

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

Dear Chair Marsh and Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness,

My name is Sean Gillen and I live in a Portland neighborhood which is now on the National Register of Historic Places. I am writing to express my support for House Bill 2138, particularly Section 22 (1), which repeals the requirement for demolition review for houses listed as contributing in such districts. I am hopeful that this bill will create more housing opportunities and help people stay in their communities as they age. With so little housing built in these neighborhoods, young people struggle to move in, and longtime residents struggle to stay.

Until recently, an expensive detached house was about the only option to build on a lot in this neighborhood, whether the lot was vacant or already had a structure. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are an excellent recent addition to our zoning code, but they are just one tool. We should not limit ourselves to them by requiring demolition review for large swaths of the city. A January 2025 report by the City's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability found that middle housing permitting levels were lower in designated historic areas, highlighting the need for legislative caution when imposing restrictions on these areas.

Undemocratic and landowner-controlled National Register of Historic Places districts are not the same as local historic districts that have democratic oversight from a body — the city council — that is legally allowed to consider any factors other than historic preservation, and can consider the interests of tenants as well as landowners. This bill retains Oregon cities' ability to preserve historical resources, in particular individual historic sites, and does not impact local historic districts. It grants cities the flexibility they need to address our ongoing housing shortage. I urge you to support this bill and retain Section 22 (1) (f).

Thank you.