

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HB 2647

Thank you, Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Andersen, and Members for this opportunity to speak in support of HB 2647. I am Cecelia Koontz, serving my fourth term as the volunteer Mayor of Monmouth.

Our motto is Monmouth – Where Great Things Grow. We celebrate the Oregon bounty that lies just beyond our urban growth boundary, as well as the businesses, and people that work, live, and learn within it. We are proud to be the home of the first public institution of higher education in the state because Western Oregon University brings so many benefits to our community. It is also the largest landowner inside the City, creating property tax revenue constraints, while also landlocking us from potential growth.

We have spent hundreds of hours in the last three years updating our housing needs analysis and housing production strategy. Out of that, the Monmouth City Council adopted a primary goal – to develop attainable housing and encourage home ownership as a way to build generational wealth.

This work has been a huge lift for our volunteer Planning Commission, Council, and staff in charge of Community, Economic Development, and Planning – all 1.8 FTE of them.

While the housing formulas show we have plenty of land inside our UGB, much of that is unbuildable, including two forks of Ash Creek and a bucolic Century Farm in a conservation trust, owned by descendants of one Western's founders. Other large property owners inside the UGB, who are staunchly against selling, thwart us from meeting the goals we have worked so hard on.

We desperately want to provide opportunities for people of all ages and economic status to live comfortably in a beautiful town like Monmouth. And, as you will hear, we have developers who have been very successful in creating different types of housing to meet the demand.

What we don't have is the staff capacity, nor money, to go through the often expensive, onerous existing process to swap out precious, environmentally sensitive land inside our UGB, for land more suited to development.

HB 2647 will allow the City of Monmouth to honor one of its three core values – Sustainability - while doing its part to meet state goals, and I appreciate your consideration of this effort.