

DevNW

DEVELOPING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

March 16, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: In support of SB 8 – Streamlining Pathways for Affordable Housing Development

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee:

DevNW is a nonprofit affordable housing developer serving Lane, Linn, Benton, Lincoln, Marion and Clackamas counties. We develop both multi-family rental housing and affordable homeownership projects using a community land trust (CLT) model. Our projects range from 6 units to more than 50 units, and cover both rural towns and suburban cities. I am writing to express our strong support for SB 8, which addresses several barriers to affordable housing development and will directly improve our ability to complete critically-needed projects.

Increasing land availability is a top priority for increasing affordable housing development. In order for a project to work, we need to find ‘unicorn’ properties: land that is 1) zoned multi-family (needed not just for rental projects, but also for cottage cluster and townhome CLT/ownership projects), 2) for sale, 3) at an affordable price, 4) that doesn’t have barriers such as wetlands or slope, and 5) is near transportation, schools, and other services. You can imagine the difficulty. **SB 8 proposes to allow affordable housing “by right” in commercial zones and on property designated for public or religious use – which will open up significant new opportunities** for us to find viable land, without the burden of engaging in long and costly rezoning processes.

I would note that the change applies only to commercial, public, and religiously-zoned lands, which are commonly found in or adjacent to neighborhoods and near transportation and services. We are not looking to building affordable housing in isolated areas; indeed, our applications for federal and state funding are scored on the site’s proximity to schools and other core services.

Reducing opportunities for NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) sentiment to derail projects is another way to increase affordable housing development. As a nonprofit affordable housing developer, DevNW goes above and beyond to engage neighbors early and often about our projects: our goal isn’t just to build housing, it’s also to build healthy neighborhoods. But change is scary, affordable housing has deeply-rooted stigmas in many communities, and neighbors can easily add months (if not years) and tens/hundreds of thousands of dollars to a project by fighting every land use application – at least two separate applications if a rezone is required. **SB 8 would remove the re-zoning step, but would maintain project-specific site design review -**

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reducing the opportunity for NIMBY-driven costs and delays by 50% while preserving public process and local review at the project level rather than both re-zoning and project level.

Finally, DevNW develops housing across 6 counties and countless cities/town, and we firmly believe that the changes in SB 8 should be made at the state level, not left to individual jurisdictions. Our housing crisis is statewide. Oregonians live and work regionally, across city boundaries. We don't have time for each and every jurisdiction in the state to make small changes in isolation; we need a coordinated, statewide response to fast-tracking affordable housing development.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 8, and for your work to address Oregon's housing crisis.

Sincerely,



Emily Reiman, CEO