

### Shelters in Red



Supportive Housing in Yellow  
Affordable Housing in Green

**Pack the homeless in like they aren't people,  
but sardines.**

Old Town and 14 Acres of Asphalt:  
Prepared by Ruth Ann Barrett

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## OPINION

I thought it might be helpful to those advocating for turning the Post Office 14 acres into a shelter/camp/rest center to take a look at the the "where" of this property which technically is in the Pearl, but actually is an extension, if you will, of the Old Town low-income unhoused and housed community. Both neighborhoods are in the zip code 97209. I will provide background to the map provided on the cover from a density and housing point of view.

To be clear, nearly all of the people in the units pinpointed in this map are no-to- low income folks, recipients of Social Security Disability benefits, pensioners and veterans on fixed incomes, and employees in low paying or entry level jobs.

### Density

Old Town with a population around 4,000 has a population density of 14,042 people per square mile. As a comparison Downtown has a population density of 11,849 with a population of 11,170. Old Town has 23% of its residents below the Federal Poverty level, Downtown 39%. There are no neighborhood serving businesses. Not much in the way of "amenities" such as parks, community center, library, shade, etc. It is a most unwelcoming neighborhood from the perspective of the built environment - a heat island with a low tree canopy, lots of concrete, and surface parking lots.

The primary industry is healthcare, not entertainment, although it is Portland's entertainment area with a bevy of nightclubs, bars, sex clubs and other entertainment venues. It's a busy nightlife area that contributes to a mix of 40% person and society crimes, 60% property. The City split is 80% property and 20% person/society offenses. We are talking assaults, homicides, sex offenses, weapon law violations, and drug/narcotic offenses. Lately shooting incidences have kept residents awake and people living on the streets running for cover. From August 2020 to August 2021 there were 20 such incidences, 15 of them resulting in injury.

### Housing

Affordable Housing is the below-market subsidized housing in Old town that is on the rental market. These units make up about 25% of the housing units. They are income restricted and most are at 60% AMI, with 50% and 30% AMI units a small percentage of rental units.

#### Supportive/Transitional/Shelters

Over half of the units are dedicated to caring for and providing housing for those experiencing homelessness. Most are at 30% AMI. While income-restricted, supportive/

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transitional housing is also restricted to those seeking apartments who are experiencing homelessness. **The units are not on the rental market. Caring includes mental health services, addiction recovery support, primary care, and both temporary and permanent housing solutions. Central City Concern, Transition Projects (TPI), and HomeForward are major landlords and service providers. As to shelters, in 2017 the Portland Mercury reported "...there are four year-round homeless shelters in Old Town, comprising some 328 beds (and more in the winter). This was before the Navigation Center (100), the Greyhound Station (100) and the Old Town Village, non-identity-specific village (60) of Creating Conscious Communities with People Outside (C3PO). The number may also not have included privately funded shelters.**

## **Market Rate Apartments (not shown on map nor are condos)**

**This, along with condos, is the other 25% of the units. According to rentcafe.com 45% of rentals are in the \$1,000 to \$1,500 range in Portland. One market rate property in Old Town, according to apartments.com, has rental units ranging from 426-601 sq ft starting at \$1195. It positions itself as being "at the corner of luxury and convenience." An affordable housing property lists similar size units at \$850 for studio and \$898 for a one bedroom. "Affordable and modern," it falls into the 4% in the \$700 to \$1,000 range. The average disabled-worker benefit is about \$1,236 a month, and 90 percent of beneficiaries get less than \$2,000 a month. The average benefits for retired workers is \$18,034 or \$1500 per month.**

**Keeping tabs on the number and kind of housing units in Old Town or any other neighborhood for that matter is a challenge and not really in anyone's wheelhouse, not the City Housing Bureau for sure. If you want to discredit those of us who do count, one can always dispute definitions because, in the end, all housing that is not market rate or an owned condo, according to the local (mostly business) leadership, is considered public housing and the residents (housed and unhoused), referred to as "them," are low or no income folks and the majority.**

**I've come to believe that keeping the mix of housing units unclear and undocumented is intentional and not just the outcome of a data-adverse group of professionals who like flying blind. And I do believe that further expanding North and NorthWest of Old Town the shelters/camps/rest villages/communities is what happens when you have residents who complain mightily about the homeless, but refuse to have the homeless housed in their neighborhoods. Old Town is the default and has been for decades.**

**Ruth Ann**

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