

Submitter: Kristin Koptiuch
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure: SB406

Re: Support for Senate Bill 406

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson and Committee Members,

My name is Kristin Koptiuch, I am a resident of Tillamook County and have served on the county's Housing Commission for the past two years. I write you as an individual citizen to share my support for SB 406, a Tillamook County pilot project to provide Tillamook County's small cities and urban unincorporated communities with the same housing development support and opportunities to increase the availability and affordability of housing on the Oregon coast.

When I moved to Tillamook County in 2019 after retiring from my long-term job as a professor at Arizona State University in Phoenix, I was surprised that our small coastal cities face comparable housing challenges to far larger cities. Pretty much any discussion on community Facebook sites ends up identifying the housing shortage as the root of virtually any problem. My work as a US Census enumerator for a few weeks in 2020 was a revelation about housing urgency. The majority of homes in Rockaway and other beach towns are either owned by absentee owners who reside in other cities and states and only occasionally use their home, or have become profitable short-term vacation rentals. Local housing costs inflated and supply vanished as absentee owners from comparatively high-value housing cities purchased coastal properties as investments, rather than as residences. The perverse coexistence of so many vacant homes with an acute workforce housing shortage presents a host of problems that only deepened during the pandemic. I volunteered to serve on the county's Housing Commission to help find solutions to these housing problems.

Together our many public, private, and nonprofit agencies, employers and organizations are doing their best to address the housing crisis--but with fewer resources than those available to larger cities made possible by HB 2001 and HB 2003. Like the vast majority of Oregon's cities, all seven of Tillamook County's incorporated cities and urban unincorporated communities have fewer than 10,000 residents. Yet the lack of buildable lands in Tillamook County is comparable to the land constraints experienced by large, densely populated urban areas. By exempting small cities from most of the truly enlightened legislation adopted to increase the state's housing availability, the legislature has created an inequitable predicament for the state's rural population.

SB 406 extends the same opportunities HB 2001 provides to larger cities, creating a foundation for local land use changes to support the modest density offered by “missing middle” housing, specifically by requiring allowance of duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in certain residential zones. SB 406 also provides guidance and financial support for small cities and urban unincorporated communities and requires OHCS and DLCD to make recommendations on additional changes that would support housing development. Importantly too, in a very politically divided county where a mere handful of votes can make or break an election, SB 406 supports Tillamook County’s elected officials by providing the state-authorized political cover they evidently need to embolden them to take the giant steps necessary to meet the challenges of inadequate housing.

This pilot project would allow Tillamook County cities and unincorporated communities to access the same nimble solutions larger cities are allowed to explore to address our housing crisis. I urge you to support SB406 so that Tillamook County can join larger cities and the work being done to address Oregon’s housing crisis.

Thank you for considering SB 406’s modest proposal for a pilot program in Tillamook County.

Kristin Koptiuch
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