

Response to Phase II Qualifying Questions for
Portable Opportunity Dwelling (POD) Demonstration Project
RFPQ-76-2021 “Alternative Shelter” (Category 2)
May 26, 2021

Prepared for:



Joint Office of Homeless Services



Prepared by:



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3.1 – PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

3.1.1 What service are you offering to contribute to the expansion of alternative shelter options in the community, and what qualifications do you have to deliver that service?

POD the People will provide Portable Opportunity Dwellings. As described in Phase I, we define a Portable Opportunity Dwelling (POD) as an inexpensive mobile home, vehicle, craft or vessel, or a combination of mobile homes, vehicles, crafts or vessels that is (a) equipped with safe sleeping and sanitary accommodations, (b) transportable without an operator license or insurance, and (c) able to fit in a standard parking, docking, or storage space.

On January 19, we released design specifications and a construction plan for a new type of POD based on a three-wheeled electric motorhome that qualifies under the law as a “low speed electric bicycle.” Portable Opportunity Dwellings will meet all applicable safety standards, including rules of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, relevant *Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards*, the *National Electrical Code*, and all requirements of the National Fire Prevention Association *Standard on Recreational Vehicles*. Details on the design may be retrieved from https://www.podthepeople.org/files/bids/rfq20210119/POD_Prototype_Specification.pdf

POD the People are a nascent non-profit public benefit corporation. We have not yet provided any goods or services to the public. However, we are qualified to provide Portable Opportunity Dwellings substantially similar to these specifications.

Our Secretary, Jeffrey Hood, is a Certified Adult Mental Health Peer Support Specialist and a community systems scientist with 12 years of experience in urban design and planning. Prior to co-founding POD the People, he was the founder and principal of RFPQ-76-2021 Phase II – POD the People

a consulting firm which provided planning services to San Francisco County, Los Angeles County, San Diego Association of Governments, the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, Puget Sound Regional Council, and other public agencies. He has a B.A. in Mathematics from Reed College, an M.Sc. in Mathematics from the University of British Columbia, and a Master of City Planning degree from the University of California, Berkeley.

Our President, Rachel Kessler, is a curriculum coordinator for an Oregon non-profit statewide education network supporting advocacy, standards, and resources in after-school youth programs. She is also an able designer and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

We have also received help from contractors and volunteers who are experts in law, construction, fabrication, and mechanical engineering.

3.1.2 What are the strengths and advantages that you offer relative to other providers? How do those strengths align with the goal of expanding shelter options, in particular for People of Color and other communities that are over-represented in the unhoused population?

To the best of our knowledge, POD the People are the only prospective providers of Portable Opportunity Dwellings (PODs) as defined above. Before we elaborate upon the advantages of the Portable Opportunity Dwelling relative to fixed structures and the typical “recreational vehicle”, acknowledgement and congratulations the City and County are in order. The new *Shelter to Housing Continuum* amendments to the zoning code will go a long way to facilitate the expansion of alternative shelter options in the city.

Within this context, the advantage that the POD will provide to local government is a possibility for new arrangements on the flexible and low-cost “Temporary Outdoor Shelter” side of the continuum, with minimal neighborhood impacts. For program participants, the advantages of the Portable Opportunity Dwelling will include (1) the holding of title to their own shelter, (2) the utility of transportation, (3) the blessings of security and seclusion, and (4) the Liberty of location choice.

Benefits for Disadvantaged Groups

We have not yet performed market research with an adequate sample of prospective participants with which we could, with any reliability, differentially characterize the views of ethnic minorities regarding the advantages or disadvantages of the POD, and we decline to speculate on such differences, if any exist, so that we do not substitute bias and stereotypes for the genuine views of the People. We can speak with some confidence, however, about the needs of other groups that often lack housing. One such subgroup occurs among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth.

When New Avenues for Youth opened Unity House, Portland’s first culturally-specific Supportive Housing for LGBTQ Homeless Youth in 2015, that organization reported that nearly three-quarters of visitors to their Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center were homeless.¹ According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless, the proportion of Homeless Teens and Young Adults who are Gay or Trans may be as high as 40 percent, with family conflict related to coming out a primary cause of youth homelessness.²

Regardless of their age or other demographics, Transgender Men and Women are particularly vulnerable in the typical overnight shelter. Although HUD has rescinded the previous administration’s proposed rule which would have authorized the

exclusion of Transgender People from shelters,³ that decision does not change the fact that segregation of shelters on account of sex creates an environment for Trans People which is at best uncomfortable, and which in the worst case presents an extreme risk of assault (against the Trans Person).⁴ Now, we would not advocate for an end to sex segregation in mass shelters—that change could increase the risk of violence against Women in general. And we would not argue that “Alternative Shelter” could even begin to emulate services such as Unity House. However, a benefit of expanding alternative shelter will be the creation of a variety of offerings wherein a diversity of People can meet with the dignity and security that we all deserve.

Another group that frequently lacks housing includes People who are chemically dependent on alcohol or another addictive substance. Addiction is especially endemic among Homeless Veterans, who are six times as likely to report current problems with an addiction than Homeless People without a history of military service.⁵

Unlike Trans People and People of Color, People who use alcohol or other drugs can be lawfully excluded from most shelters, including Transitional Accommodations. According to the new *Shelter to Housing Continuum*, the distinguishing feature of “shelter” *vis-à-vis* “housing” is “the principle that there is a tenant to landlord relationship established with housing but not with shelter.”⁶ The long and short of the consequences of drawing such a bright line in what is ostensibly a ‘continuum’ is that residents may be forcibly removed from shelters at a moment’s notice, without an opportunity to defend themselves at an eviction proceeding in court.

To be fair to lawmakers, immediate removal is indispensable for keeping the peace at congregate shelters. No sane community service provider would say, “Give us your drunk, your high, your addled masses yearning to squat free”, crowding them all into a dormitory, and expect it all to work out fine.

¹ Parks, C. (2015). “New Avenues for Youth opens city’s first housing program for LGBTQ homeless youth”, *The Oregonian*, Sep. 30: https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2015/09/portland_homeless_lgbtq.html (Acc. 5/19/2021)

² Ray, N. (2006). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*. New York: Natl. Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and Natl. Coalition for the Homeless.

³ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev. (2021). “HUD Withdraws Proposed Rule, Reaffirms Its Commitment to Equal Access to Housing, Shelters, and Other Services Regardless of Gender

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Identity”, Press Release 21-069.

⁴ *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*, pp. 83-89, See Note 2.

⁵ Dunne, E., Burrell, L., Diggins, A., Whitehead, N. & Latimer, W. (2015). “Increased Risk for Substance Use and Health-Related Problems Among Homeless Veterans”, *American Journal on Addictions* 24(7).

⁶ Portl. Bur. Plan. & Sustain. et al. (2021). “Amendments to the City Code: Volume One, Introduction - Recommended Draft”, p. 4, in *Shelter to Housing Continuum*, Apr.

Plus, many People who have completed residential substance use treatment programs cite routine breath and urine analysis, and the risk of immediate termination, as essential motivators for maintaining sobriety at the beginning of their recovery.

However, abstinence from all drugs is NOT always the path to recovery for every drug user. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's *Federal Guidelines for Opioid Treatment Programs*, "Even when patients are not fully abstinent from all drugs of abuse, they and their communities continue to benefit from medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders."⁷ Furthermore, long waiting lists at inpatient detoxification programs can deter engagement in any treatment at all,⁸ and outpatient detox is often contraindicated.⁹ Meanwhile, with the passage of Measure 110, the People of the State of Oregon have (in part) put an end to the inanity of prohibition.

The 0.64-cubic-centimeter question is: What is likely to happen when someone with an opioid or polypharmacy dependency is removed from a Shelter or a Transitional Accommodation?

First, due to the stress of removal, they are likely to discontinue medication-assisted treatment such as buprenorphine or naltrexone; to relapse on heroin, illicitly-manufactured fentanyl, or an adulterated mixture; to share syringes; and to use methamphetamine "to increase alertness and navigate survival amidst severe hardship."^{10,11,12} Second, they are likely to have disrupted access to known suppliers of these drugs, and to administer them in a novel environment where, due to the absence of conditioned stimuli mediating the tolerance response, they face a high risk of 'overdose' death.^{13,14,15}

What the Portable Opportunity Dwelling can offer to those who face this scenario is a stable and low-stress transition to another Shelter site, reducing the risk of relapse and related harm.

A POD will not be the best solution for everyone. Anyone with more than one conviction for driving under the influence of intoxicants would—from the perspective of their own safety, rather than the miniscule risk of harm to others—make a disastrous candidate for ownership of a POD. However, many drug users and former drug users are able to refrain from driving while impaired, and to implement other practices of harm reduction. For these People, we believe that the harms of chronic eviction outweigh the risk of personal injury due to a collision, and that the Portable Opportunity Dwelling will be a suitable option for most applicants.

What the needs of these subgroups illustrate is that what Homeless People need is the same as we all need: a safe and stable place to call our own. In the end, we are all Homeless.¹⁶ If there is any difference between us, it is that what is safe and stable for some is not necessarily *stationary*.

Benefits to the Community

Beyond the external benefits resulting from the amelioration of the above, the great potential of the Portable Opportunity Dwelling for other residents and businesses lies in the dissipation of local impacts from Temporary Outdoor Shelter installations. The degree to which a Temporary Outdoor Shelter site disrupts local communities can be measured by the product of four factors: intensity, density, frequency, and duration of operation. The more shelter sites are established, the less frequently they will be needed, and the more diffuse they will be distributed throughout the county (and the state). The fewer residents there are at each site, the smaller will be the external costs that accrue from local diseconomies of agglomeration. At a Temporary Outdoor Shelter, three residents may be a crowd, and four a party, but five or six are a slum. Most importantly, *one* is but a wanderer, and not all who wander are lost.

⁷ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Svc. Admin. (2015). *Federal Guidelines for Opioid Treatment Programs*, p. 38.

⁸ Redko, C. et al. (2006). "Waiting Time as a Barrier to Treatment Entry: Perceptions of Substance Users", *J. Drug Issues* 36(4).

⁹ Blondell, R. (2005). "Ambulatory Detoxification of Patients with Alcohol Dependence", *Amer. Fam. Physician* 71(3).

¹⁰ Sinha, R. (2008). "Chronic Stress, Drug Use, and Vulnerability to Addiction", *Ann. New York Acad. Sci.* 1141.

¹¹ Bentzley, B., Barth, K., Back, S & Book, S. (2015). "Discontinuation of Buprenorphine Maintenance Therapy: Perspectives and Outcomes", *J. Subst. Abuse Treat.* 52.

¹² McNeil, R. et al. (2021). "Navigating post-eviction drug use amidst a changing drug supply: A spatially-oriented qualitative study of overlapping housing and overdose crises in Vancouver, Canada", *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 222(1).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Siegel, S. et al. (1982). "Heroin 'overdose' death: contribution of drug-associated environmental cues." *Science* 216(4544).

¹⁵ Gutiérrez-Cebollada, J. et al. (1994). "Psychotropic drug consumption and other factors associated with heroin overdose." *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 35(2).

¹⁶ Job 1:21

It may take some time for most People to agree, but we believe the optimal distribution of Portable Opportunity Dwellings will be found by POD users choosing their own sites, including parking for up to 24 hours on the street. If the City and County can house or shelter enough residents so that the number of ‘unsheltered’ People returns to pre-pandemic levels, then the density of POD users circulating with regularity could be as low as five per square mile. A tract the size of Ladd’s Addition would host, on an average day, one Portable Opportunity Dwelling.

This possibility would require the effective enforcement of most public order and parking laws except (unless amended) 16.90.290: Definition of “Recreational Vehicle”—which we are prepared to challenge as unconstitutionally vague.

To aid law enforcement, People who are under post-conviction supervision or pre-trial release for an alleged criminal offense could be required to install a positional transponder in their PODs as a condition of release or parole, and for the allocation of government funds to the provision of their Shelter.

Under these circumstances, each city block would become the collective host to a Portable Opportunity Dwelling as infrequently as once per every 100 days.

Imagine... *A Home for Everyone.*

3.1.3 At what scale are you able to offer to deliver the proposed services over the next year? Next two years?

In the first year, we can, as described in our Phase I proposal for a Demonstration Project, deliver two units—one concept and one prototype. In the second year, depending on the budget available, we could deliver a virtually unlimited number of PODs. Perhaps 100 units in the first year of mass production would strike an optimal balance between long-term fixed investment and short-term variable costs.

3.1.4 What experience do you have contracting with local government to deliver the services you propose to deliver, and what support, if any, would you need to be successful in such a contract?

Please see our response to 3.1.1. We do not anticipate

requiring any additional support in contracting and working with local government beyond what support the City and County ordinarily provide.

3.1.5 How does your organization deliver services in a manner that advances the County’s goals of advancing racial equity and ensuring environmental sustainability?

Please see our responses to 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.

3.1.6 What is your approach to working on a team to create a new product or program, either a shelter program or something analogous? How do you involve community voice? Does your team include people who are houseless or have experience living unhoused?

What God says is best, is best, though all the Men in the world are against it.
– “Faith” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 1678

An apparently benign but hidden premise is loaded into this question—that we are working on a “team.” To answer the question, we need to agree on definitions. At times, it has been in question whether the City and County were even on the same team.¹⁷

In *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, a team is defined as “a number of persons associated together in work or activity.” However, multiple connotations are appended, such as “a number of persons selected to contend on one side in a match” or “a group of specialists or scientists functioning as a collaborative unit.” Thus, teams can be cooperative or competitive. When which is best is the perennial quandary of social ecology.

At a recent meeting of our Board, when we reviewed the list of respondents to this Request, a Director wondered what might happen if delegates from all the respondents were assembled together—an interesting possibility to imagine. While a collaborative charrette is often more than the sum of its parts, design by committee can also produce aimless squabbles and watered-down solutions that lack genuine support. The best teamwork is often both cooperative *and* competitive. Thus, it is meet that JOHS has reached out for collaborators while engaging service providers in a competitive process.

¹⁷ Bailey, E. Jr. (2020). “Portland mayor threatens to pull city from county-partnered homeless efforts; county chair calls it ‘outrageous’”, *The Oregonian*, Sep 23: <https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2020/09/portland-mayor-threatens-to-pull-city-from-county-partnered-homeless-efforts-county-chair-calls-it-outrageous.html> (Accessed May 24, 2021)

[.com/portland/2020/09/portland-mayor-threatens-to-pull-city-from-county-partnered-homeless-efforts-county-chair-calls-it-outrageous.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2020/09/portland-mayor-threatens-to-pull-city-from-county-partnered-homeless-efforts-county-chair-calls-it-outrageous.html) (Accessed May 24, 2021)

The question both POD the People and JOHS need to answer is the extent to which we are allies or adversaries. The purpose of POD the People is to empower the poor by making mobile micro-housing available to all. Subject to IRC 501(c)(3) and ORS 65, we will employ any peaceable means necessary to achieve that purpose. If JOHS can also support this purpose, then we will focus on working with you and “lessening the burdens of government.” However, it remains to be seen that POD the People and JOHS are not in contention about the needs of the People. We have designed our plans with attention to win-win solutions, but you can’t please all of the People all of the time.¹⁸ If we are irreconcilably opposed, then our charitable purpose may need to focus on “the defense of civil rights,” and in that case only Time can tell which “team” will win.

When it comes to the internal team of POD the People, in all honesty, our team is scant. We are three volunteer Directors and a handful of informal auxiliaries. All of our co-founders including a current Director have been Homeless, and multiple volunteers are currently Homeless. The groundwork you see here is a labor of love—the sustained effort of a few dedicated People. We welcome more volunteers!

For the involvement of community, we have drafted membership bylaws with four membership classes: Directors, Workers (including volunteers), POD Owners, and Neighbors. When we ratify these bylaws, each membership class will receive an equal aggregate influence over the election of Directors using a class-weighted extension of a proportional multi-winner approval voting rule.¹⁹ We call this approach *democratic capitalism*. As these membership classes are representative of the public interest, and because no stock will be issued, nor dues required, nor or dividends paid, we believe that the method is consistent with IRC 501(c)(3). Unfortunately, we were not able to hold our first Membership Meeting in 2020 due to extenuating circumstances, so our Board of Directors is still self-perpetuating.

Apart from the Request for Quotations that we issued in January for components described in the design specifications, and our subsequent appearance on *BikePortland.org*, this proposal to the Joint Office of Homeless Services is our first mass communication with a broader audience. With some modest fundraising, we are ready to make the first POD a reality. In any case, we are grateful for the opportunity to receive feedback from JOHS.

3.2 – RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

3.2.1 Describe how your organization will provide the services you have identified as a sustainable business practice with environmental considerations.

As described in 3.1.1 and Phase I of this Request, the Portable Opportunity Dwelling (POD) will be very efficient. First of all, the POD itself *is* alternative transport. Furthermore, if the electric motor is not used to propel the POD beyond a half-mile per day in January, and if the POD is regularly parked with the solar panels unshaded and facing south, then meteorologic and thermodynamic computer simulations show that the POD interior could be heated to 65 degrees in Multnomah County without ever needing to be connected to the electrical grid in nine out of ten winters. And all of this on a \$100 battery pack with a capacity of less than a single kWh!

Now, the furnace also requires propane for fuel. However, propane produces no particulate matter in combustion and does not contaminate groundwater if accidentally released. Furthermore, heating the POD will emit less carbon dioxide in an entire year than a typical passenger car burns off in a single fill-up. (Incidentally, the furnace is not strictly necessary, but provided to forestall the possibility that a POD user would otherwise attempt unsafe means for comfort heat.)

Thanks to the low mass of the Portable Opportunity Dwelling, the carbon emissions resulting from a life-cycle of construction and recycling of a POD could be less than the embodied carbon in just the *foundation* of a very small house. A POD user could become a net carbon sink just by eating a lot of *Spirulina*, or by disposing of her toilet waste in a biogas digester.

¹⁸ Sen, A. (1970). “The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal”, *Journal of Political Economy* 78(1).

¹⁹ Brill, M., Freeman, F., Jansoon, S. & Lackner, M. (2017). RFPQ-76-2021 Phase II – POD the People

“Phragmén’s Voting Methods and Justified Representation”, *Proceedings of the 31st AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, pp. 406-413.

Speaking of toilet waste, the advantage of the cassette toilet to be installed in the POD is that discharging waste from the system is user-friendly and may be performed safely at a variety of locations, or even collected from POD users in the field. For more information about cassette toilets, please view the following informational video online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37xir19OjqI>

Most of the materials in the POD can be readily recycled except for the polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the windscreen frame. However, we must add that—due to arcane oil and gas industry tax and accounting rules—the polypropylene cladding can (at present) only be remarketed at a loss to the recycler.

3.2.2 Please explain how the organization will deliver services in a manner not reinforcing racial disparities and instead helping to eliminate them by having policies and practices that ensure equitable access and outcomes for communities of color, and what support, if any, the organization would need from the Joint Office?

At this stage of procurement, it is hard to answer this question because it is not entirely clear what relationship POD the People will have with JOHS or with the lead agencies who are responding to Category 1. If we provide Portable Opportunity Dwellings to JOHS or a lead agency for distribution or installation by that agency, then equitable access for People of different ethnic backgrounds must ultimately be the responsibility of the agency distributing the PODs. Nonetheless, we do plan to distribute PODs in our own programs regardless of whether we establish a contract with JOHS under this solicitation. Therefore, we will describe some plans to bring equity to those programs.

The critical junctures for securing equity are in (1) staff training and development, (2) communications and outreach, and (3) selection of applicants.

1. *Staff training and development.* Due to the brevity of this document, the complexity of labor laws, and the fact that we currently operate on an all-volunteer basis, we cannot comment upon equity in staffing at this time. Prior to hiring staff, we will engage consultants to advise us in these matters.

2. *Communications and Outreach.* We will liaison with community service organizations that have a culturally-specific focus on serving ethnic minorities, and we will keep accurate records of this

outreach. We will translate written materials into Spanish and provide or obtain interpretive services in American Sign Language, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Chinuk Wawa, and any other language for which competent telephonic interpretation is available at a comparable cost.

3. *Selection of Applicants.* We will anonymize applicant data prior to sharing it with the selection committee, who will sort applications into tiers of need based on a structured procedure. Criminal history (except for offenses related to driving a motor vehicle) will be considered as evidence of need, and will NOT be used to screen out program participants.

These methods are only a small component of the practice of equity, the scope of which is, of course, far beyond the space permitted for this document. For more about equity, please see Phase I and 3.1.2.

BLACK LIVES MATTER!

3.2.3 How does your agency incorporate equity values, manage diversity, and systematically involve clients, families, and communities in all aspects of design and service delivery?

As described in Phase I, during the Demonstration Project, we will exhibit the POD prototype in the community and obtain feedback from prospective clients. During mass production, clients will be directly involved in our work through a *collaborative partnership program*. In this program, People who help to build their own PODs will receive an invoice credit on a sliding scale that will completely offset the sales price for People who have no funds and no expected savings potential.

Families may also join in the work of the organization with the consent of program participants. In our draft application form, we have written several questions about family, most importantly about domestic violence and risk for domestic violence. People with moderate trauma histories, disabilities, or substance use issues will receive support from a Peer Support Specialist who may meet with family members. People requiring more involved support will be connected with other community services that are better equipped to provide counseling or case management from a Social Worker or another Qualified Mental Health Professional.

For more information about these factors: please see 3.1.2, 3.1.6, and 3.2.2.