

Paul L. Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 26, 2021

Senator Jeff Golden, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

Ref: HB 2160

Chair Golden, Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery:

A colleague asked me to write an explanation of my vote against HB 2160 because of the potential impact upon your committee discussion about the measure. This is NOT an advocacy letter opposing the measure. However, I want you to know the concerns I have about the dangerous precedent we may be setting if we continue down the path HB 2160 moves us. I have great admiration and respect for Senator Hansell, Pendleton, and all of the local and regional leaders asking for assistance as they navigate the challenges of economic uncertainty. If my vote had been the deciding vote I would have been willing to reconsider because of the facts on the ground.

I voted against the measure to put a marker into the record. After watching the Oregon Legislature continue to make “one-off” policy choices on land use planning (especially for communities farther east of the Cascade Mountains), I believe something needs to be recognized: it may be time for a larger conversation about a more regional approach to our land use planning framework. We must also recognize that at present we are rewarding past failures. The addition of “more land” is not a solution, it is a temporary remedy. It is how we best optimize the land available that is the real issue before us.

In the Willamette Valley it has become common practice for some developers to overbuild the high end of the market and build “affordable housing” only when subsidized through non-profit, private, and/or public support. While this approach can and should be utilized for short-term incentive-based stimulation, it is not a sustainable practice and too often rewards bad behavior. Over time a cycle develops where more land available is divided into space for affordable housing and other housing that in turn pushes out affordable housing through the nature of ungoverned market dynamics. We need a better balance. We need a better structure. And, I believe, we need a better, more functional strategy for long-term development of our State of Oregon through a regional lens.

Oregonians are blessed with so much bounty we often become desensitized to it. We must be good stewards of our air, land, and water. We must find more innovative methods for optimizing all of our natural bounties in a manner consistent with our charge – to pass along the livability of our Oregon – as well as the affordability for working families to enjoy the bounties we have. HB 2160 is likely a necessary tool for this moment. But I caution us all to be careful and recognize that minor adjustments absent a strategy soon becomes a strategy itself – and often without a positive outcome.

Thank you for considering this letter. I wish you well on all future endeavors.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul L. Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive.