



American Planning Association  
**Oregon Chapter**

*Creating Great Communities for All*

December 17, 2021

Dear Senator Merkley:

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to addressing the nation's growing housing affordability and availability crisis.

The Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association (OAPA) and our 890 planners and planning officials across the state applaud your efforts in recent years to find and advance proven solutions that boost housing supply and strengthen communities.

The United States Senate has an opportunity right now to address supply side challenges that for too long have wreaked havoc on local markets and exacerbated inequities in housing choice and affordability. A provision in the House-passed Build Back Better Act would address these challenges by ensuring planners and communities have the necessary federal support, technical assistance, and tools to identify and advance solutions.

**OAPA asks for your support in retaining the *Unlocking Possibilities Program (Section 40103)* in any final Build Back Better Act reconciliation package.**

[OAPA's 2022 Policy Priorities](#) call for addressing the housing crisis in Oregon, including increasing the supply of affordable to low- and moderate-income residents. We strongly believe that overhauling underlying zoning is a necessary first step toward removing barriers to housing production. Across Oregon, housing supply is limited in part because of exclusionary zoning. Planners have the ideas, expertise, and a keen sense of local housing markets to advance local solutions. Unfortunately, our best efforts are often thwarted by codes and zoning laws that best reflect the market realities of the 1950s. Without significant reforms to antiquated zoning laws and development codes, there will continue to be a mismatch between housing supply and demand. Communities and regions will struggle to build housing in the most desirable areas – even with the most generous federal stimulus. Now is the time to partner with communities, regions, and states to rethink zoning.

Importantly, the Unlocking Possibilities Program would directly benefit lower capacity communities.

Many planning departments are under-resourced with some still having not yet rehired for positions cut during the Great Recession. The dedicated planning and implementation grants established through Section 40103 would help those communities without the resources and technical assistance to do the planning work required to clear the way for greater production. From housing action plans to the development of new codes and zoning, the Unlocking Possibilities Program will turn housing goals into plans and plans into actions.

The provision also takes aim at persistent housing affordability challenges. Section 40103 would enable planners to identify and advance comprehensive zoning and code reforms by providing \$4.5



billion in new support, incentives, and technical assistance to communities committed to tackling housing affordability challenges. It is imperative that something be done to break the status quo. The Unlocking Possibilities Program is one such solution; a strong federal partnership is all that is missing.

On behalf of all OAPA members, I look forward to working with you to preserve the Unlocking Possibilities Program in the Build Back Better Act. Please feel free to contact me ([president@oregonapa.org](mailto:president@oregonapa.org)) or APA Public Affairs Director Jason Jordan ([jjordan@planning.org](mailto:jjordan@planning.org)) if you have questions or would like additional information. APA has research and policy [materials](#) available on each topic and is ready to share our expertise and insights.

Thank you for your leadership and service at such a historic moment in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Ray'.

Aaron Ray, AICP, President  
Board of Directors, Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association