



HARNEY COUNTY COURT

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April 4, 2013

Chair Roblan

And members of the Rural Communities and Economic Development Committee.

I am Steve Grasty; my address is c/o Harney County Courthouse 450 N Buena Vista Burns, Oregon. Thanks for allowing me to provide this testimony by phone.

In the 1990's, Harney County assumed the responsibility of the Building Inspection program from the state. We collaborated with Malheur County and hired a single contractor to serve as both the building official and to provide inspection services. That organization had a staff of several qualified people and was able to provide at least weekly inspection service to an area covering in excess of 20% of the state of Oregon. This model worked well for over a decade.

The reason that our county assumed the program at that time is that the closest state inspectors were in Pendleton, a 3.5 hour drive in good weather. This often resulted in two and three week gaps between inspection visits and I suspect also lead to poor compliance as many jobs were likely completed without permits or inspections. The local contractors were vocal about the need for prompt and efficient building department services. Assuming the program from the state and working a collaborative arrangement with Malheur County was a good solution at that time.

In January of 2011 our inspection contractor elected to discontinue service to this county, and has now notified Malheur County of his intent to discontinue service there in June of this year. Since that time we have continued to be able to provide weekly service with the assistance of surrounding counties offering building official and inspection services, in particular Lake and Deschutes Counties. However this is cost prohibitive and I doubt we can afford the travel cost of inspection service longer than a couple more years at most. Should we be forced in returning the service to DCBS I also doubt the state, acting alone, will have the resources needed to provide timely services.

With that background I would like to go on the record as solidly supporting SB582-1. This bill will establish opportunities for the state and local government, particularly in our part of the state, to work together and find solutions to assure construction can continue promptly. Allowing the state and local government to cooperate and combine resources will enhance our ability to retain local control while ensuring efficient delivery of building department services. Without this law a significant portion of this state may find itself without adequate inspection services.

This bill also has other tools that will be particularly useful in the rural areas of the state. The bill creates flexible approaches to rural building standards that address unique rural construction needs. The current one-size-fit-all approach does not work all the time. In addition, the authorization for building department staff to work directly with the owner and developer to improve code compliance

on plans seems to be a sensible tool for our staff to provide timely service while reducing delays that are currently created by having the designers of the project make the required changes. I remain somewhat worried with Section 9 of the bill, which seems to be fairly broad but feel confident that we could find a way to use the same flexibility on a more limited basis to deal with that single issue.

Chair Roblan and members of the Committee I strongly encourage you to find a way to pass this bill and help my county to continue to have the same opportunities for economic growth other areas have. Without the tools provided by this bill a significant portion of the state may find it difficult to provide adequate and timely building inspection services.

Thank you for your consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven E. Grasty". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Steven E. Grasty
Judge, Harney County Court