



February 6, 2024

RE: SB 1537

Attention: Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members
Senate Committee on Housing and Development

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD and its conservation district members are strong supporters of protecting working lands and maintaining Oregon's agricultural base. SB 1537, while providing some useful tools to enhance housing development, threatens agricultural working lands because of the bill's provisions to expand urban growth boundaries outside the existing statutory process as identified in Sections 48 to 60 of the bill. Oregon has a limited supply of agricultural lands, and they are irreplaceable.

Expediting the expansion of UGB boundaries will likely:

- Result in more expensive housing being built due to the cost of developing infrastructure outside the existing UGB boundaries;
- add to transportation impacts due to moving residents farther out from jobs, schools and commercial resources;
- add more climate and environmental impacts and wildfire risks.

We do need to build more housing, especially affordable housing, but we need to accomplish that by methods other than just moving boundaries through an expedited process:

- Invest in infrastructure within existing boundaries to more quickly enhance housing development.
- Provide financial incentives for infill development as featured in this bill and several others proposed in the session.
- Take advantage of federal funding opportunities now available to invest with communities to support housing development and to partner with state investments.

- Remove unnecessary local regulations to build housing where already allowed.
- Incentivize brownfield redevelopment.

We urge the committee to consider the best approach to enhancing our housing inventory by means other than taking working lands out of production.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

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