

Submitter: Michael De Blasi

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB1537

I request that my testimony against SB 1537 be added to the record. I readily acknowledge that Oregon has a housing availability and affordability problem. But while some of the proposed solutions are acceptable, I am fully opposed to allowing cities to expand their UGB.

Declaring that lack of land as one of the causes of the housing crisis completely ignores, history and present day reality, and absolves cities of the responsibility that they bear for this crisis. Oregon is not unique in the pattern of development that is dominated by single-family detached housing zoning, excessive off-street parking requirements and the never-ending spending on increased road and highway capacity. However, it's these foolish efforts that have restricted the land available for housing and it would be foolish to continue that development pattern as the solution. Just read the HNAs to see that cities have not been serious about housing affordability. The problem has been exacerbated by the segregation of uses (Euclidian zoning) and large tracts wasted on warehouses, industrial parks and data centers.

I am extremely disappointed with politicians from both parties that this is considered a solution to the crisis. Democrats should know better that paving over Oregon will lead to an uglier state and destroy what makes Oregon special. Just look in other states that lack UGBs and see how their cities and suburbs have devoured land, destroyed communities and increased commuting time. Democrats are falling for the same lie that has been spread for decades by large tract developers and the asphalt industry about how protecting against sprawl is bad for the economy. These groups are only interested in their short-term profits. It's also likely that the expanded UGBs will be filled with unaffordable housing that only benefits wealthier Oregonians. Even with adding bike lanes, these spread out communities encourage driving and discourage transit, biking and walking. How does that work with our efforts to reverse climate change?

Conservatives should know that spread out development is fiscal suicide. The further a community grows outward, the more miles of roads and pipes are required, and the larger area for transit and emergency services to serve. We put taxpayers on the hook for increased spending on infrastructure maintenance while decreasing revenue per acre to pay for those costs. Simple math shows that costs are higher and revenues lower in single family detached sprawled out communities than in compact communities.

Like with the plan for highway expansion and tolling highways, trying to make more compact communities AND expanding the UGB are conflicting actions and will cause unnecessary government liabilities. As these communities expand, the bill for that expansion will eventually come due. Local governments already struggle to pay for their liabilities. They will only be forced with bankruptcy in the future with these extra liabilities. And as these communities decline, they will be less attractive and less resilient to environmental and economic shocks.

I encourage you to work on housing affordability but expanding the UGB is NOT the solution. It is a temporary salve on the wound that is decades in the making. Oregon has the chance to continue to be a leader in land use policy. Start by forcing cities and developers to stop with business as usual. Efforts so far have been poor to middling. Change financial sector laws to make them more flexible in funding real mixed use development. The kind of communities that existed before the suburban experiment began in the 1950s. Rebuild our passenger and commuter rail network to what it was in the early 20th Century to encourage and support compact development. Finally, use taxes and subsidies to discourage sprawling development in the residential, commercial and industrial sectors. Once you've done that for 25 years, then we can see about expanding the UGBs.