

Submitter:

Jonathan Knudtsen

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2138

I am writing to express my strong support for HB2138.

Oregon has made notable progress in opening high-opportunity neighborhoods to new, denser, and more affordable housing options. There are many reasons these pro-housing policies are good: They reduce carbon emissions; they provide opportunities for upward social mobility; they allow families who may not be high-income to buy homes in neighborhoods with good schools; they bring new (often young) families into school districts that are dealing with steep enrollment declines.

A tool that opponents of these policies have turned to recently is historic district zoning. Where such districts are in place, current law requires demolition review for "contributing resources"--which, in practice, means almost every building in the neighborhood. Demolition review adds cost and uncertainty, and the result is that many projects that would have helped solve the housing crisis and provide all the benefits described above never move forward.

This would not matter very much if historic districts were small, or if demolition review only applied to very specific buildings deemed historic. But this is not the case. Historic districts can and do block housing production across wide swathes of Portland, and there is reason to think there may be attempts to grow the districts in size. Many of the state's pro-housing policies will be rendered ineffective if individual neighborhoods--particularly those inner, older neighborhoods best suited to incremental growth--can decline to participate.

For all these reasons, it is important that all neighborhoods be included the incremental pro-housing growth policies that the state is adopting. Thank you for your consideration.