

To: Senate Rural Communities and Economic Development Committee
From: Jason Cox
Subject: Oppose "Alternative Siting" provision in Senate Bill 7

To Chair Roblan and members of the committee,

I write you to ask that you amend or vote against Senate Bill 7 to prevent allowing the Oregon State Fair to relocate from its traditional home at the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center.

The fairgrounds site has hosted the fair for more than 150 years. It is as much a part of Salem as the State Capitol or Mission Mill. It is intrinsic to who we are as a community. It is also an economic driver for the surrounding businesses and the entire region.

Section 13 of Senate Bill 7 appears to allow this new public corporation to move the fair anywhere within Marion and Polk counties. It seems likely that any new fairgrounds site would be located closer to Portland, as Marion County stretches all the way to Aurora. Were the fair to leave Salem, it would leave behind yet more surplus state land with no plans for development. Judging by prior experience, the land would sit vacant for many years, leaving a gaping hole in an already-vulnerable portion of the community.

While the Oregon State Fairgrounds are in dire need of investment and fresh ideas, moving the state fair merely relocates the problem. New facilities would have to be built along with infrastructure - not to mention the price of purchasing a new site. Any new site would likely take a chunk of the county's priceless farmland out of production.

Allowing the fair to relocate makes it easier for leaders to give up on the current fairgrounds rather than striving for success in its home for 151 years. Furthermore, it is against Oregon's spirit of citizen democracy to hand over such a major decision to a board that is accountable to no one but the governor. By voting yes on Senate Bill 7 as written, legislators appear to be surrendering control of such a major decision to an unaccountable quasi-governmental corporation forever.

Again, I urge the committee and the legislature as a whole to vote down Senate Bill 7 or amend it to require a separate vote for relocating the fair.