

HB 2007 testimony 6-22-17

I am Fred Leeson, a board member and past president of the Bosco-Milligan Foundation in Portland. We own and operate the non-profit Architectural Heritage Center. We believe that our central city neighborhoods, including historic districts, are vital components to making Portland the successful city it is today.

HB 2007 as it stands will seriously damage city neighborhoods by speeding the pace of demolition of less-expensive homes and replacing them with far more costly single-family homes and duplexes. This conclusion is based on the several hundred demolitions in Portland over the past five years that have led to the construction of virtually zero “affordable” replacements. Along the way, opportunities to purchase less-expensive homes in the region have been reduced and renters have been displaced from rented homes.

We believe that design review, including historic design review, has proven successful in improving the design and quality of new buildings that have undergone those reviews. Given that new buildings could last for 200 years or more, taking time to maximize the quality of their design and materials is time well spent.

Since historic districts in Portland comprise less than 2 percent of the city’s residentially-zoned land, we believe that historic districts are not a major factor in the so-called affordability “crisis.” That said, we believe that density can be increased in historic districts by building accessory dwelling units and by allowing large old homes to be reconfigured into multiple units. We believe that historic design review for exterior changes is vital to protecting the context of our historic fabric.

We believe that quality construction in many parts of Portland can provide excellent new housing opportunities, without destroying the integrity of the city’s historic districts.

We appreciate the need for new affordable housing opportunities. We believe this goal can be achieved with success and sensitivity, but not by incentivizing the pace of residential demolitions that remove our most accessible housing for owners and renters today.

Regrettably, as a result of intent or not, the legislative trajectory of this bill eliminated or minimized testimony and factual submissions from the heritage community. We believe that ALL stakeholders should have a voice in decisions that affect them. As a result, we believe that HB 2007 is poor public policy and violates Oregon’s tradition of public involvement. Thank you.

