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May 4, 2020

Portland City Council
1221 SW 4th Ave Room 130
Portland OR 97204

RE: Expanding Opportunities for Affordable Housing

Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Expanding Opportunities for Affordable Housing (EOAH) project. The Urban Greenspaces Institute strongly supports the proposed zoning code reforms behind EOAH and we urge City Council to advance the necessary policy and administrative changes to make it easier for churches to redevelop their sites for affordable housing.

UGI works across the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region to integrate greenspaces with the built environment. We engage with agencies, nonprofits, and the public on collaborative conservation initiatives to boost wildlife habitat connectivity, clean water, and public access to nature.

Across the Portland metropolitan region, there are too many churches with declining congregations and a desire to redevelop at least a portion of the church grounds for affordable housing. Many churches have large expanses of under-utilized parking and were developed in an era before on-site stormwater management requirements, or awareness of climate change and urban heat island impacts. Because of burdensome conditional use reviews, many churches are frozen in time and cannot easily redevelop to address the twin challenges of affordable housing and the climate crisis.

On behalf of Depave, I have sought to permit re-greening projects at churches in Portland and bumped up against conditional use review requirements, especially around on-site parking requirements. The EOAH reforms will lift some of these conditional use reviews and this is a good move. We strongly support making it easier for churches to redevelop their parking areas for affordable housing.

The redevelopment of Portland churches will trigger on-site stormwater upgrades and tree planting in street right-of-ways. We think this will help boost urban re-greening around churches, which often serve as de-facto community hubs in many neighborhoods and supplement the City's own network of parks and community centers. Please adopt the proposed Expanding Opportunities for Affordable Housing zoning code amendments. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ted Labbe, Executive Director
ted@urbangreenspaces.org

In Livable Cities is Preservation of the Wild