

HB 2966: SUPPORT

This is the most exciting - and realistic - proposal I've heard about in years!

I am a former State of California analyst and consultant on social services and affordable housing. We worked with large and small banks, housing nonprofits, and housing developers.

Supporting local financial institutions

I am enthusiastic about expanding the capacity of credit unions and community banks. I remember part of the laws that helped prevent a repeat of the Great Depression, in particular the law that limited banks to only doing business in one state and internationally. This was to prevent a bank from becoming too big to fail. The following two years after the repeal of that law led to so many mergers that one bank teller told me: "I wake up in the morning and sometimes can't remember the name of the bank I now work for." But the real consequence, of course, was the Big Bailout and the great loss of family homes, a consequence that still lives on with the increased poverty, homelessness, and distrust of institutions.

Affordable Home Ownership Options

California gave tax credits to banks if they helped finance affordable housing. I haven't time to ascertain whether Oregon already does this, but this is a good way of giving local financial entities more of a stake in the lives of people with low incomes. Community banks and credit unions (should they get also into financing housing) are likely to be the most enthusiastic about providing good terms for loans since financing local projects expand community familiarity in the bank as a source of stability and progress. It also makes employees more loyal to the bank and proud of their work as increasing the livability of their community.

One problem my government department constantly ran into when working with this triad of banks, housing nonprofits, and developers/builders is, they usually formed an LLC (Limited Liability Company) as the umbrella entity for each specific project. This is fine, but the ultimate liability sometimes was so convoluted that our lawyers would often find it impossible to find who was actually liable if there was fraud, incompetent building or other problems. So our lawyers, I believe successfully, required that there be an ultimate entity for the liability. That entity had to have adequate resources to cover the liability, and a life before and after the project completion.

However, to steal a recent quote: "A home is not affordable if it is going to burn down again." Or flood or be destroyed in a storm, or an earthquake. High-risk disasters should not automatically be re-built with quick or shoddy construction or in a dangerous area. Consulting with soil engineers, insurance companies, ecologists, geographers, and others should be considered.

Since burning is the most frequent and likely loss of housing, please favor construction with metal roofs and cement construction with an eye toward the new cements that avoid climate-warming, if these new materials prove durable. Ban wood shake roofs and gas lines statewide for new housing, and employ other green materials such as LED lights and car chargers for plug-in hybrid cars and EVs.

Of course, streamline laws and regulations that no longer have a good reason for being there. But don't drop rules that make another disaster less likely. For instance, houses should be anchored to their steel-reinforced concrete foundations unless a better way to harden houses

for earthquakes is found. There should be a constant regard for research on construction improvements.

Also, multi-family housing should be favored instead of our sprawl. Sprawl creates transportation congestion delays and accidents, and is less amenable to public transit and bicycling. It creates incentives to building on earthquake faults, being too close to agricultural spraying of toxins, commercial pollution, and fire-prone areas.

If it hasn't yet, Oregon should follow California in preventing community bans of accessory housing within single-family housing plots. These ADUs provide safe, affordable housing, a greater opportunity for family caregiving, and extra family income.

"Green" architects or creative engineers should be employed both for their knowledge of climate adaptation and pleasing livability, instead of repeating old mistakes of creating publicly financed slums. This should not be considered as "nice-to-haves" but as necessary elements that reflect respect and stability for their residents. And residents should be expected to form their own resident committees for community improvements, whether renters, condo-owners, manufactured housing, or RV park residents.

Cost-effective Infrastructure Development

For housing and commercial establishments, research into durable manufactured modular construction should be considered. Pre-constructed modular units add flexibility and affordability while being tailored to the site and users. Less lumber is being used in construction, which increases fire resistance and preserves our forests, particularly the little old-growth we have left. The fast-growing trees of lumber plantations are fire-prone, although that is now most of our forests. The wood produced from them is not of great quality, although they produce decent engineered wood.

The task force outline for public financing under this bill as currently written is wonderful! And quite timely, in light of uncertain federal funding. Again, tax credits for community banks and possibly credit unions could add to the financial resources.

Public financing of new and sustainable methods for energy, such as the research on using energy from ocean waves, should be explored. Also standardizing fast chargers for electric cars should be discussed and researched, first with California and Washington, then other states. Geothermal heating and cooling of buildings by inserting thin metal tubes deep into the ground should also be encouraged by public financing, at first for big buildings.