

Dear Oregon Legislators,

May 23, 2017

Unfortunately, House Bill 2007, which is being fast-tracked through the legislative process, has only recently come to the attention of local neighborhood and preservation advocates. As land use legislation that, in the name of housing affordability, effectively rezones all single-dwelling neighborhoods throughout the entire state, it is a massive land use decision; yet there has been **virtually no public outreach** to inform and engage Oregonians.

Furthermore, this poorly written bill provides no guarantees that even a reasonable supply of affordable housing will be created as a result. The bill uses the terms “needed” housing and “affordable” housing with inadequate definitions. Under this bill, any developer can disrupt neighborhoods (and even demolish some of the most affordable housing) by claiming that whatever they build is “affordable.” One supporter recently commented that a broad definition of “needed” housing is necessary because even people making \$300,000/year can’t find housing. Not only is that incorrect but it is a blatant slap in the face of those who are really struggling. Recent amendments to the bill do not fix the bill, rather, they add ambiguity and confusion.

Instead, the outcomes of HB 2007 are a giveaway to developers, the elimination of single-dwelling zones, the elimination of design guidelines that help to ensure the compatibility of infill housing, and national historic district protections. This should be no surprise given its key sponsors: the Homebuilders Association and Mary Kyle McCurdy (1000 Friends of Oregon) who were main backers of Portland’s Residential Infill Project (which Portland’s planning staff now concede will *not* guarantee affordable housing). Although 1000 Friends of Oregon has in the past been supportive of historic preservation (preservation, in fact, has preserved more affordable housing options across the country), Mary Kyle McCurdy has stated publicly that she is opposed to all historic districts and is on a mission to eliminate them.

The Homebuilders and McCurdy recognize that **by keeping the language in the bill progressive in tone and vague**, it is a win-win for them if not Oregonians. Homebuilders have stated publicly, that they cannot build affordable housing, by federal definitions, without subsidies. Given the current political climate nationally, and fiscal climate at the state level, subsidies, on any scale, seem unlikely. What the developers will build, as they have been, may be ***affordable for a few***. That is what HB 2007 guarantees.

Goal 1 of the state’s land use goals is meaningful public participation. While Goal 1 may apply to comprehensive plans, HB2007 overrides local comprehensive plans which makes it the responsibility of legislators to inform and engage their constituents in this massive change to Oregon land use. To date, there has been no meaningful public engagement. Apparently, after the May 22nd poorly written amendments were submitted (behind closed doors), no new amendments will be considered. I implore you to delay any decision before you have meaningfully involved your constituents and have done impact and fiscal analyses to adequately understand the bill’s results.

Sincerely,

Meg Merrick, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Portland State University