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January 29, 2016

Chair Sara Gelser
Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Gelser and Committee Members:

The Mayor and Council of the City of Corvallis urge lifting the state's ban on Inclusionary Zoning as in SB1533. This measure amends current law, removing the prohibition of local governments from considering inclusionary zoning, a tool by which a more affordable mix of housing opportunities can be provided in their communities.

Background:

Housing affordability for lower income workers and families has been a long standing concern in Corvallis. For the last three decades, Corvallis has offered programs that provide housing assistance directly and in partnership with community non-profit agencies such as Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services and Habitat for Humanity. However, there are serious resource constraints that limit the ability of Corvallis and other jurisdictions to meet these needs.

In the late 1990s, Corvallis was strongly considering the merits of inclusionary zoning as an option to augment existing programs. In 1999, ORS 197.309 effectively took away the opportunity for Corvallis to make a local decision about whether this type of program could fit with other land use planning and housing program tools.

Current Opportunities:

There are more than 18,000 people who travel to Corvallis to work each day. The City of Corvallis initiated a 2014 study, conducted by ECONorthwest, to learn more about those folks who work in Corvallis, but do not live in our community. The project also identified strategies that could provide more housing opportunities for those commuters who wish to live in Corvallis.

Forty percent of survey respondents were interested in moving to Corvallis. Concerns about housing affordability were by far the greatest barrier identified by these commuters. The profile of respondents includes a wide range of household incomes. For example, the Corvallis School District reports that nearly 30 percent of its teachers live outside of Corvallis.

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Inclusionary zoning was identified by ECONorthwest as an important policy option to consider as a tool to increase the supply of mixed income housing in Corvallis for these commuters. It could complement other programs that the City and non-profit partners currently have available or might implement in the future to address low income and work force housing needs.

Corvallis hasn't yet decided if inclusionary zoning is an option that should be implemented – that decision would be made after careful review and public deliberations. However, amendment of ORS 197.309 to remove the Inclusionary Zoning pre-emption would restore local control of planning and housing efforts and allow our community to decide if this tool works for Corvallis rather than being prevented from considering it due to a state preemption.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Biff Traber". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Biff Traber
Mayor