

2/14/2025

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 Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) 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 services and commercial spaces in the Portland metropolitan area.

I have been directly involved in the planning and implementation of SEI's first 4 affordable housing buildings (3 buildings operating right now and a 4th under construction). I have seen the difference that SEI makes in this process to ensure vital community in these spaces and to create living experiences for our residents that they can be proud of. I have been on staff at SEI since 2011 and I can say with 100% confidence that there is no entity better suited to develop community, and to create optimal living experiences for our community members, than SEI. We all know and see the crisis of homelessness in our region, and specifically in N/NE Portland. SEI desires to disrupt this process by creating affordable opportunities for our community to access in the heart of NE Portland.

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.

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,

Sahaan McKelvey

Director of Advocacy & Engagement

Self Enhancement, Inc.