

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB 974A

My name is Carol Bellows and I am a Planning Commissioner in King City, OR. I have practiced urban planning, landscape architecture and urban design in both the private and public sectors.

I oppose this bill on two points:

1. The timeline for approval is too short for the kinds of neighborhoods that will be built in small municipalities (as well as larger ones) and the penalty is unreasonable for missing a deadline.
2. Abandoning design review can vacate opportunities to create better communities.

Let me elaborate:

1. In the Metro-mandated building out of King City, our first project is a complete town, including a new civic center and housing of different types. We are building a city from scratch with one smart but inexperienced planner. Our planning commission serves as a backup with expertise that includes a land-use lawyer, a surveyor, an engineer, and other experienced professionals. We have caught inconsistencies in documents and places where adherence to code is questionable, and are seeing where our codes are inadequate to build the kind of community that will age gracefully with time; a community that deserves the land it is built upon.

Many small cities around Oregon use the same planner King City contracted before we hired our first full time planner. A flurry of projects to address our “housing emergency” can overwhelm planning departments and contractors-- and it isn’t easy to timely hire someone to assist. And, what if other agencies don’t cooperate? Washington County DOT? Clean Water Services? There are many uncontrollable factors in the approval process that can be disastrous for either the city or the developer. *Should a city just deny an application if the process is taking too long?* That doesn’t work for anyone.

2. There are many opportunities to create more comfortable lives while designing a community. Building orientation affects light and temperature inside. Landscaping creates shade and mitigates stormwater, as well as having a profound effect on mental health. With density comes concrete which reflects heat, repels water and makes it hard to grow anything natural. It all needs to carefully come together for any one element to survive and thrive.

When one goes for a walk or a child visits a friend, pedestrian circulation around a neighborhood dictates whether one walks a couple blocks or drives 2.5 miles to say hello to the person over the back fence. Does one pass homes that invite people to interact? or featureless boxes that warehouse families? Are there immediate opportunities to interact with nature? Or is that experience only available as a special outing?

SB 974A weakens Oregon’s commitment to good planning and I oppose it.

Respectfully,
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