

April 17, 2015

TO: Oregon House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development, Chair Caddy McKeown and Members of the Committee

RE: Testimony in Favor of HB3526 Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant Program

My name is Mary Bosch and I am Director of Rural Economic Vitality for Rural Development Initiatives, a statewide nonprofit serving rural Oregon. I am testifying in support of HB 3526 Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant Program that would fill a critical resource gap in Oregon downtowns. Downtown revitalization is a top economic development concern of nearly every rural Oregon town. Community leaders are asking for help and for resources to address their questions:

- How do we fill our vacant ground floors and get the lights on upstairs?
- What businesses and entrepreneurs should we target? How can we help existing businesses grow?
- What can we do to keep local residents shopping local?
- How do we work with property owners to get buildings in good condition for tenants and create the right size space for today's retail and small business?

Downtowns are the center of commerce and economic generators for local residents and Oregon's growing tourism market. Many towns are keenly aware of the link between a vibrant downtown and the ability to grow their community's jobs base. One such example is the town of Sweet Home that worked hard in the post-timber era to create new jobs by attracting new industry to locate in the community. In working with Business Oregon two potential new businesses were identified and targeted for relocation. Sweet Home looked good on paper, but when both companies came for a community visit, they were concerned with the "run-down" appearance downtown which they felt demonstrated a lack of commitment on the part of the community to invest in itself and this assessment was the reason given for not relocating.

Since then, Sweet Home has participated in the OMS and worked tirelessly with very limited resources to begin the revitalization process and is a great example of how small amounts go a long way. A \$12,000 Market Study and Business Development Action Plan resulted in the following:

1. Pop-Up lease program to assist new startup businesses in the Commercial Core.
2. The creation of a Commercial Exterior Improvement Program where funds and professional design services are matched with property owner funds to improve the exterior appearance of commercial structures in the core including signage, color palette, etc. We would also like to expand this to include street scape and street art projects in the downtown sector at key business locations.
3. Entrepreneurship and microenterprise assistance—leveraged technical assistance to local microenterprise and or youth entrepreneurship opportunities



As a model self-help community, Sweet Home like small towns across our state need resources to continue to develop and sustain the innovative approaches to business and property development that the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant Program would provide.

Downtowns are the hearts of our community and a well known selling point for broader economic investment and job growth. I urge you to support HB 3526 and thank you for your time and leadership.

