

From: Ethan Seltzer
To: [Sen Dembrow](#)
Cc: [SENR Exhibits](#)
Subject: Senate Bills before your Committee
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Senator Dembrow...

Greetings! I am writing about five bills coming before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on April 6: SB 432, SB 602, SB 608, SB 612, and SB 618. All five of these bills, though potentially well intended, do not address the issues they raise and, in fact, could cause grave damage to Oregon's longstanding efforts to stem the tide of urban sprawl on resource land and protect the essential land base for agriculture and forestry, two cornerstones for Oregon's economy and future prosperity.

There are three reasons why these five bills ought not to be advanced any further in the legislative process:

- 1) Several of these bills declare an emergency, but in long-range land use planning, there are no emergencies. Note that the entire premise behind long-range comprehensive planning is that communities are addressing a time 20 years in the future, not in the middle of July. If conditions today suggest that the long-term vision held by the community for its future needs to change, then we have a process in place for that to happen. Communities should update and amend their plans, not fire random shots at conditions of the moment. Unfortunately, these bills, rather than encouraging and enabling communities to come up with better plans actually encourage and enable communities to proceed with no plans at all, a clear abdication of the trust and responsibility placed in them by the Oregon statewide land use planning program.
- 2) This first short-coming of the bills signals larger issues with their substantive justification. Consider the bills addressing a lack of economic or population growth. Certainly rural economies must be a concern for all Oregonians, urban or rural. However, suggesting that they can be invigorated solely by adding land to urban growth boundaries, or by allowing so-called job creating initiatives to be sited virtually anywhere, is like pushing a string. The real question is why rural economies are languishing in so much of the state. The answer is not a lack of land. Fundamentally, the economy we operate in, whether urban or rural, bears little resemblance to the economy of only a few short decades ago. Posing land or the ability to site new enterprises as an incentive for economic growth comes with both no justification and no assessment of what it means to the real potential for rural economic growth, namely efforts to advance and modernize the agricultural and forest products economy that could be sustained by the land and talent resources of Oregon. Simply put, and as others have noted, trying to jump start the economy by adding land to communities hard put to even service what they have, is like trying to lose weight by engaging in a diet based on chocolate eclairs. Further, note that these proposals to increase economic activity by increasing the land supply is an old argument. What would be refreshing would be actual efforts to increase rural economies themselves focused on the real needs of and opportunities before rural communities. How becoming bigger to overcome trends in the opposite direction needs much more than these bills promise.
- 3) Finally, the notion that affordability is assisted by putting development in places where it isn't planned for works against both longstanding commitments to rural resource lands and to the objectives found within local plans. Simply put, it's an avenue to classic sprawl:

unplanned and unserviced growth in far-flung locations, where the true costs are left to underfunded communities and to the households ultimately paying the cost of getting to and from places never intended for urban levels of development. Affordability is not going to be found on raw land at the edge. Note that the tremendous surge in middle income householders buying houses post-World War II occurred only with now nonexistent levels of Federal investment. Suggesting that evidence-free urban growth boundary amendments will lead to affordability is a false and unfeeling promise.

In sum, these five bills do no more than great damage to Oregon's legacy of land use planning and rural resource land preservation. They do nothing to advance their purported purposes. Make no mistake: the purposes are real and need to be addressed, and I, for one, would welcome a real conversation about them. However, these bills do none of that, and as a consequence ought to be tabled immediately.

Thanks for your time and consideration. Please share these comments with your committee. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ethan Seltzer

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Ethan Seltzer
3082 NE Regents Drive
Portland, Oregon 97212
503-544-8228 c
seltzere@gmail.com