



STAFF

Ted Labbe

Executive Director

Theresa Huang

*Partnerships and
Planning Manager*

Mike Houck

Emeritus Director

BOARD

Daniela Brod, *Chair*

Mike Faha

Tom Liptan

Jim Rapp

May 22, 2023

Senate Committee on Rules
Oregon Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 775

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members Hansell, Manning Jr, and Steiner:

My name is Ted Labbe, and I work on urban nature conservation in the Portland metropolitan region on behalf of the Urban Greenspaces Institute. The Urban Greenspaces Institute advocates for nature-based solutions and leads collaborative conservation initiatives. We work to safeguard and reclaim greenspaces as places for people and nature, to address the climate crisis. In all work we seek to redress social and environmental injustice, to create healthy, connected and resilient communities.

The Urban Greenspaces Institute works closely with Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the Portland metropolitan region. These organizations serve an important role, and it is important that their leadership reflect the urban populations that they serve.

I am writing today in support of SB 775. This important measure would reform the eligibility requirements for zone directors for our most urban Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in Oregon. Currently, only those who own or manage ten or more acres are eligible to run for these elected positions, and this threshold disqualifies urban residents, tenants, and others who don't own land.

Several of these SWCDs are funded through local property tax levies and the majority of taxpayers in these settings are not eligible to run for SWCD zone directors. Zone directors represent the majority of elected positions at SWCDs. Zone directors set policy and make budgetary and financial decisions governing millions of dollars per year. This means that urban residents who don't own the requisite 10 acres have taxation but lack sufficient representation. This must change.

This bill strikes a compromise and reforms this land ownership/management requirement for only the largest, and most urban of our SWCDs – those with populations greater than 250,000. This is a fair compromise and would leave the eligibility requirements for the majority of Oregon's SWCDs and those in rural settings unchanged.

Please join me in supporting SB 775. We need this change. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Labbe".

Ted Labbe, Executive Director

ted@urbangreenspaces.org

In Livable Cities is Preservation of the Wild