



Commissioner Nick Fish
City of Portland

October 17, 2011

Open Letter to Occupy Portland

Dear Friends,

In the midst of the current economic crisis, the Occupy movement has already made a difference. As someone who spent a legal career fighting for the civil rights of others, I support your constitutional right to conduct peaceful protests that question corporate ethics and the growing inequality in America.

I also applaud Occupy Portland's commitment to non-violence. A civil society requires that we balance important and sometimes competing legal rights. Mayor Adams, the Portland Police Bureau and Occupy Portland deserve credit for resolving issues in a peaceful and respectful manner.

That said, as the Commissioner-in-Charge of Portland Parks & Recreation, it is my responsibility to express my growing concern with the impact your occupation is having on Chapman and Lownsdale Squares. These historic downtown parks in the heart of the city serve all Portlanders. They provide a quiet place to enjoy nature in the city.

Chapman and Lownsdale Squares are part of a complex and fragile urban ecosystem -- an ecosystem now threatened by your continued occupation. The parks were not designed to support encampments.

Parks & Recreation arborists, landscapers and horticulturalists will do a complete assessment of the damage when you vacate the parks. Their current estimate is the park will require more than \$19,000 and several months to repair. Given the season, the public can't expect the parks to be restored to their natural state until the weather warms in Spring. Ropes on some trees and compression of sensitive root systems may cause damage that may not manifest itself for years. Every day of occupation increases the possibility of damage.

Parks belong to everyone. The cost to restore the damage to our parks will not be borne by Wall Street bankers but by Portland taxpayers. These are the very people Occupy Portland is attempting to engage and represent.

In the battle for civil rights a generation ago, the Freedom Riders took their civil disobedience directly to the core of injustice, including segregated buses and lunch counters. In Portland, parks are in no way related to your demands for justice. Damaging these much loved, shared open spaces is frankly inconsistent with your stated goals of renewing our democracy and restoring power to ordinary people.

We share a collective responsibility to be good stewards of our public lands. Lownsdale and Chapman Squares are public assets that deserve to be treated with respect and care.

In this spirit, I request that Occupy Portland take immediate steps to work with Parks & Recreation professionals to make changes that will minimize the damage to the parks.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Fish", followed by a horizontal line.

Nick Fish
Commissioner

cc: Portland City Council