

Testimony on Residential Infill Project Concept Paper November 9, 2016

Mayor Hales, City Council Members, thank you for this opportunity to share our comments.

My name is Elaine Friesen-Strang. My husband and I have been long time residents of NE Portland. In fact, our children attended the same public grade and high schools that my husband did. It is our hope that we will continue to live in our neighborhood as we grow older and that our children too will live and raise their families in this great city. So, as with other residents, we have a personal stake in any plan that shapes the future of the city.

In addition to being a long-time Portlander, I am here today as the Volunteer State President for AARP Oregon. AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, social change and membership organization. We have 500,000 members in Oregon and 65,000 right here in Portland. With a mission to enhance quality of life for all as we age, we are engaged in public policy, education, and community service at the national, state and local levels for our members and society. An important aspect of our work here in Oregon includes advocating for increasing housing options and successful aging in place. On behalf of AARP members who live in the City of Portland, I offer these comments on the Residential Infill Concept Report.

Overall, we believe the report is headed the right direction. In particular, we support the goals of expanding housing choice in terms of size and types of homes, encouraging walkable communities so people have easier access to services and supports, and prioritizing the preservation of neighborhood character and existing homes. However, we see a major gap in this report – the absence of any provision to foster and encourage increased stock of accessible housing. Without adequately addressing this issue the proposed recommendations are unacceptable and cannot make for an effective plan to guide future development in the city that meets the needs of all its populations.

AARP research tells us that 90% of people 65 and older want to remain in their homes and communities as they get older. However, if a move becomes necessary because their home may no longer be safe or meet their needs, they should not be forced to leave their community, abandon important social networks, or live in age-segregated communities or assisted living facilities simply because there are no other appropriate options.

And for those who rent, finding homes that are built or remodeled with universal design principles to meet their changing needs is near impossible. The Residential Infill Project represents a unique opportunity to proactively plan for our city's changing needs. The report projects that by 2035 the city will grow by approximately 123,000 households and that the city is becoming more diverse and older.

According to Metro, our region is expected to see a 106.4% growth in people 65+ compared to a projected 35% growth for the general population between 2010 and 2030. And according to the CDC, over a third of adults over the age of 65 and 22% of all adults report having some disability. The truth is each of us can and often do experience some physical disability in our lifetime, whether it is a skiing accident or mobility challenge brought on by a chronic condition.

AARP supports the recommendations made by Dr. Alan DeLatorre in his letter to the council dated November 2, 2016 for the city to enact regulatory and incentive-based policies that increase the stock of accessible housing as part of the Infill Project.

We also urge the council to consider examples from other jurisdictions that have enacted voluntary, incentive based, and mandatory policies to promote accessible and universal design housing. For example, the Rogue Valley Council of Government's Lifelong Housing program, Montgomery County Maryland's Design for Life Program, City of Austin's SMART home program, and New York Township of Babylon where new development and modification of existing residences containing universal design and accessibility features enjoy expedited permitting, reduction or waiver of permit fees, and flexibility on setback regulations.

This is our chance to shape the future of our city. AARP urges you to recognize the growing need for more accessible homes. Thank you for your continued commitment to making Portland a great place for people all ages and abilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elaine Friesen-Strang". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Elaine Friesen-Strang
Volunteer State President
AARP Oregon