

**Testimony of Anneliese Koehler, Legislative Affairs Manager**

**Testimony on SB 1537**

**Senate Housing and Development**

**February 8, 2024**



Metro is the regional government for the greater Portland metropolitan area, tasked by Oregon statute with making decisions every six years about how and where the region will grow. Our region has a strong track record of supporting the core purposes of Oregon’s statewide planning system – protecting farms and forests by facilitating efficient urban development, while providing additional room for people and jobs when needed by expanding the urban growth boundary. In recent years, Metro partnered with stakeholders to ask voters to support housing for our region’s vulnerable community members through an affordable housing bond in 2018, and through a supportive housing services measure in 2020. In short, Metro understands the need for housing production while balancing the tenets foundational to the land use system.

Metro wholeheartedly supports many components to this package. In particular, Metro is excited to see significant funding and programs focused on infrastructure. One of the main cruxes of our region’s housing crisis is development-ready land. To facilitate housing production, we need funding for local governments to provide critical infrastructure, to convert vacant buildable land to development-ready. And we need partnership from the state to do this. Roads, sewers, pipes and other critical infrastructure are the bricks and sticks that facilitate housing production. That is why we are so pleased to see a significant investment in infrastructure and a bill that provides our local partners with more tools for development.

Over the past few sessions, Metro has been heavily involved in the iterations of an expedited UGB expansion pathway. We have had significant concerns and opposed nearly every version of those concepts. Our understanding of the intent of these concepts is to offer opportunities to increase land supply for housing production. While I cannot speak for other areas of the state, raw land supply is not the crux of the Metro regions housing supply crisis. We have thousands of acres of vacant buildable land inside our UGB. In addition, Metro has multiple opportunities for cities to petition us to expand the UGB. Cities currently have an opportunity to petition Metro during our 6-year cycle, our mid-year cycle and at any time under a land exchange for a UGB expansion.

Last session, we had significant process and policy concerns with HB 3414, the prior iteration of this bill. I want to thank the Governor’s office for their hard work over the summer and fall to bring interested stakeholders together, discuss concerns and work to rectify them. Our process concerns have been addressed and several of our policy concerns have also been addressed. In particular, the addition of eligibility criteria for cities wanting to utilize the temporary expedited UGB process is crucial. Limiting the pathway to cities that are more land constrained and face acute affordable housing shortages provides a critical sideboard and is the main policy

consideration that has moved Metro to neutral. We also continue to believe in the necessity of the density, affordability and concept planning pieces to the bill. These pieces are all necessary to ensuring that the land brought in produces the housing our communities need at the affordability levels they can afford.