

Submitter: Emily Hays

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB974

I oppose the elimination of Design Review as proposed in the SB974 –1 Amendment “Section 12 (5)” on page 10 and “Section 13 (5)” on page 11.

Design Review is integral to Portland’s identity and history. It was established in the 1970s to combat downtown blight and played a crucial role in transforming Portland into the world-renowned, pedestrian-friendly city it is today. As Portland navigates economic recovery, retaining Design Review will help sustain this legacy and ensure that new development contributes to a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive city.

Over the decades, Design Review has adapted to Portland’s growth, particularly with the expansion of higher-density residential areas in the 1990s and 2000s. This tool has guided new development in neighborhood cores, ensuring positive impacts on the public realm and urban fabric. Eliminating Design Review would remove an essential mechanism for maintaining high-quality urban development as the city continues to evolve.

Additionally, Design Review is not an obstacle to density—it actively supports high-density residential projects, including affordable housing. By setting clear but flexible design expectations, the process ensures that all Portlanders, regardless of income level, have the opportunity to live in safe, durable, and well-integrated communities. Design Review aligns with Portland’s Comprehensive Plan, particularly Goals 3 and 4, which call for the creation of complete, healthy, and well-connected neighborhoods.

Finally, Design Review is vital to Portland’s economic and environmental future. It ensures that developments contribute to a vibrant streetscape, particularly in key areas like downtown and along the waterfront—both of which are essential to the city’s recovery. By prioritizing resilient, lasting, and contextually sensitive development, Design Review strengthens neighborhoods, enhances public safety, and fosters community spaces that benefit all residents.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject or amend SB 974 and uphold Portland’s commitment to thoughtful, high-quality urban development. Thank you for your time and consideration.