

Testimony of Randy Tucker, Legislative Affairs Manager
In Support of House Bill 2377
House Committee on Business and Labor
February 24, 2021



Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

Since 2014 Metro has coordinated the efforts of the Oregon Brownfields Coalition, a diverse alliance of more than 50 partners from the public, private and nonprofit sectors united by a desire to advance solutions that can return Oregon's thousands of contaminated sites to productive use. At Metro, one impetus behind this effort is the desire to make the most efficient use of our existing urban land. Another is the potential benefit of converting sites that are degrading the economic and environmental health of their surrounding neighborhoods into assets that build prosperity and community.

Brownfields vary widely in size, setting, complexity and redevelopment potential. There is no single tool that will address all of them, which is why the Brownfields Coalition has pursued a variety of policy and funding proposals and is doing so again this session. Our legislative efforts have generally reflected the "polluter pays principle." This has often meant excluding parties that have caused or exacerbated contamination from receiving public funding or other benefits related to brownfield cleanup or redevelopment. In HB 2377, the "polluter pays principle" means assigning financial responsibility for mitigating contamination to parties who were paid to assume that obligation. In each case, it is critical that we adhere to this principle, both to ensure fairness and to create the right incentives for responsible behavior.

As for Metro specifically, in 1996 we purchased a 27-acre property in the Portland Harbor known as Willamette Cove with proceeds from Metro's first voter-approved bond measure for parks and natural areas. The site was slated for redevelopment as an urban nature park along the Willamette River. Prior to purchasing the property, Metro had received a report noting that it did not present unacceptable risks to human or environmental health. However, shortly afterward, it was discovered that environmental contamination was much worse than had been previously detected. More than 20 years later, we are still working to ensure that this property can eventually become the natural jewel it should be. The site has a complicated ownership history but HB 2377 may provide one avenue that could help to finance the cleanup and enable us to realize the potential of this place on behalf of the people of North Portland and the larger region.

In summary, Metro supports HB 2377 and urges you to move it forward. Thank you very much for considering these comments.