

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood:

I retired in 2012 after working 19 years for the Housing Authority of Yamhill County and assisted that agency in developing over 200 units of affordable housing. While I am generally supportive of any Legislative measures to promote affordable housing (especially those that increase the funding to build such housing), I see little in the proposed Senate Bill 1575 that offers any practical assistance to affordable housing providers.

Most affordable housing tends to develop in high density, multiple family projects. These projects often serve residents with limited private transportation options (ie, they don't drive or cannot afford a vehicle), so need to be located near a public transportation stop or in town near stores and services. Locating them at the far edges of town as this measure seems to imply should happen is absolutely the worst possible location. I suggest you communicate with Oregon Housing and Community Services regarding the standards they presumably still use to judge the siting of affordable housing projects.

In my opinion the real lack of land for affordable housing is caused by weak or ineffective zoning. I am most familiar with what has happened in McMinnville, the city where I live. The "Multiple Family" zoning here is R-4. In an excessively large UGB expansion in 1980 the City brought in plenty of land for commercial, industrial and residential uses. With the exception of minor UGB amendments the City has lived within that original 20-year supply of land and continues to have land available in all three general designations. However, because the R-4 zoning in McMinnville allows single family development, much of the land in this "Multiple Family" designation was used for single family and duplex development, so that it was essentially all used up. Land remains in the other residential zoning categories but cannot be used for higher density projects without a politically difficult (dare I say impossible?) rezoning application. Such high density projects are allowed in certain commercial zones in McMinnville, so for the past 20 years affordable housing developers have purchased higher-priced commercial land to develop affordable housing.

While buying commercial land does allow affordable developments to happen closer to the city core, it drives up the cost of the housing and takes away land that probably would be better served for retail and other commercial needs that the city has identified. The Legislature would do more to increase the supply of affordable housing if they required the cities to keep a proportionate supply of land for affordable projects and by requiring an exclusive zone for high density housing. It would also help if DLCD were given the authority and funding to make this happen. At present as I see it enforced, the 20-year supply of residential land seems to mean a 20-year supply of single family land, and I fear that SB 1575 will just be used to build more suburbs on the outskirts of town rather than ensure a useful supply of land designated for affordable housing.

Thank you for considering my opinion on this matter. In closing I would like to make clear that the opinion I am expressing is a personal one and is not necessarily endorsed by my former employer.

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