



WASHINGTON COUNTY OREGON

March 19, 2025

Senator Khanh Pham, Chair
Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Se. NE Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 6

Dear Chair Pham and Members of the Committee,

Washington County is committed to ensuring a consistent and dependable building permitting process, and we welcome collaborative efforts to improve the system at a statewide level. However, we strongly oppose Senate Bill 6 as currently written, as it imposes a rigid, uniform approval timeline for every building permit without addressing critical underlying issues that affect permitting timelines.

A key concern with Senate Bill 6 is that it fails to resolve the core challenges within the statewide permitting process. County permitting departments are already operating at maximum capacity, working diligently to process applications thoroughly and efficiently. Imposing a standardized review timeline does nothing to reduce existing workload challenges or provide additional resources needed to ensure timely reviews. Instead, it merely creates an impractical expectation that disregards the realities faced by permitting staff. Building permits also generally require review by other entities that are not within the city or county permitting office, and agency staff cannot dictate those entities' review timelines.

The proposed uniform 45-day timeline does not reflect the differences between building types. It would apply to all building permits, from massive, complex technology manufacturing facilities to small residential accessory buildings. Even housing permits vary widely, from multistory apartment buildings to large and complex luxury homes, middle housing and more simple prescriptive dwellings.

Meeting the proposed 45-day timeline would necessitate significant staffing increases at the local level, incurring substantial costs. These expenses would inevitably be passed on to permit applicants, affecting not only large-scale for-profit developers but also non-profit affordable housing developers and even homeowners undertaking personal repair projects. While some proponents claim they are willing to absorb these costs, the reality is that fees will rise for all applicants, making home improvements less affordable for many community members.

If the goal is to streamline development, the legislature could consider other opportunities to address systemic bottlenecks. One such issue is the statewide shortage of building department staff. Implementing a strict timeline at the permitting stage while failing to account for delays in inspections and subsequent approvals only shifts the problem downstream rather than solving it. Forcing an arbitrary and inadequate permit review and issuance timeline will lead to more required field corrections and resultant construction delays, which will ultimately increase housing costs. Without addressing these interconnected systemic challenges, Senate Bill 6 risks exacerbating inefficiencies rather than resolving them.

Lastly, the mandated timeline creates a serious liability risk for counties and other agencies responsible for plan review, permitting and inspections. Senate Bill 6 would automatically approve portions of applications

if they are not reviewed within the prescribed time frame, regardless of whether they meet safety and structural standards. This restriction undermines the ability of local jurisdictions to conduct thorough assessments and could lead to significant safety concerns. Counties cannot be expected to carry liability for projects that may not have been adequately reviewed due to an arbitrary deadline imposed by the state. If the state limits what can be inspected or mandates automatic approvals, it should also assume responsibility for any risks associated with those decisions. Counties want to carry out building department programs, however if we are unable to meet these new requirements, we could be forced to return our local building program responsibilities back to the state. We want to continue to serve our local communities and carry out this important work without undue liability.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to oppose Senate Bill 6 in its current form. Instead, I encourage a collaborative approach that seeks meaningful improvements to the permitting process, ensuring efficiency without sacrificing safety, affordability, or fairness.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Carly Sylva-Gabrielson
Government Relations Manager, Washington County