

April 6, 2019

In support of HB 2001

House Committee on Human Services and Housing, April 8, 2019 Work Session

Patty Wentz, Portland Resident, Mt. Tabor neighborhood

I do not like the changes that have happened in my neighborhood.

When I moved into my home 18 years ago, I moved to a block filled with young families. It is hard to picture now, but there was a time when our neighborhood was affordable for working class people. Teachers for the Atkinson Elementary and Franklin High School could buy a home within walking distance to their classrooms. People who worked hard could afford to buy a reasonably priced home to raise their children. Back in the day, the street was alive with children playing and evening basketball games. Now, those children have grown up and moved away. New teachers in the school must commute long distances to get here because they cannot hope to live close by. The median home price in my neighborhood has skyrocketed to more than half a million dollars as wages have remained stagnant in the state. I imagine that few of the children raised on our block can ever hope to afford to buy a home for their own young families nearby, short of one of many sterile condos that have erupted on SE Division Street and SE Hawthorne. As a result, today my block is much quieter and less alive. It also remains one of the whitest neighborhoods in Portland, in a city that has already been dubbed the whitest city in America.

In our neighborhood, long time homeowners have benefitted greatly from increased housing prices because we are sitting on the kind of home equity that most of us never imagined we would see. I understand the fears that creating more affordable housing mixed in with our single-family homes will somehow take something away from us and there is no denying that the last decade has already changed the city. But by being intentional we can start to broaden the number of people who are benefitting.

It is an illusion to believe that our neighborhoods and communities will always stay the way they were when we arrived and fighting against change is like fighting against the rain. All of us will profit if we look both to the past and the future to help guide that change. As last month's EcoNorthwest report showed, Oregon leads the nation in homeless people living without shelter. That is a sad mark of distinction for which every single one of us must take responsibility. If we

want to have vibrant and thriving communities, we must be open to both old and new ways of living on the limited land we have.

If we want to truly protect our quality of life in our neighborhoods and protect our property values, we can take steps to reduce the number of our neighbors who are sleeping in the doorways of our local businesses, or under our freeway overpasses. We can open the possibility for young families, people of color and seniors on a fixed income to join us on our beautiful tree-lined streets close to good schools within blocks of some of the most beautiful public parks in the country. We can start to address racially discriminatory policies that historically kept people of color out of our neighborhoods. Once again allowing a few new duplexes, tri-plexes and four-plexes on single lots on my block with HB 2001 will do more to help people than any charitable contribution I can make, any march or rally I go to or any volunteer activities I can do. While the changes will be slow-moving, they will be significant so we must act now to put ourselves on a different path where more people can afford to live in our communities

As a long-time homeowner in a now-affluent neighborhood, I can handle maybe not being able to park right in front of my house or waiting a few more beats to make a left-hand turn at an intersection because there are a few more cars on my street or more children in the crosswalks because it means that more people have access to the same overall quality of life that I enjoy.

Just as important to me, HB 2001 will restore some of the original character of my neighborhood. I have researched the history of my three-bedroom, one-bathroom home and learned that decades ago it was owned by a single-income blue collar family that raised six children here. I want to make it possible for these kinds of families to return.

I urge state lawmakers help restore my neighborhood to the way it used to be and vote yes on HB 2001.