

Testimony re. HB 2138 – Peggy Moretti
March 3, 2025

Good afternoon. I'm Peggy Moretti, Executive Director Emeritus of Restore Oregon, and current member of Portland's Historic Landmarks Commission, and the Development Review Advisory Commission, but testifying as an individual citizen.

While I support much of HB 2138, **I am in opposition to – and urge you to remove - section 22(1)(f)** which would eliminate demolition review for homes in historic districts. This is the only protection they have, and the only opportunity for stakeholders to have a voice in whether to retain or replace a historic structure that matters to their cultural heritage, or sense of place.

I fully appreciate the desire to remove obstacles to housing production, but in our shared goals of equity, livability, and sustainability, this is “cutting off our nose to spite our face.” And it won't move the needle.

Points to consider:

1. Demolition is forever. We SHOULD be weighing the decision and opting for reuse whenever possible!
2. Are we really going to abdicate our commitment to Oregon's Land Use Goals 1 (for public engagement) and 5 (for protection of historic resources) – and do so without any requirement that the historic structure be replaced by middle or affordable housing?
3. Demolition review DOES NOT equal demolition denial. The Landmarks Commission recently conducted a demolition review for a house in the South Portland Historic District and in the space of approximately 90 minutes, after hearing public testimony and considering the benefits of the proposed replacement structure, voted unanimously in support of the demolition.
4. Within historic districts there is typically 25% to 50% of the structures that are not considered to be “contributing” to the historic significance, and therefore are already not subject to demolition review. That's where new construction should go first.
5. Even better would be to launch a state rehabilitation tax credit – like 39 other states already use – to offset the cost of converting commercial buildings to residential use. That WOULD move the needle.

We can create housing AND steward our historic resources! Thank you.