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February 3, 2020

Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis
900 Court Street NE, H-239
Salem, OR 97301

Christine Drazan
900 Court St NE, H-395
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Opportunity Zone Legislation in Oregon

Dear Rep. Boshart Davis and Rep. Drazan:

I am writing on behalf of the rural communities that stand to suffer significantly with the passage of HB 4010. Should Oregon decouple from the federal Opportunity Zones program, it will significantly and negatively impact much needed investment in the blighted, depressed and struggling rural areas of Oregon that fall within one of the 86 Qualified Opportunity Zones tracts.

Passage of HB 4010 would signal that our elected officials are prioritizing politics above offering an avenue for transformative change for our most neglected and beaten down communities.

It would also tell investors that their capital is not needed, wanted or welcomed here.

Even though I may disagree, I do understand the argument that ultra-wealthy investors, hedge funds, family offices and the like don't need added incentives to develop high rise projects in Downtown Portland. But by taking action to eliminate the Oregon tax benefits to those select few investors who may not need it, you are crippling the ability for small investors and developers like myself to route their investment dollars and creative energy to blighted, neglected and often abandoned and dangerous properties around the state. Incentivized investment is critical for making a difference in these areas. These properties will never be attractive to or benefit from the same investors who prefer to build high rises.

I grew up in Reedsport at the tail end of the timber and wood products heyday in the 1980's. Jobs were plentiful, schools, police and public services well funded, and citizens were engaged, happy, and took pride in their work and communities.

It's well documented that since the collapse of that timber-based economic driver, unemployment has ballooned, funding for critical public services has collapsed and pride in many of our South Coast communities is at historic lows.

There are dozens of communities around the state with similar stories. And they can all benefit from substantial strategic investments. Through Opportunity Zones, they have finally become visible to investors who otherwise may never have taken a look.

A million dollar investment in a community like Reedsport, The Dalles, or Lakeview can be transformative. Investments could create affordable housing, transform business districts, reactivate abandoned industrial areas, and create hundreds or even thousands of family wage jobs. Jobs that are desperately needed in these communities. All of this builds momentum to reverse a generation of economic decline.

The spill-over benefits go beyond a simple "clean up" of these areas. The commercial activity and re-activation of blighted properties will add tax and services revenues for communities and municipalities that are often severely under-funded.

When investing in rural communities, one of the top prerequisites I have is finding community and civic leaders with a "solutions focused" mindset. It is my belief that people and organizations are better served by advocating for what they want as opposed to fighting to defeat what they oppose. I ask respectfully, is this bill designed to support and encourage investment activity that struggling communities of our state desperately need? Or is it designed to impair a couple of massive high-rise developments in one Downtown Portland Opportunity Zone, at the expense of the remaining 85 Opportunity Zones in the state that truly need it the most?

If this bill passes as written, thousands of citizens in the state—especially those in rural communities so often overlooked—will want to know why.

On behalf of the citizens, leaders, developers and investors of every Oregon Opportunity Zone outside of Downtown Portland, I urge you to discard HB 4010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robb Crocker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Robb C. Crocker
Entrepreneur and Rural Developer