

Garrett West
Medford City Council
Garrett.West@MedfordOregon.gov

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Attn: Co-Chairs Representative Ken Helm and Representative Mark Owens
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Medford City Council Member's Opposition to HB 2950 – Unintended Barriers to Housing Production

Dear Chairs Helm and Owens, and Members of the Committee,

As a member of the Medford City Council and a land use attorney, I am deeply concerned that HB 2950, as drafted, will make it even harder for Oregon to achieve its housing production goals. My constituents are already suffering from a severe lack of housing and extraordinarily high housing costs, which have priced many individuals and families out of homeownership and stable rental options. **Adding more barriers to housing production will only make this crisis worse.**

HB 2950 mandates that the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) “shall” amend Goal 1—putting the cart before the horse. This bill makes a finding that Goal 1 is insufficient before any analysis or report has been generated to determine whether changes are necessary. **This is a fundamentally backward approach to policymaking, as it presumes a problem exists without first gathering data to support such a conclusion.**

The reality is that Oregon jurisdictions already accept any and all testimony provided to them in a land use process. There are very few barriers to public participation, and none that could not be addressed through rule amendments rather than altering Goal 1 itself. **If there are minor process improvements to be made, they should be handled administratively—without opening the door to sweeping changes that could create even more uncertainty and obstruction in our land use system.**

In Medford, we see strong public engagement in land use decisions. However, while public input is an important part of the process, it is frequently leveraged to delay or block housing projects that comply with local and state housing policies. This

opposition is particularly strong against housing that serves middle-income and lower-income families—the very groups struggling most in today’s market.

A prime example is the Northgate Apartments, one of the largest housing projects in Medford, and which now houses many of my constituents. While it was in the planning process, a single neighbor appealed the project to prevent the mixed-use development. This caused significant delays and additional costs that almost led the developers to abandon it entirely. Had the developers walked away, Medford would have lost 372 desperately needed housing units. This is just one of many cases where procedural hurdles have placed housing production at risk.

The same pattern has played out in nearby Ashland, where a 230-unit housing development, including 38 affordable housing units, was withdrawn despite city support and approval. The project, Grand Terrace Apartments, was considered a crucial addition to Ashland’s housing stock, particularly because of its affordability. However, a local land use advocacy group vowed to fight the project until the end, citing concerns over parking requirements and unit sizes. The developer was forced to pull the project, dealing a significant blow to Southern Oregonians in desperate need of more housing.

We cannot meet our housing needs if we continue to allow these tactics to derail projects that would provide homes for working families, young professionals, and seniors. If Goal 1 is to be amended, any changes must acknowledge the reality that public engagement—when unchecked—has been a major barrier to housing production. The Legislature should ensure that any update prevents public participation from being used to unduly obstruct or delay housing that aligns with Oregon’s broader goals. Clarifying that public involvement in quasi-judicial proceedings should not be weaponized against compliant housing developments is a critical step toward ensuring that procedural safeguards do not become barriers to progress.

Additionally, HB 2950’s proposed advisory committee does not adequately reflect the industries most affected by land use opposition and that build our homes. If the Legislature moves forward with this bill, **the committee must be expanded to include representatives from homebuilding, industrial development, agritourism, and renewable energy—sectors that frequently encounter regulatory delays and opposition.** Their perspectives are essential to crafting a balanced policy that encourages (and does not obstruct) housing production.

Oregon cannot afford to add more layers of complexity and opposition to housing development. If we are serious about addressing the housing crisis, we must ensure that any changes to Goal 1 do not further entrench the procedural barriers that have already made development so difficult. **My constituents are struggling under the**

weight of high housing costs, and we need solutions that promote housing production—not policies that make it even harder to build. I urge the Committee to reconsider HB 2950's current approach and instead pursue reforms that facilitate, rather than hinder, housing production.

I urge you to either vote this bill down or amend it.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Garrett West
Medford City Council