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To: JWMNR Exhibits
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HB 2007 Op Ed

Sometimes in the legislative process a good idea in a good bill gets hijacked. That's what happened to HB 2007. It started off as a way to get more affordable housing. It got amended and hijacked to kill off historic districts, to allow development without enough public process, and to encourage demolitions.

We oppose HB 2007 in its current A-amended form.

HB 2007 violates Oregon land use goals: Goal 1 requires citizen participation in land use, but, with little public input, HB 2007 strips citizen oversight and involvement on zoning and design. Goal 2 says that actions must be consistent with our city and county comprehensive plans but HB 2007 invalidates our hard-worked comp plans.

HB 2007, because it invalidates comp plans, means local governments must spend millions of dollars re-writing laws in an unfunded mandate that throws out tax dollars already spent on decades of urban planning.

We believe HB 2007 will lead to UN-affordable housing because HB 2007 encourages demolitions, which are proven to drive up housing costs, and, shockingly, HB 2007 defines affordable as 120% of Median Family Income while HUD defines affordable rent as 30% of income. It's an unworkable trickle-down-economics scheme as we've already seen in Portland's Albina District which led to massive displacement of low-income and African American citizens from a historically black community. Research shows that the most affordable house is the one already built. Better state policy would encourage dividing existing homes into duplexes and adding Accessory Dwelling Units; define affordable rent as 30% of income; discourage demolitions by only allowing demolitions for developments with 50% affordable housing; and remove mentions of historic districts (which are only 1% of Oregon's housing).

Incredibly, HB 2007's supporters label historic districts as racist. In fact, for 45 years northeast Portland's historic district has enthusiastically and repeatedly elected African Americans to represent it in the Oregon House and Senate. It is the only district in the state where that has happened. Advocates for HB 2007 appropriated the racial pain of America's history of redlining to try to shame historic district advocates. Such redlining claims are false. In fact, zone changes are already allowed in historic districts --to turn homes into duplexes and add ADU's. Historic district protections include only a slight delay on demolitions, since Oregon has some of the weakest historic preservation laws in the nation. Historic districts provide some of the most affordable housing and are economic engines for cities all over Oregon. Just ask Baker City, Astoria, Sumpter, Corvallis, Oregon City, St. Helens, Port Orford, Bend, Sisters, or Hood River. In reality, HB 2007 would prevent a currently planned National Registry listing of buildings that are significant to African American history in Portland and would encourage the demolition of those buildings.

It appears to us that a Southeast Portland neighborhood fight over a proposed historic district has been dragged into the bill's attack on historic districts. It is sad to see Tom McCall's beloved 1000 Friends of Oregon support bad land-use legislation, apparently driven by a staff member who opposed the historic district in her Portland neighborhood. It is appallingly bad policy to use a Portland neighborhood fight to make land-use policy for the entire state.

HB 2007, in its current form, needs substantial amendment work. Its first public hearing on March 14 only included testimony from the amendment backers and nothing from concerned critics. If it passes as is it should be vetoed.

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