

RE: Support for HB 3190 Special Assessment Renewal

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice Chairs Reschke and Walters, and Committee Members,

As the Executive Director of the Architectural Heritage Center, I am writing to express our strong support for HB 3190, a bill that reauthorizes and refines Oregon's long-standing Special Assessment for Historic Properties program. Our organization is dedicated to preserving and celebrating Portland's historic and cultural assets, which serve as cornerstones of our identity and economic vitality. We believe this bill is crucial for revitalizing our communities, supporting economic growth, and addressing critical issues like housing and downtown revitalization.

HB 3190 will restore a valuable financial tool specifically for commercial property owners, offering them a specially assessed value for a ten-year benefit term in exchange for making appropriate improvements to their historic properties. Administered by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, this program is well-positioned for success, leveraging their expertise and experience in managing the prior iteration of the program.

The reauthorization of this program comes at a critical time. Across Oregon, our main streets, commercial corridors, and downtowns are in dire need of investment. HB 3190 provides a targeted incentive to rehabilitate and maintain historic buildings, ensuring they remain vibrant contributors to our communities. This program aligns well with existing initiatives like the Main Street Revitalization grant fund, providing a long-term stabilizing benefit that extends over a decade.

Importantly, HB 3190 can also help address Oregon's housing challenges. By encouraging the adaptive reuse of underutilized and vacant upper floors in historic commercial buildings, this program has the potential to unlock significant housing opportunities. For instance, projects like Astoria's Merwyn Hotel, which created 40 units of affordable workforce housing, and Salem's Fork Forty project, which revitalized a food hub and added new housing units, demonstrate the transformative impact of such investments. These successes underscore the program's potential to catalyze similar projects across the state.

Moreover, adaptive reuse of historic buildings is a critical strategy for mitigating climate change and reducing carbon impact. Preserving and repurposing existing structures significantly reduces the demand for new carbon-intensive construction materials, creates more skilled jobs, and demonstrates Oregon's leadership. By extending the life of historic buildings, we not only honor our heritage but also contribute to a more sustainable future by reducing waste, conserving resources, and lowering the carbon footprint of development.

Historic preservation is not only about safeguarding our past; it is about building a sustainable and equitable future. By reinvesting in tools for our historic properties, we strengthen the distinct qualities and economy of our communities while addressing critical societal needs. HB 3190 offers a proven path forward, and its passage will ensure that Oregon's unique built environment continues to thrive for generations to come. Thank you for considering our support for HB 3190. We urge you to pass this bill and help reinvigorate Oregon's historic properties as vital assets for our state's future.

Respectfully,

Heather Flint Chatto, Executive Director, Architectural Heritage Center