

Submitter: Chris Beck
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Housing
Measure: HB4118

Dear House Committee on Housing,

I have followed Oregon land use system all of my adult life. I represented downtown Portland neighborhoods as a State Representative in the 1990's and have also been a lifelong advocate for rural economies, particularly working farms and forests and small town Main Streets. HB 4118 is well intentioned, but the -1 Amendment and the task force it envisions strike me as establishing an unwieldy process and not targeted enough to get at this current problem of workforce housing. One gets the impression that interests not interested in workforce housing might actually be using this task force concept to advance other objectives which undermine the land use program. There may be ways to improve this bill, but as it stands it should be opposed. Moreover, given that this is a short session, there may be better ways to start working on this challenge without sending out hastily conceived, and divisive, legislation.

Instead of going to the trouble of enacting legislation creating a task force, I'm guessing that the Committee Chair, perhaps with some sanctioning from the Speaker, could establish an informal work group with key stakeholders, with the goal of recommending legislation for the 2023 Session. Part of the charge could be to evaluate whether goals of HB 2001 from 2019 Legislature are working, and even whether those strategies could be employed in small cities (not covered in that legislation) for work force housing.

Unfortunately, key interest groups work steadily to undermine the core tenets and goals of the land use program--conserving farm and forest land for economic production. These groups often say we need more housing and industrial lands outside of the urban growth boundaries. I travel a lot through rural Oregon, and I am always struck by how much underutilized residential land there is within rural cities and towns. Most recently I was in Stayton and Jefferson in Marion County. Both communities appear to have plenty of room for housing and might be ripe for creative public/private partnerships to supply workforce housing to serve the area's farms. This is just one example, of course. In any case, any proposal to provide workforce housing--and we surely need more--should first evaluate existing land supply within UGB's and perhaps even unincorporated town centers, before crafting sneaky get-around to expand UGB's without going through the proper public planning process.

The way the original bill was crafted, and unfortunately even the -1 amendment, will create a divisive dynamic instead of a collaborative, problem-solving civic dynamic. The solutions are not easy, but they can be found with leadership, creativity, adhering

to core principles, and even identifying new financial resources.

I encourage you to lower the heat on this, table HB 4118, and establish a task force without legislation to address the agriculture workforce housing challenge.

Oregon's land use planning system is arguably the single most positive and emblematic law in our state. Senate Bill 100 was Oregon's best idea. And it still is. Please work to understand the benefits of this nearly 50 year old legislation and how it has fundamentally made Oregon a better place than just about anywhere. The law isn't perfect, but an inclusive, thoughtful, collaborative process to address the agricultural workforce housing issue has a chance of developing a targeted set of solutions within the framework of the existing land use system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Chris Beck