

Dear Committee Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee,

I am writing today to express my support for the Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP), which allows students to develop skills through applied projects that directly help Oregon communities achieve their goals. In spring of 2018, I was a student in a City Planning class at the University of Oregon. During one of our lectures, Professor Marc Schlossberg discussed his work as one of the founders of SCYP. The program immediately intrigued me as an excellent way to help Oregon communities in a direct and impactful way.

From a young age I prioritized serving my community. In elementary school, my father took me along on a food drive, my first service experience. Together, we delivered boxes to those in need during the holiday season. The experience had a profound impact on me; seeing smiles on faces of those receiving food boxes instilled in me the positive impact I could make on my community. I carry the value of volunteer service and the lessons I learned from it to this day.

In college, I declared double majors in Political Science and Public Policy. I sought to make real, lasting change in my community; I wanted to help the people I had delivered food to reach a place of food security. To that end, I began searching for jobs and internships that would positively affect my community. In winter of 2018, I worked as an intern in Senator Ron Wyden's field office in Eugene. There, I enjoyed answering phone calls and addressing questions and concerns of the Senator's constituents but became disillusioned by the work's political divisiveness. To that end, I changed my focus to non-political public service positions, and became a State of Oregon LEAP Intern for the summer of 2018. Working in the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD), I had the incredible opportunity to protect Oregon's workers while upholding the state's business standards to the highest degree. I loved my time at WCD, but after the ten-week program ended, I felt dissatisfied. I wanted to continue working to better Oregon's communities in an impactful way.

Enter the Sustainable City Year Program. When Professor Schlossberg discussed the program with the spring City Planning class, I inquired if there were any student positions available. He indicated that there were and invited me to interview with the Sustainable Cities Institute (SCI, the applied think tank that runs SCYP). I was hired for a position the following fall and have been working with SCI and by extension SCYP ever since. My work with SCYP has allowed me to continue affecting positive change throughout Oregon. As social media coordinator, I spread the word on SCYP's projects with Oregon cities like La Pine, Gresham, Eugene, and Springfield. Furthermore, I witness first-hand the good these projects do for their respective communities: providing vital information cities otherwise would not study, promoting sustainable ideas for city development, and changing the way cities think about development opportunities. As report editor, I also see the way SCYP partnerships positively affect the participating students. I read student reports and learn how they apply classroom learning in a public sector setting. I see the great work students do to help their partner communities, and in turn how those communities help students develop their skills and apply their unique talents. I feel lucky to bear witness to the unique partnerships SCYP provides.

Just as SCYP facilitates growth among its student participants, it facilitates growth in me. In the office, I have developed my communications, writing, and editing skills while working on the community-oriented service I am passionate about. Moreover, seeing SCYP students' work has changed the way I think about my community and its future. Where once I saw public transit as an impediment to my speedy drive to the grocery store, I now recognize it as a service to be celebrated and expanded upon. This represents just one of many ways SCYP has not only facilitated my skill development but likewise changed my understanding of my community. Finally, SCYP allows me to achieve my ultimate goal: applying my skills in a way that creates a large, lasting change in my community. This distinguished opportunity is a rare find for a student my age with my experience; I am grateful for the opportunity the SCYP program affords me.

I look forward to my continued work at SCYP in the years to come. Moreover, I anticipate the development of new ideas and real change the program is sure to create through future student/community partnerships.

Sincerely,  
Sean Vermilya