

# Housing on the Ballot

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form of Measure 26-199. Standing on its own, the bond could provide 7,500 people with affordable homes. If a second, statewide ballot measure that amends Oregon's constitution passes, too, that could allow the bond to house even more: 12,000 people, according to Metro.

Though the bond measure has seen the support of many public officials and organizations across the political spectrum, including Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, the Portland Business Alliance, and the Urban League of Portland, there's been some opponents of the measure as well.

The bond would tax property owners 24 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value, which works out to about \$5 per month for the average Portland-area home owner, according to Metro. The bond could leverage an additional 2,400 or 3,900 new housing units, the total depending on the result of a statewide ballot measure called Measure 102, also on the ballot in November, that would allow regional bond money to co-mingle with federal funds specifically for creating affordable housing for private and non-profit developers.

The Metro measure has been compared to Portland's \$258 million housing bond that voters passed two years ago for creating at least 1,300 affordable housing units.

This time around, the housing bond is before voters in Clackamas, Washington, and Multnomah counties, and if passed, the monies would be distributed to the respective low-income housing authorities in those counties.

Sahaan McKelvey, 42, who works for non-profit Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI), was on the steering committee made up of a coalition of local organizations that worked closely with Metro to help develop the framework for the housing bond, a set of guidelines that have an equity-lens that local housing authorities would have to agree to work within when they use the money.

"[We] worked with them to ensure that the framework was developed in a way that was going to be equitable and useful for primarily communities of color and lower income families," McKelvey told the Portland Observer.

That doesn't mean prioritizing one population over another, McKelvey clarified, but creating opportunities for those most in need in our society, those with severely limited income, a plight which happens to disproportionately affect communities of color.

Low-income families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities, are also some of the groups that will benefit from the bond, according to the official form of the measure from the county's elections website.

A focus on setting aside a significant portion of the housing for those in the lowest income bracket, low income families, and dedicating much of the funds toward generating new housing stock, rather than rehabilitating older units, were some of the main points McKelvey cited as particularly equitable aspects of the framework.

Up to 40 percent of the housing that would be created by the bond would be set aside for those in the 0-30 percent Area Median Income [AMI] range, McKelvey said. (That's 1,600 homes set aside for the 0-30 AMI group if the companion constitutional amendment passes or 1,200 without the constitutional amendment.)

"That was a big deal for us," he added.

In order for to ensure the measure helps families, the framework's goal is to create at least 50 percent of the homes with 2-5 bedrooms. McKelvey, who works with families at SEI, said that's important in a region where a significant portion of the homeless population is families, including thousands of kids. Keeping families together, he added, was a high priority in drafting the framework.

"It's an extremely important part of the cultural fabric of some of the populations that we're working with," McKelvey said.



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

*Sahaan McKelvey used his expertise helping African American families at the north Portland non-profit, Self-Enhancement Inc. to help craft the framework for Metro's housing bond to create affordable housing to help people of color and other disadvantaged populations. The measure will be on the ballot this November.*

Another equity-focused goal of the framework, McKelvey said, was for a significant portion of the housing created to become new housing stock, not just rehabilitation of units already on the market.

"We have seen instances before where acquisition and rehab of existing units and facilities has been done in a way that can be inequitable and causes folks to be pushed out through that process," he added.

Rehabilitating older houses will still be done, McKelvey said, but many will be homes in such a state of disrepair that they would have gone off the market anyway.

McKelvey also cited the prevalence of vacant luxury homes in the greater Portland area as a sign that subsidized housing could be a viable solution to housing the poor, rather than solely relying on the private housing market to meet that need.

Despite these points, the Metro housing bond has seen a level of opposition that the city housing bond from two years ago saw

little.

Among those opponents is Andy Duyck, the chair of the Washington County board of commissioners and chair of Washington County Housing Authority (the agency which would distribute the bond dollars should it pass).

In his opposition, Duyck finds himself in the company of the Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce, Beaverton Chamber of Commerce, Tualatin Chamber of Commerce, and Portland Metro Realtors Association, Duyck told the Portland Observer. Duyck also joined the political action committee that opposes the bond, called "Affordable for WHO?," describing himself as a reluctant spokesperson for the campaign which he did not form.

Though Duyck doesn't dispute that there's an affordable housing crisis in the region, he contends initiatives for affordable housing would be more efficient and

which the Metro housing tax would be determined for each home. Due to Oregon's tax limitation measures from the 1990s, measures 50 and 5, newer homes often have a higher assessed value than older ones, he said.

"It's disproportionate in how it affects the property owners. It means that anybody who has bought a home that's been built since measure 50 and 5 were put in place is going to be paying a lot more than \$60," Duyck said, referencing the \$60 per year that Metro said the average Portland-region homeowner will pay for the bond.

McKelvey said the potential amount of tax that homeowners would pay may fluctuate from home to home, but not drastically.

"If we're looking at an average annual cost of \$50 or \$60 across the tri-county region we're probably looking at maybe \$15 to \$25 dollar difference."

McKelvey, who spent the majority of his life in Portland, his home town, added that he understands the concerns about taxes that Duyck and others raised, but said fears of tax dollars being misused are unwarranted.

A 7 percent cap for the bond dollars to be used for administration, oversight and transaction costs at the regional and local level makes it possible to "hold our Metro government accountable," McKelvey said. An oversight committee would also be created.

McKelvey said he's also heard concerns that the measure will be too Multnomah County-centric. When asked if that was a concern for Duyck, he said no. Even so, the homes created by the bond will be distributed region-wide based on assessed value of each county, according to Metro's bond framework. That means 45 percent of the homes created would be in Multnomah County, 34 percent in Washington County, and 21 percent in Clackamas County.

However, McKelvey argues that as Multnomah County's cost of living rises, those who get pushed out to neighboring counties see an increase in cost as well. Hence, the bond would benefit all three counties and make spending for things like homeless services more efficient.

"We can keep playing musical chairs and the people can keep trying to find their seat in Multnomah or Clackamas or Washington county or we can try to work together to make sure everybody has a seat."

Though McKelvey lauds the measure as a good start for turning the region's affordable housing crisis around, he added that it's only the beginning of what's needed as it would provide only a tenth of the financial need to house all homeless people in all three counties.

The coalition that McKelvey was a part of to develop the Metro housing bond framework was called the Welcome Home committee and was made up of dozens of groups representing affordable housing developers, civil rights organizations, faith communities, and anti-poverty non-profits like Living Cully, 1000 Friends of Oregon, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, and Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives.

That same committee was also instrumental in developing the Portland City housing bond that voters passed two years ago, McKelvey said.

Registered voters can expect to receive their ballot in the mail next month.

effective if it were done on the local level, rather than through Metro. He also accused Metro of "mission creep" for creating the bond proposal, citing that it's not a housing authority. Duyck also opposes the use of taxes for creating affordable housing, saying it would raise rents.

"People are becoming so tax burdened they're being priced right out of their own home. And it doesn't matter if they own that home or if they rented. All of those costs it attributed to the cost of housing," Duyck told the Portland Observer.

Duyck said Washington County was contemplating putting forth an affordable housing levy to voters, but nixed the idea once Metro's bond measure was approved for the ballot.

"Our polling was pretty clear that that support for any kind of a housing measure was tepid at best anyway. And to have two on there would just confuse the voters."

In addition, Duyck questions the way in