

TO: Rep. Pam Marsh, Chair, House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
FROM: Sandy Belson, Comprehensive Planning Manager
Mark Rust, Planning Manager, Development & Public Works Department
RE: SB 974A
DATE: May 19, 2025

On behalf of the City of Springfield, we are writing to respectfully express our opposition to SB 974A. While we share the Legislature's commitment to addressing Oregon's housing crisis, this bill would undermine thoughtful local planning efforts and hinder our ability to deliver the very housing outcomes the state seeks to accelerate.

One of our primary concerns with SB 974A is its elimination of local design review authority in certain contexts. In Springfield, design standards are not used to obstruct development—they are essential tools for ensuring that new housing is safe, durable, and compatible with its surroundings. These standards help us build livable, lasting neighborhoods that reflect the values and character of our community. Removing this authority strips local governments of one of the few remaining mechanisms to align development with local priorities.

We are also concerned about the complexity and implications of the sections dealing with the definition of an "urban housing application" and the expanded use of limited land use decisions. These provisions introduce ambiguity into an already complex planning framework, creating uncertainty for both local governments and developers. Rather than streamlining housing production, they risk triggering additional legal and procedural complications, which could delay projects and divert valuable staff resources from ongoing implementation work.

In recent years, the City of Springfield has invested considerable time and effort into implementing key housing legislation passed by the Legislature, including HB 2001 (2019), HB 3115 (2021), HB 2003 (2023), and SB 1537. Each of these initiatives has required extensive public engagement, technical analysis, and updates to our comprehensive plan and development code—largely without corresponding state funding or administrative support.

While we appreciate the efforts to make SB 974A more workable for local jurisdictions, the bill ultimately adds complexity without delivering measurable housing outcomes in Springfield. Our staff and community are already working hard to implement significant, mandated reforms. Diverting limited resources toward another set of changes risks slowing or stalling that progress.

Oregon's housing crisis is real, and Springfield is committed to being part of the solution. However, SB 974's approach is out of step with the collaborative, locally informed planning that has helped our city meet ambitious housing goals. We urge the Legislature to support cities through investment and capacity-building—not by stripping away effective local tools or introducing new mandates that may undermine progress already underway.

In short, SB 974 is unlikely to result in additional housing in our community and may in fact jeopardize work in progress. We respectfully urge the committee to reconsider advancing this bill and instead prioritize full support for the successful implementation of existing housing laws.

Thank you for your consideration.