



Sightline Institute is an independent think tank working to advance sustainability in the Pacific Northwest. We believe it exists at the intersection of environmental health and social justice.

We're writing in support of HB 2984, including the -1 amendment, and proposing further simplification in the same direction.

When people spend time in walkable downtowns and commercial hubs, the economic and environmental benefits are huge and incalculable. They are also gravitational. Like a new star or a new snowball, commercial hubs accumulate more and more economic and environmental benefits as more people use them. Every person in one of these commercial areas induces more small businesses, more tax revenue, more pleasant social interactions, more great ideas hashed out over chance meetings at the lunch counter. All of those things attract more people, more dollars, more ideas.

Unfortunately, the same is true in the opposite direction. To use just one example, \$5 billion worth of light rail is currently pointed directly at acres of largely empty buildings in downtown Portland. Park tables sit empty at lunch time. Hundreds of toilets are never flushed. This is a **big waste of the public's infrastructure investments**. If we have ways to reactivate this infrastructure just by getting our own rules out of the way, we should.

But as you all know, underused commercial buildings and abandoned upper-story spaces are common in towns across Oregon. These potential homes are often in nice-looking old buildings in the most infrastructure-efficient locations we have, already well served by parks, already diverting stormwater whether they're inhabited or not. This bill would slightly increase the chance that some such buildings can get back into daily use.

There's one simple thing you could do in this bill to increase that chance slightly more: remove the price restriction. This would greatly simplify both financing and compliance. We desperately need more middle-price homes, including newly built middle-price homes. You are pursuing that goal in other laws. But based on a series of interviews with development professionals: **if the price cap remains in this bill, the likeliest effect of this legislation would be nothing at all.** We would be very lucky to get more than

a few of these buildings back into full use, with or without this law. The simpler we can make this law, the more likely all Oregonians are to benefit from it through reinvestment in walkable commercial areas.

The most cost-efficient infrastructure is the infrastructure that's already built. Please help our state take advantage of that infrastructure and breathe new life into empty commercial spaces by further streamlining, and passing, HB 2984.

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