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On Behalf Of: Carrie and Sarah Cowan
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2138

I am writing you to urge removal of Section 22(1)(f) from this bill. The intent of HB 2138 is to create more middle housing in Oregon, which I support. However, as written, middle or affordable housing is NOT required as a condition for removing a demolition review process. This new rule would eliminate the minimal protection of a process that is designed to review and balance the needs of local communities and their historic homes and places.

Demolition review does NOT equal automatic demolition denial. It is a weighing of the public benefit of retention vs replacement. Removal of the requirement is removal of consideration of public benefit. Furthermore, demolition review is the only protection we offer in Oregon - to remove the demolition review, as Section 22(1)(f) would do, will nullify Oregon's Land Use Goal 5 for historic resources.

Removing demolition review denies the public a voice, which is counter to Land Use Goal 1. The community or stakeholder group should have an opportunity to weigh in on places that matter to them and reflect their heritage. The developer voice should not be legislated as the only voice. Demolition is forever and more demolition works against our climate goals.

The demolition review process has been shown to balance the public benefit and often has helped create more housing, not hindering it. As written, Section 22(1)(f) has no requirement that middle housing or affordable housing replace the demolished historic structure. It has NO connection to the bill's goal, merely to grease the wheels of development.

Historic designation requires rigorous research and vetting to prove cultural significance. They should not be erased without careful consideration.

No protection + no restoration & reuse incentives = Oregon dead last in the U.S. for stewardship of its heritage places! Portland alone has a wealth of historic examples of blighted neighborhoods created by rush to demolish for the sake of expediate progress. In the long run, this is always ruinous to urban fabric, neighborhood integrity, and ultimately property value and revenue.

How can we move the needle for increased housing in heritage areas? Create a better inclusive "both-and" strategy that would add more units within designated historic areas through an incentive package for adapting existing residential, add ADUs, add triplexes on non-contributing properties, etc.