

Submitter: Denise Bartelt
On Behalf Of: Lake Oswego Preservation Society
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2138

The Lake Oswego Preservation Society strongly opposes Oregon House Bill 2138, specifically Section 22(1)(f), which proposes repealing demolition review requirements for houses listed in the National Register of Historic Places. While I understand the urgent need for increased housing, particularly "missing middle" housing, this provision represents a reckless and shortsighted approach that will irrevocably damage Oregon's cultural heritage.

The argument that eliminating demolition review will streamline housing development ignores the fundamental value of historic preservation. These designated properties are not mere obstacles to progress; they are tangible links to our past, embodying the architectural, social, and cultural narratives that define our communities. To strip away the minimal protection afforded by the demolition review process is to disregard the carefully considered designations that recognize their significance.

Furthermore, the claim that demolition review hinders housing development is demonstrably false. The process is not about automatic denial; it's about a balanced assessment of the public benefit derived from preservation versus replacement. It provides a crucial opportunity for communities to weigh in on decisions that impact their heritage, ensuring that the voices of residents, not just developers, are heard. This aligns with Oregon's Land Use Goal 1, which emphasizes citizen involvement.

Section 22(1)(f) also undermines Oregon's Land Use Goal 5, which mandates the protection of historic resources. By removing this crucial safeguard, we are effectively abandoning our commitment to preserving our state's rich history. Demolition is a permanent action with irreversible consequences. Once a historic structure is gone, it's gone forever, along with the stories and cultural significance it represents.

Moreover, the bill fails to establish any connection between demolishing historic homes and achieving its stated goal of increasing middle housing. There is no guarantee that affordable or middle housing will replace demolished historic structures, leaving a void where our heritage once stood. This is a critical oversight that reveals a lack of thoughtful planning.

The environmental implications of demolition are also significant. Demolishing existing structures generates substantial waste and contributes to carbon emissions, contradicting our climate goals. Preservation, on the other hand, promotes reuse and reduces the environmental footprint of construction.

Instead of resorting to wholesale demolition, we should focus on innovative solutions that integrate new housing with existing historic areas. This could include incentivizing the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, encouraging the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and promoting infill development on non-contributing properties within historic districts. This "both-and" approach would allow us to increase housing density while preserving the character and integrity of our historic neighborhoods.

In summary, Section 22(1)(f) of HB 2138 is a destructive provision that will irrevocably harm Oregon's historic resources. It disregards the importance of community input, undermines our land use goals, and fails to provide a meaningful link between demolition and increased housing.

We urge lawmakers to reject this section and instead pursue a balanced and sustainable approach to housing development that respects our past while building for our future.

Denise Bartelt, President of the Board of Directors
Lake Oswego Preservation Society