

March 17, 2023

To the Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB 1051. This bill seems to suggest that land is the answer to many of the major issues facing Oregon communities. This couldn't be further from the truth. Oregon communities have created and invested in comprehensive land use plans that carefully and intentionally guide community growth over many years.

Part of those plans are urban growth boundaries that serve two essential purposes. First, they effectively prevent urban sprawl from interfering with Oregon's vital farm and forest economies. Land is a resource that once committed to urban use cannot be economically and, in many cases, effectively reclaimed for resource use. Urban growth boundaries ensure that urban expansion occurs only after the lands already committed to urban development have been efficiently utilized in pursuit of broader community aims. Research has concluded that Oregon's urban growth boundaries are perhaps the only effective growth management tool in use in the US today. This is not the time to weaken what UGBs should and can do.

Second, urban growth boundaries focus public investment in infrastructure and services in those places where those investments are most needed. Circumventing community planning processes through SB 1051 will result in carefully planned community investments being left behind and/or inefficiently utilized due to unplanned additions of urban land mostly of interest to individual land owners. Undercutting Oregon's urban growth boundaries, as SB 1051 promises to do, jeopardizes years of planning and commitments made for and agreed to by Oregon communities, and to both urban and rural residents.

No one argues that Oregon doesn't face a housing crisis. Unfortunately, SB 1051 attempts to hijack that consensus by portraying it as a land crisis, which couldn't be further from the truth. Don't let the current high level of commitment to providing more and better housing be subverted by the opportunistic, inaccurate, and distracting approach embedded in SB 1051. SB 1051 is no solution, creates new problems, and leaves both Oregonians and their communities high and dry at a time when we all need the Legislature to come up with real solutions to our real problems. Please reject SB 1051 and all other efforts this session to weaken or eliminate urban growth boundaries.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Ethan Seltzer  
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Portland State University  
(affiliation provided solely for purposes of identification)