

1/29/2025

House Higher Education Committee
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Letter of Support for the Sustainable City Year Program at the University of Oregon

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Committee,

On behalf of the City of Oakridge I would like to express my strong support for the Sustainable City Year Program SCYP at the University of Oregon. Our city had the privilege of participating in SCYP in 2024 & will continue in 2025, and the experience was absolutely incredible. It provided our staff, myself included, with fresh perspectives, innovative policy solutions, and an energized approach to addressing community challenges. The City of Oakridge is a small city where the staff members all take on many jobs and duties needed for a small city to function. This means we often have to be experienced in many aspects, a "Jack of all trades", I myself as the Community Development Director, I take on the role and responsibility of 1) Planning Director, 2) Public Works Director 3) GIS Coordinator, and 4) Permit Tech. Due to the many hats we all wear, we often loose out on new and innovative ideas simple due to the workload and wide range of subjects, programs like the SCYP keeps us engaged with talented students and faculty who bring creative ideas, data-driven insights, and forward-thinking strategies to our most pressing local issues.

I could go into all the great things the SCYP has done for Oakridge, and it has, but I would be amiss to not discuss my personal experiences with the program. I was raised in Oakridge, kicked out of High School in 1994, and I am the first in my family to attend college, much less graduate from High School. I did not have the advantage of a family that taught professionalism within white-collar work, much less higher education. Until 2008 I worked for a home builder and shortly after the housing market crashed, I decided to go back to school, which led me down the path to becoming a University of Oregon Graduate in 2015 with a Bachelor's degree in Geography, and again in 2022 with a Master's degree in Community and Regional Planning. Both times attending the UofO I found myself in SCYP programs. The skills I gained from the real-world examples and projects while in the SCYP program are immeasurable. These skills and knowledge come largely from the unique course structure of real-world projects that are guided by experienced professors and professionals in the field. This program and the experiences from it is what got me to where I am today. In short and in the opinion of a low-income, non-traditional, first generational student, programs such as SCYP can make or break someone that hasn't learned professionalism through generational experience. From my perspective the program is like getting a little help climbing the social ladder, but still being expected to make the climb using your own strengths.

I urge the committee to support funding for the Sustainable City Year Program to ensure that more communities and students across Oregon can benefit from its positive impacts. SCYP is a unique and invaluable resource that not only enhances the educational experiences of university students but also empowers local governments to innovate and thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Rick Zylstra
Community Development Director
City of Oakridge
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