

Submitter: Chris Beck
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1522

Dear Senator Pham and Committee,

I write in opposition SB 1522 and -1 amendments. I am a former State Representative and have been a follower of Oregon's land use system since the 1980s. The land use laws remain one of Oregon's shining achievements over the past 50 years. This set of laws and goals have become the iconic undergirding for why most Oregonians love living here and why many farmers and foresters and ranchers have been able to keep the agricultural economy operating. This bill is just the latest attempt by the so-called "property rights" interests to eviscerate these laws. Sadly, those interests have in recent years duped some of the elite business groups, and it seems, the Governor's staff, into thinking that the land use system is the cause of Oregon's housing affordability problem. This conclusion is wrong-headed. You should have the courage to stand up for the current law and oppose this sloppy, reckless measure.

What is soooo puzzling is that this bill's intent is completely counter to, and undermines Governor Kotek's primary legacy achievement, namely HB 2001 from her time as Speaker. That legislation was bold and brave and aims to encourage development within urban growth boundaries on existing infrastructure. The Legislature and the Governor should be looking for ways to stay on that path of promoting infil development AND affordable housing near jobs, on transit, in pedestrian friendly neighborhoods, near schools, etc. Building on exurban farmland is one of the dumbest approaches we could undertake. And would only make Oregon look more and more like everywhere else--a sea of cancerous sprawl.

The Business elites and the homebuilders and realtors will tell us about supply and demand, of course. And they aren't wrong. But Senators, there are ton of vacant parcels, and grossly underutilized properties throughout most Oregon cities and towns. Egads, the Metro area is filled with moribund, dead shopping malls and old highway corridors of empty lots, one story buildings and on and on. Redevelop all of that and focus on whatever incentives for infill in those places, before ripping up more high value farmland with world class soil.

This is very complicated issue. It has no place for serious vetting in a short Session. Moreover, Governor Kotek's staff, and perhaps the Governor, along with the business elites AND many legislators, would do well to think a lot harder about the impacts of exurban sprawl that would be unleashed by proposals such as this.

Thank you for your consideration.