



Re: Support for Mixed Used Housing in Portland Metro Area (SB 949)

Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Senate Committee On Housing and Development

On behalf of MWA Architects, I am submitting testimony in support of SB 949, which directs the Housing and Community Services Department to establish a project to develop affordable housing that integrates residential units with community spaces and services in the Portland metropolitan area.

As an architecture firm that has been committed to serving peoples basic needs, with a focus on affordable housing, we know that a safe and secure home is the first priority. For long term success, there are additional community support mechanisms that must be in place to create a stable environment for residents, especially when those residents are children. The opportunities that are made available beyond housing can also serve as a hub for greater community integration and neighborhood benefits. In our urban cores it is important to provide spaces that activate the sidewalk. Allowing for economic opportunities, cultural gather places, and community service spaces is one of the foundations of good urban design. It makes good use of the built environment where the public and private meet and allows peoples homes to be elevated above the street level for a greater feeling of comfort and security.

Background

Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) was founded in 1981 and has been providing excellent services to marginalized youth and families in the Portland Metropolitan Area for 44 years. In 2021 SEI partnered with Community Development Partners (CDP) to initiate our [Alberta Alive Affordable Housing Project](#). This project now includes three finished buildings that provide 115 units of affordable housing to children and families in the N/NE Portland community. A fourth building that will provide 75 additional units of affordable housing as a part of this project is currently under construction. In delving into the world of affordable housing development, SEI quickly saw the impact that limited funding has on the overall livability for current and future residents. And SEI desires to change this reality. It is the goal of SEI to provide much more than “sticks and bricks.” SEI is seeking to develop optimal living experiences for families while working together to build real community in every space that it develops. This prospective funding is a means to supplement existing funds so that SEI can create the optimal living experiences that this community deserves.



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Impact

SEI sees the need for mixed use affordable housing developments in our community and is seeking to meet that need so that marginalized and displaced children and families can enjoy the desirable benefits of living in proximity to practical functions that enhance their living experiences. These are the desirable benefits that current residents in the gentrified neighborhoods of Albina, on Mississippi and Williams avenues, enjoy. Creating affordable housing units in the heart of N/NE Portland that also include community services and commercial spaces will enhance livability, increase residential retention, and create a sense of community and belonging for families that once called this area home. Current tax credit and funding options are not sufficient to develop the type of optimal living experiences that this community deserves. And I support this effort to place real value on the lives of marginalized and displaced community members who will benefit from enhancing current affordable housing models.

This bill and this funding is a necessary investment into the lives of the prospective families who will live in this project, and others like it. This bill and this funding says to our marginalized community members that, “you deserve the very best, and not just what is minimally good enough.” This bill and this funding is a step in the right direction that acknowledges that [“homelessness is a housing problem”](#), and that by creating opportunities to develop housing that is both optimal *and* affordable, we are taking real steps to address the housing problem that we see everyday.

For the above reasons, we urge you to support this request for funding to develop mixed use housing in partnership with Self Enhancement, Inc. by passing SB 949. Our most vulnerable and displaced families deserve the safety and well-being that these funds afford. Organizations like SEI that are working to create optimal living experiences cannot continue to deliver this reality without your support. Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Bill Lanning, AIA
Principal