

**GUEST EDITORIAL  
FROM THE ALBANY  
DEMOCRAT-HERALD**

## Legislature may ponder zoning change

The fight over accessory dwelling units may have been just the undercard for the main event.

The state Legislature in 2017 passed a bill that required cities with 2,500 or more residents to allow the construction of at least one “accessory dwelling unit” alongside single-family houses. (An accessory dwelling unit is a detached extra living unit on property that also contains a primary dwelling; they’re often used as in-law apartments or rooms for grown children.)

Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, the Portland Democrat who spearheaded the 2017 legislation, is preparing a followup act for the 2019 session: She’s working on legislation that would require cities with more than 10,000 residents to allow duplexes, triplexes and four-plexes in areas zoned for single-family housing. The proposal also would require cities to allow “cottage clusters,” small detached homes that share a common yard.

If the measure passes the session, it essentially would end single-family zoning in Oregon’s largest cities.

Kotek is blunt about the motivation behind her proposal, which was first reported by Willamette Week: The state needs much more housing, she said, and the time has come to do something dramatic.

“The state’s housing crisis requires a combination of bolder strategies,” she said in a statement. “Oregon needs to build more units, and we must do so in a way that increases housing opportunity for more people.”

The proposal would not require such development; instead it would force cities to allow it in areas previously zoned for single-family dwellings. It would give cities 16 months to update their codes, and would provide funding for that work. Cities still could place some restrictions on the siting and design of the new homes, although the devil, as always, will be in the details.

Oregon would be the first state to essentially ban single-family zoning, although Kotek almost certainly has been following events in Minneapolis, where the city council earlier this month voted to eliminate the designation.

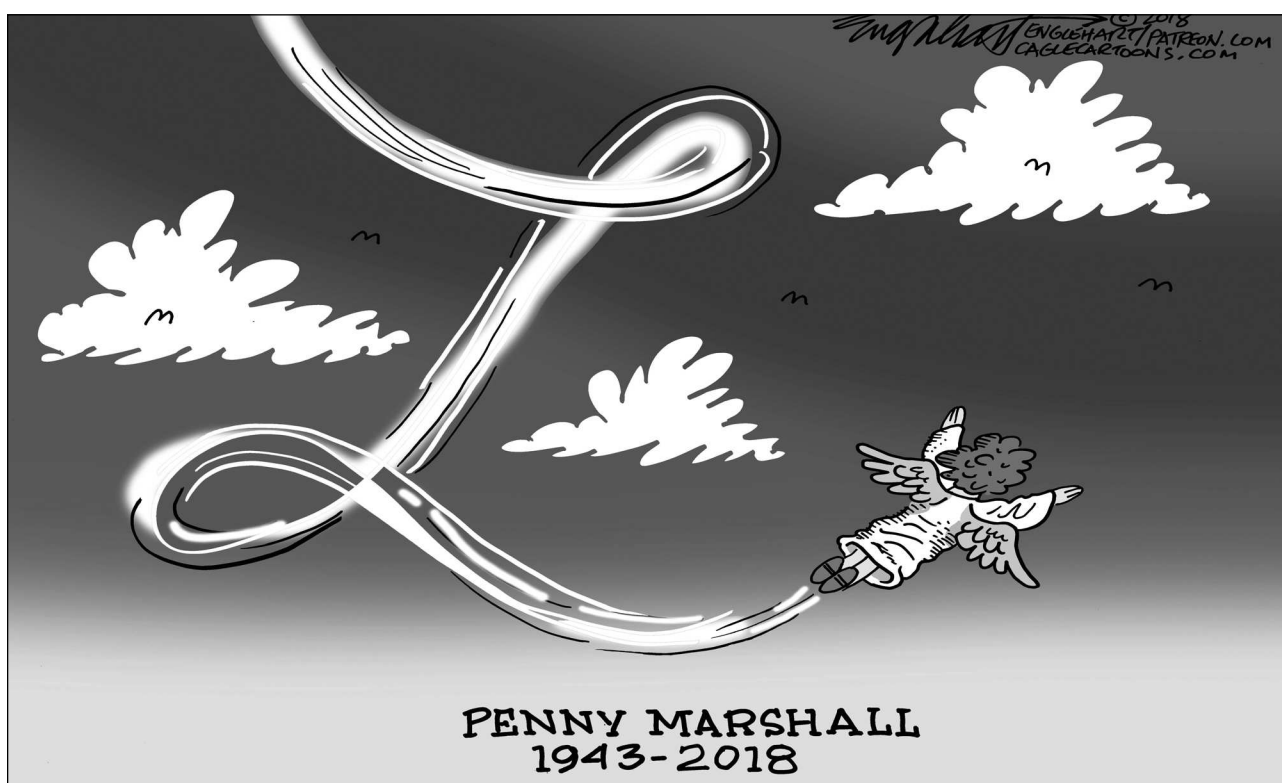
In Minneapolis, part of the issue driving the debate centered around the fact that single-family zoning has helped perpetuate racial segregation in neighborhoods across the United States. In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that zoning based on race was unconstitutional, according to a New York Times story about the Minneapolis initiative. In the wake of the ruling, the single-family designation became the only method for city officials interested in maintaining race and class segregation.

At least at first glance, Kotek’s proposal focuses more on the need for additional affordable housing in Oregon, and less on the racial and class implications.

Regardless, though, there’s little doubt that the proposal will trigger opposition from at least some city officials. But it was interesting to see that the League of Oregon Cities, typically critical of any proposal that would preempt local authority, did not immediately stake out a strong position on Kotek’s proposal.

Even so, though — and even with enhanced Democratic majorities in the Legislature — Kotek’s proposal isn’t a slam dunk: If it comes down to a battle between localities and the speaker’s wishes, legislators may side with their communities.

Kotek’s level of openness when listening to local concerns may determine the fate of this proposal, which may be among the more intriguing issues facing the 2019 session.



## Your views

### Terry: LHS wrestlers in Hawaii were like a gift

To the Editor:  
I was given a rare treat this past weekend. The La Grande High School wrestling team arrived and participated in the Maui Invitational Tournament. Of course I had to attend the event and cheer for my alma mater (LHS Class of 1985). The kids represented our state and city well, with great performances, and more so with their sports-

manship, demeanor and overall respect.

I am so grateful that LHS and the wrestlers’ parents gave me this great gift for Christmas in the Pacific, an opportunity to spend time with these awesome kids and coaches. One of them was given a task to break my 400-meter record this track season. I’m asking you to keep him to task. Go, Tigers!

James E. Terry  
Kahului, Hawaii

### Write to us

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author’s address and phone number (for verification purposes only).

We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We will not publish poetry, consumer complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Thank-you letters are discouraged.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks. Email your letters to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com) or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, 97850.

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