

Submitter: Chris Damgen

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3109

Dear Committee Members and interested parties,

I am writing today as a private citizen and former local official to express my full support and endorsement of the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) and the hope to have continued public support for an amazing program that supports local communities and empowers students and faculty.

As the former Community Development Director for the City of Troutdale from 2016 to 2022, I engaged with SCYP in 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic at a time when the typical benefits of the program - on-site meetings, community engagement, on-the-ground student research - was curtailed for public health reasons. Despite those limitations, we were proud to have the expertise of hundreds of students and select faculty to help the City advance several planning and economic development issues that had long been back-burnered due to a lack of resources. In Troutdale alone, SCYP courses, reports, and presentations helped to initiate the City's tourism management plan and social media strategy, informed the future land use considerations of an affordable housing program, analyzed hazard/natural disaster risks, informed key updates to select chapters of the City's comprehensive plan, and began initial review and design considerations for potential infrastructure projects identified in the City's capital improvement plan... two of which are now now active projects for future construction. None of these projects would have advanced without the SCYP program during that time.

Cities across the state have countless examples of projects, concepts, and ideas that sit on digital desktops or collect dusts on shelves that simply need attention and inspiration to advance. In my experience, the infusion of student interest, faculty involvement, and sponsor support provided the right conditions to begin work on these items to help inform public policy for a fraction of the price that typical resource applications (staffing or consulting) could offer. The direct relationship and weekly correspondence we had with the university and Megan Banks as program coordinator eased our concerns about having multiple contracts and touchpoints with the various faculty, which helped organize the effort and gave me peace of mind that an agency of our size could be in a client role without the added burdens of additional communications. I trust that other jurisdictions and public entities that have worked with SCYP share in that experience, and it is a testament to Megan, her faculty contacts, and the university as a whole that the program has already established a decade's worth of programs that have had impact statewide.

While U of O is not a land grant institution, I find the SCYP program to be in that same spirit of university extension programs that support local communities across the state by providing a centralized and coordinated resource for under-resourced agencies to tap into the wisdom and expertise that the university provides, while providing their students with real-world opportunities to see their learning be put to action.

Thank you for the consideration of this testimony, and I hope that the committee advances this bill for full consideration for the legislature to take action to support this service.

Chris Damgen
Portland
formerly with the City of Troutdale (2016-2022)