

Oregon HB 2138 – Public Hearing

Hello Chair Marsh and Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness,

I am testifying in strong support of House Bill 2138, to boost the production of middle housing in Oregon. There is a dramatic shortage of homes in our state, and we are falling further behind every day. It is critical that we boost the production of middle housing, which are inherently more affordable and climate-friendly than other housing types.

I specifically support the part of the bill, Section 22. (1), to end the practice of limiting new housing production in districts on the National Register, arguably the most crucial part of the bill. Hearing that this section may be stripped is shocking and would reflect a failure of leadership to address the crisis of housing affordability and homelessness that only continues to worsen.

Section 22. (1) would close an undemocratic loophole that allows these districts to continue the exclusionary practices that got Oregon into our housing crisis and could be weaponized by a small minority of homeowners in current and future districts to subvert the entire rest of this bill.

I live in Portland immediately adjacent to the Laurelhurst district and see the impacts of the district's exclusionary practices every day. Multi-dwelling and middle housing production has been concentrated in nearby areas of Buckman and Kerns, while housing production just a few blocks east is nearly non-existent. This is a central, high-opportunity area, close to jobs, schools, healthcare, grocery stores, and amenities. Continuing to lock out people who cannot afford a single-dwelling house in Laurelhurst, which at this point is nearly everyone, is unconscionable and deeply harmful. I am only able to live in my wonderful neighborhood because my multi-dwelling building was permitted to be built and it is critical that more people get this same opportunity.

Protecting historic structures is important, but such structures are a tiny fraction of current historic districts. For example, in Laurelhurst there are 6 buildings listed as historic structures but there are 1,308 so-called contributing properties. This makes a mockery of the serious work of historic preservation, especially when Portland has its own city designated historic buildings and districts. The city-based process to designate historic structures is fair and democratic and remains untouched by Section 22. (1).

Once again, I urge you to keep the common-sense National Register historic district reform clause, Section 22. (1), in House Bill 2138 to address Oregon's severe and worsening housing affordability crisis.

Thank you.