

March 3, 2025

House Committee on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, Oregon

Re: Testimony concerning HB 2138 for March 3, 2025 hearing

Dear Members of the Committee:

Please remove Section 22(1)(f) from this bill. Section 22(1)(f) currently requires "repealing requirements for demolition review for houses listed in the National Register of Historic Places."

We are the owners (stewards) of the **Hannah & Eliza Gorman House** in Corvallis, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. **The house is the oldest remaining Black Pioneer home in Oregon.** What a loss to all of us in Oregon (and nationally) if their home is lost to a future development proposal that avoids any demolition review!

Hannah and Eliza Gorman, mother and daughter, former slaves, came to Oregon on the Oregon Trail in 1844, when Eliza was a child of 5 or 6 years old. After living with the Thorp family in Polk County, Eliza bought 2 lots in Corvallis in 1857, and they began building a home. Hannah and Eliza later purchased two additional lots, and added a section to their house after 1866.

Hannah, a laundress, and Eliza, a skilled seamstress, were well-regarded in the Corvallis community, as can be seen in the attached letter from Catharine Blaine (1866), and in Eliza's obituary upon her death at age 30. Both documents reference the care they put into this house.

Hannah and Eliza have been an inspiration to those who have heard their story. Little was known about them until it was discovered that they had built the house, rather than just owning the lots. The house became the trigger for extensive research on their lives. On-going archeological work around their house continues to bring to light elements of their daily life (including buttons lost during laundering!).

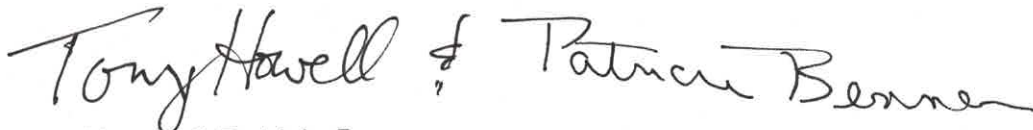
Houses, and other historic structures, provide a focus and a touchpoint for more fully visualizing and experiencing our living history, as well as understanding the daily lives, challenges, and accomplishments of those who came before us. Structures must be very unique, special and culturally significant to qualify for placement on the National Register. They should not be easily discarded without review for projects that may not provide any middle or affordable housing. The demolition review process is not onerous, and allows communities to balance needs on a case-by-case basis.

HB 2138 Testimony, Howell & Benner
March 3, 2025

We strongly support the development of affordable housing, and ourselves own two rental units renting at well-below market rates. However, we also believe that we are all obliged to be stewards of our history, culture, and environment, and that protections for them are not in conflict with other community needs. Other affordable housing strategies can easily provide more housing units than demolishing the few National Register properties in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Tony Howell and Patricia Benner. The signature is written in black ink and consists of two names joined by an ampersand (&). The first name, 'Tony Howell', is written in a cursive style with a large 'T' and 'H'. The second name, 'Patricia Benner', is also in cursive with a large 'P' and 'B'.

Tony Howell & Patricia Benner
2030 SE DeBord Street
Corvallis, OR 97333
541-760-3828
howellt@peak.org
bennerp@peak.org

Attachments (2)

Catharine Blaine Letter Describing the Hannah & Eliza Gorman Home

In September of 1861, Catharine Blaine, wife of Methodist missionary David E. Blaine, wrote a letter to her mother from Lebanon, Oregon. In it, she stated,

“Eliza, a mulatto girl—I think I have mentioned her—had told me she would clean and make over my black silk dress, and our plan had been to remain there [in Corvallis] until it was done...”

“I must stop here and tell how nice everything was at Eliza’s. She and her mother, Hannah, live together, take in washing and sewing. They will wash from \$1.50 to \$2.00 worth in the morning and then Eliza will do a day’s work at sewing. She has a machine and some days does \$2.50 worth in a day. They have 3/- a dozen for washing without ironing

Everything about the house is as clean and neat as can be, some of the negro love of ornament displaying itself. Their bed valances, ruffled and starched, their pillow and bolster cases trimmed; such handsome bed quilts, too; then the bed was so perfectly clean and sweet.”

Reference: David Blaine, *Letters and papers of Rev. David E. Blaine and his wife Catharine; Seattle, 1853-1856, Oregon, 1856-1862.* (Seattle: Historical Society of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the Methodist Church, 1963, p. 193). Research by Eileen Fitzsimmons.

Eliza Gorman's Obituary, in *Corvallis Gazette*, July 17, 1869

Researched by May Dasch, Oregon State University Archive Newspapers

DIED.

In this city, July 13th, Eliza J. Gorman, (colored), aged 30 years.

Eliza has been a member of the M. E. Church in this place for about fourteen years. Her intelligence, modesty, kind and sympathetic disposition, consistent Christian life, and uniform courteous behavior, has won the respect and confidence of the entire community. Herself and aged mother, by industry and economy had built them a comfortable home, furnished it in good style, and surrounded it with fruit, flowers, and everything necessary to human comfort and happiness. They seemed to live only for each other, and to make others happy. But the relentless archer—Death—marked her for his victim—and at 3 o'clock on last Tuesday morning, claimed her as his own. It is a severe—almost unendurable affliction to her aged and devoted mother; and but for the hope of soon meeting "beyond the flood," she could not bear it. For several months Eliza has been a patient, but constant sufferer—and frequently remarked, "if it was not for her dear mother, she would gladly be released from earth." The funeral sermon was preached by Rev. J. W. York, at the church, on last Wednesday. The large number of citizens in attendance, and the attention she received during her illness, was the strongest proof of the high estimation in which she was held. She will be missed, and her loss mourned, by nearly every family in Corvallis. c.