

Submitter: Clay Neal
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2138

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for taking testimony on HB 2138. I substantially support this bill and view it as an opportunity to take real steps in a time of crisis. While Oregonians often hear about issues related to homelessness in Portland or Eugene and housing affordability in towns like Hood River and Ashland, all communities across the state are hindered in a real response to these issues due to limitations in our zoning codes. This bill expands opportunities for more and smaller communities to explore denser housing types that can bring housing choice to a broader set of Oregonians. I have three statements about how this legislation can serve our community:

1. As a homeowner in Portland, I was able to slowly build an Accessory Dwelling Unit where a dilapidated garage had been on the property. Moving into the 200 SF ADU allowed me to quit my job and go to graduate school while retaining home ownership by renting out the main house. If more homeowners can make investments in their own properties to address housing need in communities, we also strengthen the financial health of existing community members for times when they encounter uncertain economic futures.
2. As a faculty member at the University of Oregon Department of Architecture, I am working with students on a Cottage Cluster development in Cottage Grove with Habitat for Humanity Lane County. This cluster development is a unique housing structure currently allowed in Cottage Grove but not in all communities. It allows for the thoughtful development of 4+ units on one parcel and requires quality outdoor space and shared amenities. Habitat is able to build this project because of the economies of scale and reduced land costs that come from the zoning allowance of multiple units on one parcel.
3. As a 5th generation Oregonian, I identify strongly with our state's legacy of land stewardship. Urban Growth Boundaries and other state land use policies have guided a unique growth pattern in Oregon that is envied by other states around the country. It has protected wild and agricultural lands, which will sustainably serve our population centers if managed appropriately. It has also encouraged denser town centers that help to define commercial and service districts that are less car oriented than typical western US development patterns. That said, this land use policy has also constrained our ability to build housing at a rate that meets our communities' needs. This bill provides a pathway to retain Oregon's laudable protections of wild and agricultural lands while providing more opportunity for us to build on lands that we have already disrupted with urban development. I view this as the most responsible way to address housing development in our community.

I have read some of the testimony related to concerns about a lack of protection of historic resources in our community. I agree in principle with these concerns in that we should always consider the history legacy of our existing built environment and encourage some protections and adaptive reuse of existing structures. However, attention should be paid to the value of historic resources as compared to the needs in our community for housing that serves people. This is particularly important in light of the kinds of urban development that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s which removed many historic properties that were considered "blight" when in fact they were valuable community resources. I encourage you to be balanced in your approach and seek robust community input on how to navigate the tough issue of protections in our built environment vs. flexibility to meet an urgent housing need.

I look forward to learning more about the various impacts of this proposed bill as it moves through the Committee on Housing and Homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
Clay Neal