hales to engage in a real conversation with all stakeholders to develop serious solutions for Portland's homeless community," OKNA board member Chris Trejbal said. "So far we have only had poorly-thought-out executive decrees that allow widespread camping without oversight, no serious plan to deliver services, and no long-term, large-scale effort to transition people off the streets."

Since camping increased tremendously around the Hazelnut Grove site nearly a year ago, OKNA has urged the city to work with the neighborhood on safer alternatives. The campsite is situated at the base of a fire-vulnerable bluff in summer and is inundated with water in winter. Neighbors are worried about the potential health risks at Hazelnut Grove given the city's failure to provide basic services such as fresh water and regular garbage pickup.