



Forest Park Neighborhood Association

C/O Neighbors West Northwest
2257 NW Raleigh St.
Portland, Oregon 97210

September 28, 2020

Senators Betsy Johnson and Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
Representatives Brad Witt and Maxine Dexter
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Wildfire Hazard areas and HB 2001

Dear Senators Johnson and Steiner Hayward and Representatives Witt and Dexter,

Forest Park Neighborhood is large, stretching from West Burnside to Cornelius Pass Road, and we are fortunate to have portions of our neighborhood in all of your districts – we are your constituents.

Our neighborhood is singular. Our boundaries include portions of the city of Portland around the edges of Forest Park, along the top and sides of the Tualatin Mountains as well as large portions of unincorporated Multnomah County. The neighborhood is largely forested, located largely on steeply sloped hillsides with mapped landslide hazards. We also have a dense network of headwater streams and thousands of acres of high value wildlife habitat. There are very few businesses or destinations, but over 1,100 homes.

I suspect that none of you woke up this morning wishing that more people had been living in Phoenix, Talent, or Detroit when the recent fires went through those areas. Fortunately, this time, the fires did not harm your constituents.

We were not aware, until last week, that HB 2001 from the legislature's 2019 session will require cities like Portland to allow duplexes on every single family lot in Wildlife Hazard areas. We have written to LCDC to request that the Rules they are developing for HB 2001 not require cities to allow multi-family dwellings in Wildlife Hazard areas, but it is not clear whether they will act on our request.

It seems foolish to require cities to allow more homes in Wildlife Hazard areas. We support the creation of more affordable "missing middle" homes. But we would like those homes to be both safe and affordable.

We ask you to sponsor and support legislation to explicitly exclude Wildfire Hazard Zones from HB 2001 requirements that cities to allow duplexes and other multi-family forms of housing in areas zoned for single family homes. Oregon should not put more people and homes at risk from wildfire.

Portland considers all of our neighborhood within the city to be a Wildfire Hazard Zone (see attached map).

Because of our hills, steep slopes, streams, and Forest Park, the road network is very limited. That means that evacuation routes are limited.

Starting Monday, September 7, we were under both a Red Flag Warning for Wildfire Risk and a High Wind Warning for gusts up to 75 mph on the top of our hills for days. Because trees are still in leaf, there was greater risk of trees falling.

By 6PM that Monday, there were trees and powerlines down blocking one of the main roads through our neighborhood (NW Germantown Road). More trees and powerlines fell as the winds continued. Several of the main roads were blocked by fallen trees, and some, including sections of Skyline Blvd, remained blocked for days. Power was out for extended periods for many people (10.5 hours at my house, for several days at other homes).

During this period of high fire danger, at least 3 small fires broke out. Fortunately, they were extinguished before they got out of control, but no one in the neighborhood was officially notified of the fires while they were active. I live less than 2 miles from the location of a fire that grew to between 1 and 2 acres in Forest Park and which got up into the trees, but I received no warning.

If there had been an evacuation notice, available routes would have been limited because of the downed trees. If there is a fire, it may not be clear what direction is safe for evacuation on winding roads with limited visibility and with limited information.

While the power was out, people who rely on the internet or internet-based phone service lost service. Cell phone service in our area is limited – I feel lucky if I see 3 bars at my house, and in some areas cell service is unavailable. Cell phones only work when they are charged, so if power is out for days they may stop working. If you have a landline, falling trees can take out that phone service. So even if the authorities try to notify people to evacuate, there may not be any phone service available.

Many homes in the area, including some in the city, are on wells. When the power goes out, you have no well water to use to fight a fire or wet down your property.

Homes in Wildfire Hazard areas also put first responders at risk – more homes and more people that they must work to protect from wildfire. More people living in the area means more people trying to evacuate.

We were lucky this time that no fire in our area grew out of control. Other parts of the state were not as fortunate. Wildfire risk will continue to grow as the climate changes.

It makes no sense to require cities to allow more homes in Wildfire Hazard zones.

Adding higher density housing in our neighborhood would also require vast investments in infrastructure by the city and home builders, increasing the price of any additional homes. Sewer service would need to be extended great distances across hills with unstable slopes or septic system drainfields, already difficult to place when building on steep and unstable slopes, will need to be larger to accommodate higher density housing. Stormwater management systems (also limited by steep slopes and landslide hazards) must be sized to new impervious surfaces.

Increasing the number of homes in our neighborhood would also undercut the state's goals for reducing carbon emissions. Because of our steep hills and long distances to destinations, few people can walk or bike to meet their daily needs. There is no transit service in the neighborhood. Most people use motor vehicles to reach destinations and meet their daily needs. More people living in the area will result in more cars and more vehicle trips and more carbon emissions.

Our neighborhood includes Portland's 5,000 acre Forest Park and thousands of acres of high value habitat on rural land around the park that helps keep the park and its wildlife healthy. Our neighborhood association works hard to protect these resources. The forests on our hills absorb carbon, filter the city's air, hold soils on steep slopes, and absorb stormwater.

HB 2001 is unlikely to create more affordable housing in this distant urban fringe because the infrastructure required will be extremely expensive for both the city and homebuilders.

Adding more homes in this area will also result in more carbon emissions, undermining state goals around climate change because the distances and steep hills make it impossible for most people to walk or bicycle to any destinations, and there is no transit service.

It would be far more sensible for the city and home builders to invest in building infrastructure and homes in areas that have or can more cost effectively add urban infrastructure, instead of pouring millions of dollars into infrastructure for a limited number of far-flung homes that will put people's lives and those homes at risk, add carbon emissions, and harm important Goal 5 resources.

We understand and share the concern about avoiding creation or maintenance of enclaves of single-family homes. But our society has a shameful history of pushing lower income and people of color to live in areas that put their lives and their health at risk. We should not add Wildfire Hazard areas to that list.

We have written to LCDC to urge them not to require Portland and other large cities to allow tri-plexes and other types of multi-family homes in Wildlife Hazard areas, but we may not know until December whether they will act on our request.

Please sponsor and support legislation to eliminate HB 2001 requirements that cities to allow duplexes and other multi-family homes in Wildfire Hazard areas.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to talk with you or your staff about our concerns and request.

Sincerely,



Carol Chesarek
President, Forest Park Neighborhood Association

503-285-4266 (home)

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