

Testimony

Mayor Jim Lepin, City of Millersburg

Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use

State Capitol, 900 Court St. NE Salem Oregon, Hearing Room D

Tuesday, 3/19, 3PM

Chair Clem, Vice Chair McLain, and members of the Committee I am Jim Lepin, Mayor of the City of Millersburg and a Board Member of the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments and I am here to testify on behalf of the City of Millersburg and the Council of Governments on H.B. 2436 which concerns the requirement of the State of Oregon to begin the process of determining our ability to assume Federal wetland permitting processes.

As one of the fastest growing cities in our region and the state, Millersburg has experienced a great deal of recent development and struggled with wetland issues. Being on the I-5 Corridor and within easy driving distance of Salem, Eugene, Lebanon, Corvallis, and Albany, Millersburg has grown into a hub for both housing and industry.

Millersburg is connected to the regional economy, sharing a labor pool and commuters with Lebanon, Albany, and Corvallis as well as the rest of the region. Millersburg also shares many of the same growth and housing affordability concerns.

I echo Mayor Traber's comments concerning how we work together as jurisdictions across our three counties and the need to address wetland permitting in our region. If there is one common denominator in our valley and region, it is that we are "wet".

Being "wet" drives a number of environmental issues from how water runs and to where it goes, how species thrive on our lands, and to what degree wetlands serve as permanent features and necessary and sensitive environmental areas of our landscape.

Currently, all of these determinations undergo a thorough parallel process at both state and federal agencies to determine if land can be built on, and, if so, how sensitive water and soil features shall be protected and, if necessary, mitigated.

These dual processes cost developers, and our cities, time and effort, which drives the cost of development ever higher. Furthermore, every acre of wetland that is allowed to be developed requires an offset or credit of protected land from a wetland mitigation bank. The cost of credits is rising and the credit supply is diminishing. Combined, the cost of credits and dual permitting paths contribute to housing costs and may drive developers out of the valley.

For example, in Millersburg several projects have been delayed multiple months or years because of the dual permitting process. Many projects require permitting through both the Department of State Lands (DSL) and the Army Corp of Engineers. DSL's process has a required timeline of up to six months. There is no

certain timeline in which the Corp must respond, but they will often wait until DSL's recommendations have been made before doing their evaluation. This can result in loss of a construction season (or sometimes two) while this dual process is taking place. In addition to the timeline impacts, this duplicative effort increases engineering and wetland specialist costs, without providing any additional benefits to the protection of our natural resources.

It is because of the negative effect on my city, and others, created by the dual permitting path, that the City of Millersburg and the Council of Governments support 404 Assumption and House Bill 2436, which paves the way for the state to assume Federal authority.

Thank you for your consideration. I and/or my staff will be happy to answer questions.

