

Re-legalizing the missing middle in Oregon + Portland

**Lessons from two successful actions
against exclusionary zoning**

Michael Andersen, Sightline Institute
Overcoming Barriers to Housing Affordability
Thursday, March 18, 2021

My 20-minute agenda

- **Who** I am
- **What** we did
- **Why** I think it worked
- **How** other campaigns might learn from our wins & near losses: messaging lessons, political lessons

Who am I and what is Sightline's deal?

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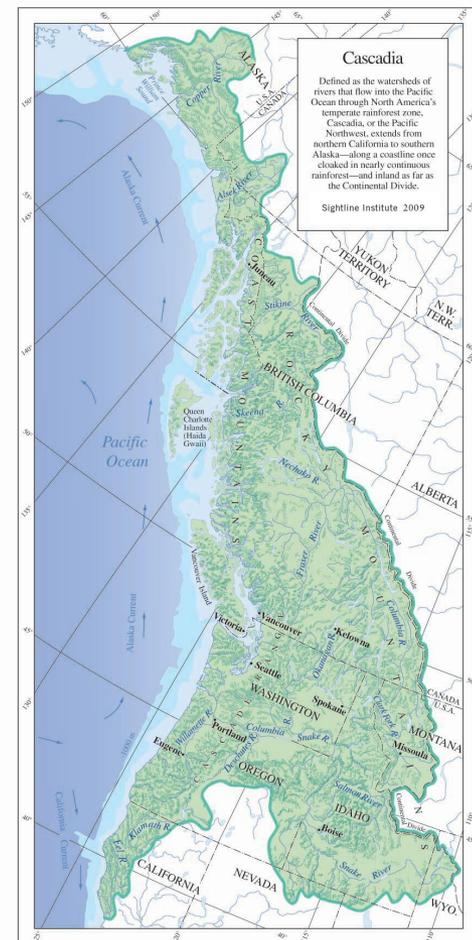
- I'm a policy writer and researcher, focusing on **housing and transportation**

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- **Sightline Institute** is a regional sustainability think tank animated in part by a conviction that cities are good

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Zoning reform: re-legalizing cities



Cincinnati, Travis Estell

Oregon's 2019 law: **fourplex** re-legalization



Fourplex in Portland, built 1947.

Oregon's 2019 law: **fourplex** re-legalization

Under HB 2001, cities
must allow:



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- Up to fourplexes in all neighborhoods for cities 25k+ and throughout Portland metro (2.5m)



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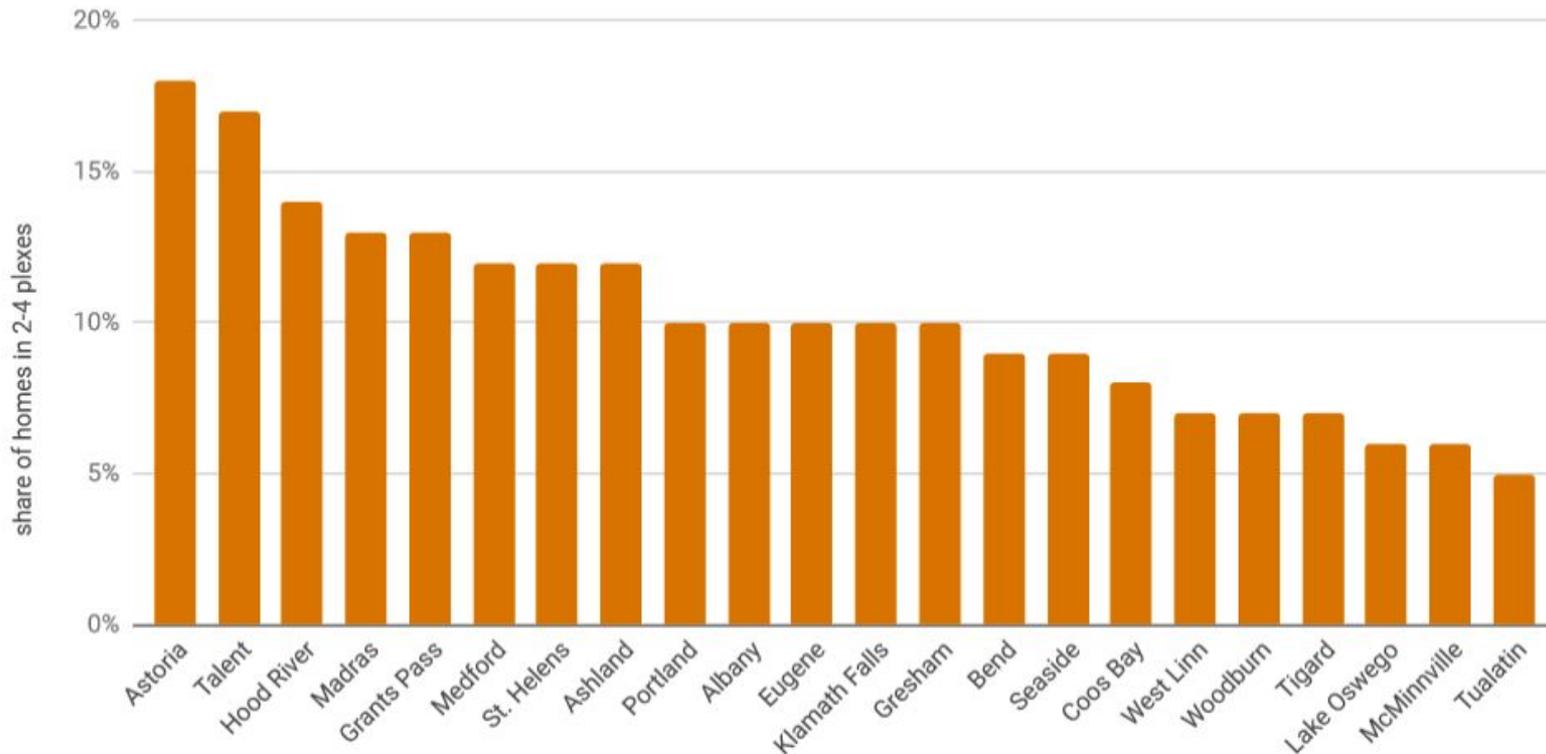
- Up to fourplexes in **all neighborhoods** for cities 25k+ and throughout Portland metro (2.5m)
- Duplexes on **every lot** in cities 10k+



Fourplex in Portland, built 1947.

Oregon's HB 2001: fourplex re-legalization

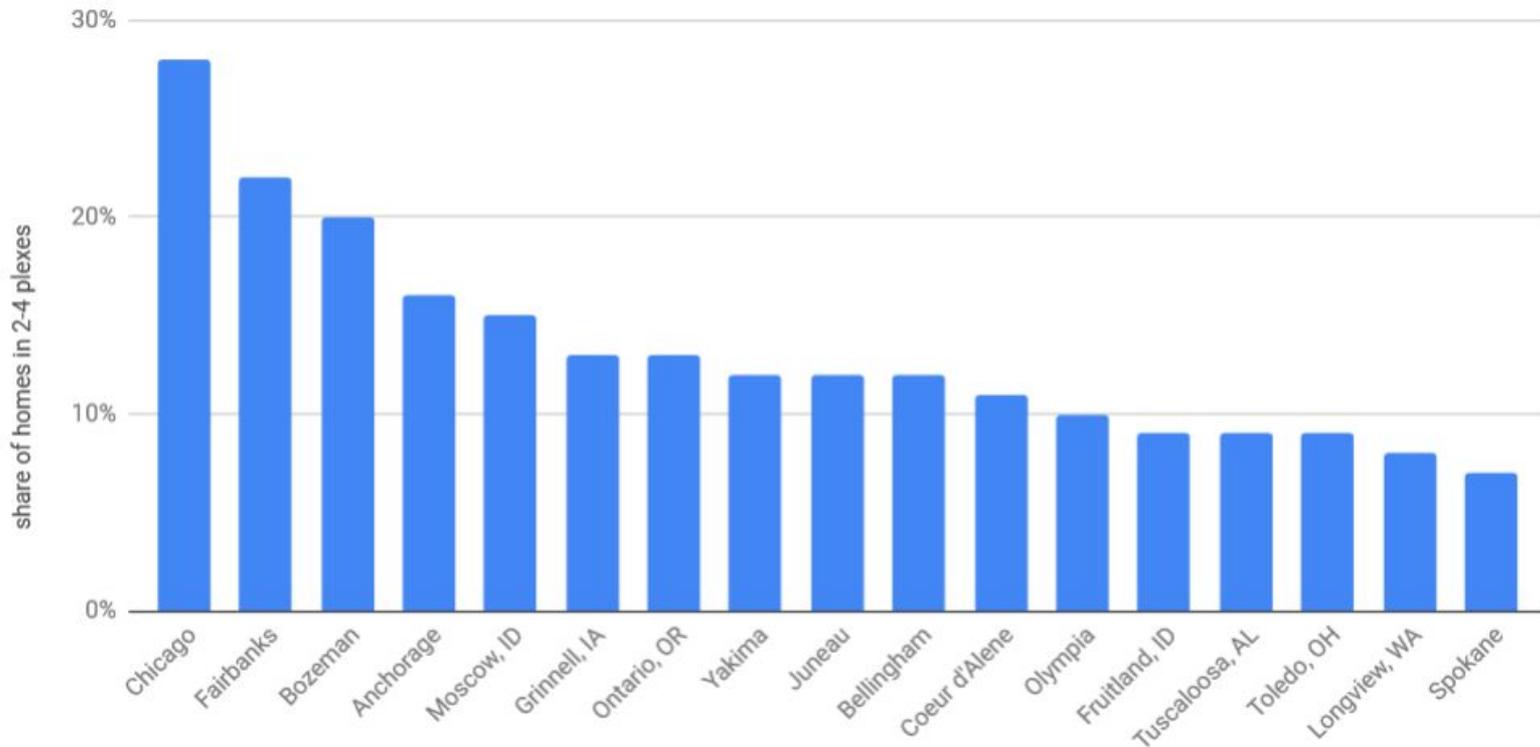
"Middle housing" is a bedrock of smaller cities' housing markets.



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017.

Oregon's HB 2001: fourplex re-legalization

"Middle housing" in a few more selected cities



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017

Oregon's 2019 law: **fourplex** re-legalization

Other provisions:



ADU in Seattle, Rainbow Valley Construction

Oregon's 2019 law: **fourplex** re-legalization

Other provisions:

- Struck down parking mandates above 1 per home and anti-rental discrimination



ADU in Seattle, Rainbow Valley Construction

Oregon's 2019 law: **fourplex** re-legalization

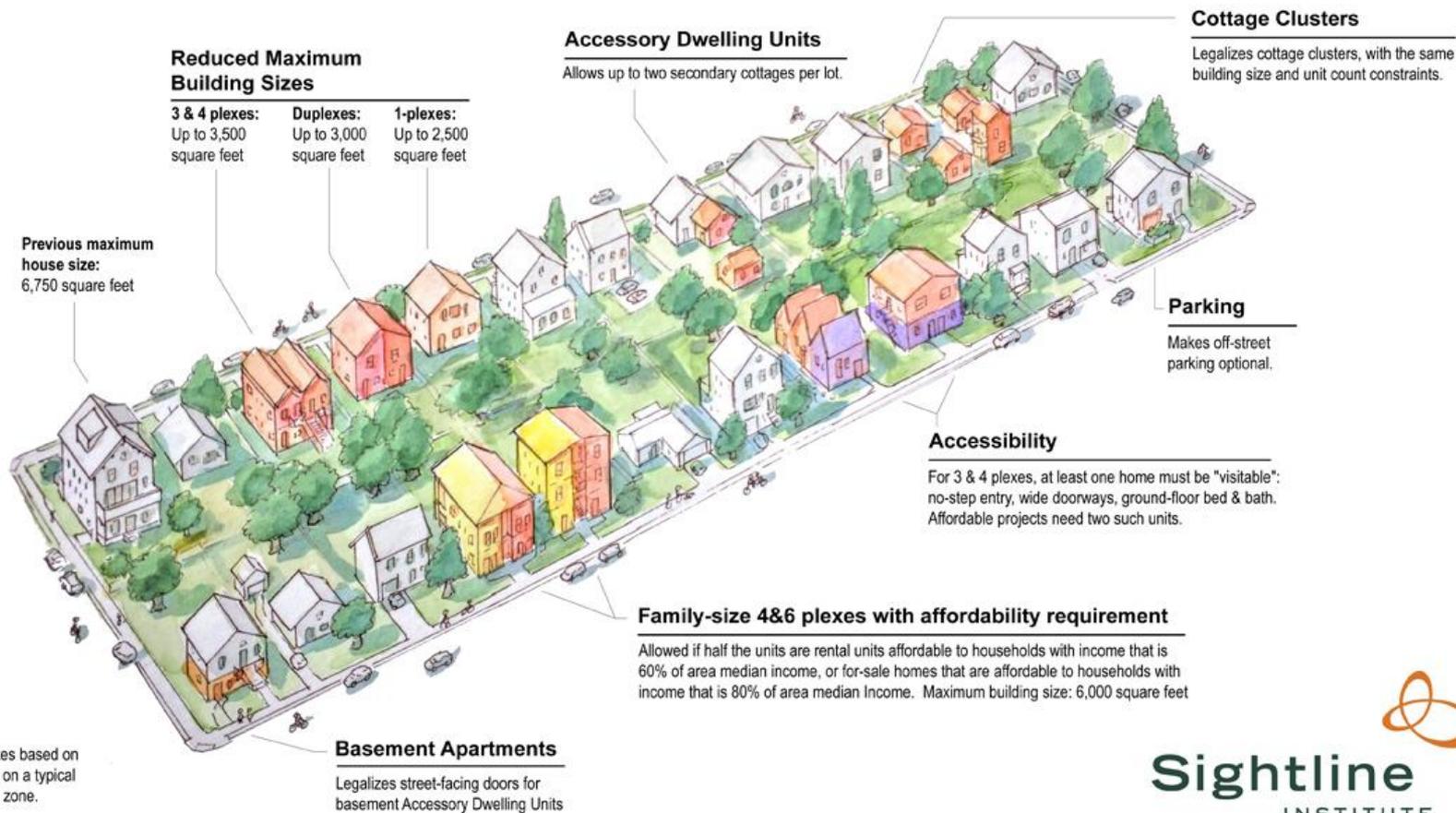
Other provisions:

- Struck down parking mandates above 1 per home and anti-rental discrimination
- Voided future HOA covenants that ban middle housing



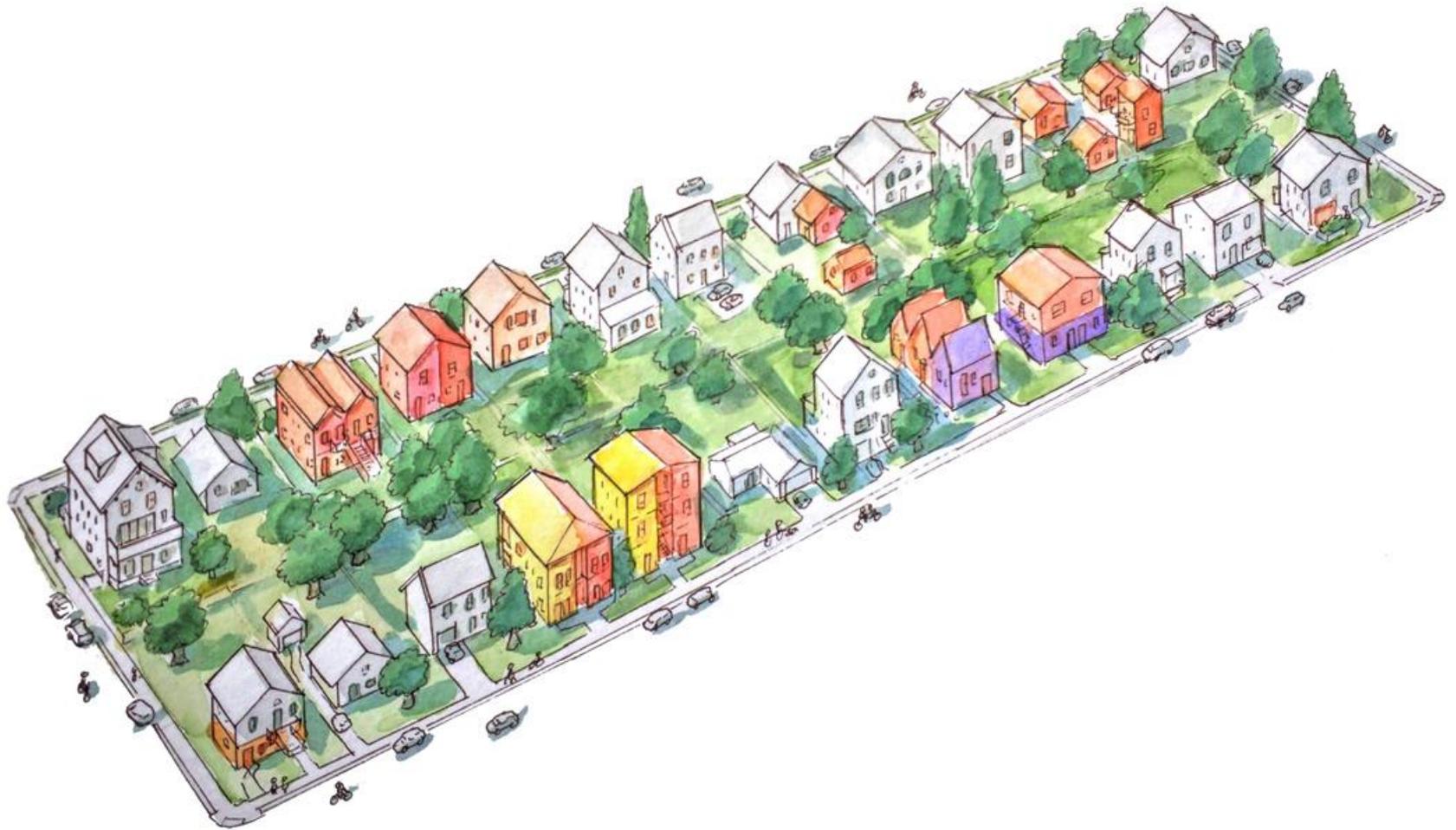
ADU in Seattle, Rainbow Valley Construction

Portland's 2020 follow-up: the Residential Infill Project



* Maximum building sizes based on floor area ratio allowed on a typical 50' x 100' lot in the R-5 zone.





The opposition



So, what worked?

Messaging lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Frame it as
re-legalizing
"middle housing"
(not "ending
single-family
zoning")

eventbrite



This event has ended.



AUG
10

Re-Legalizing Portland: Presentation & Happy Hour

by Madeline Kovacs [Follow](#)

Description

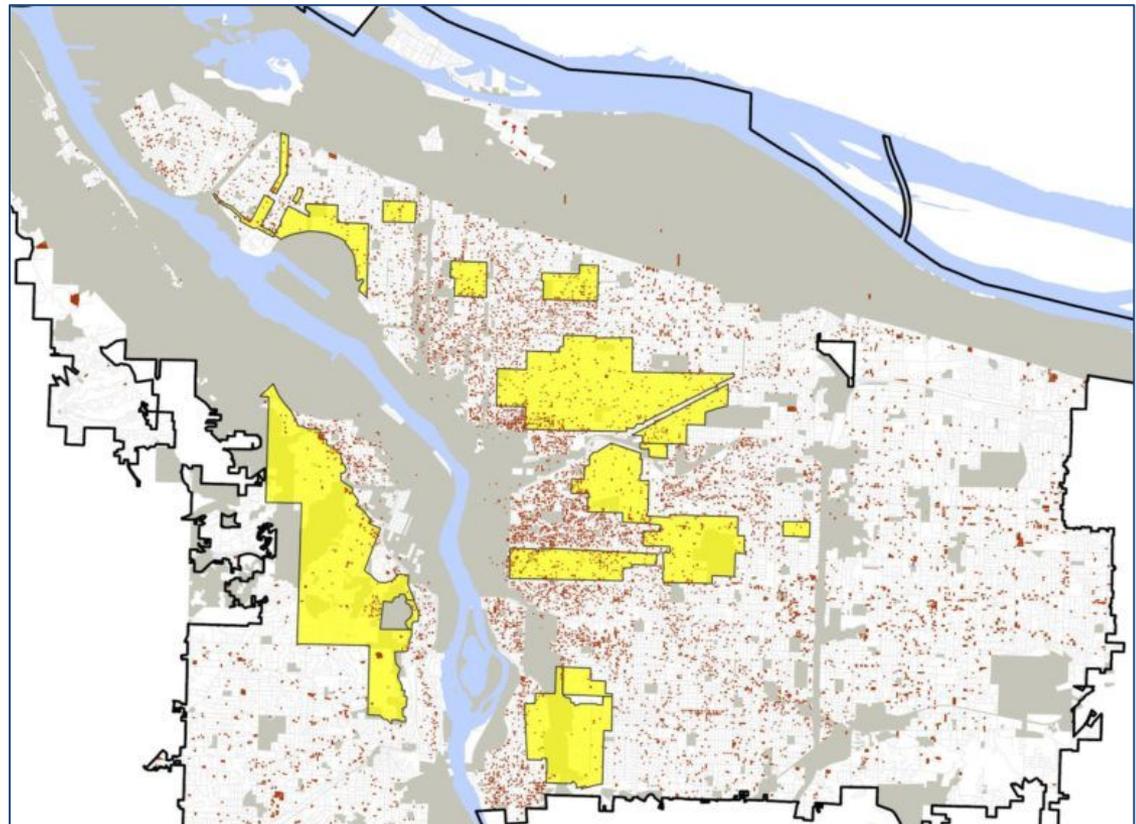
Portland faces a housing shortage.
And many Portlanders don't like

Date And Time

Wed, August 10,
2016

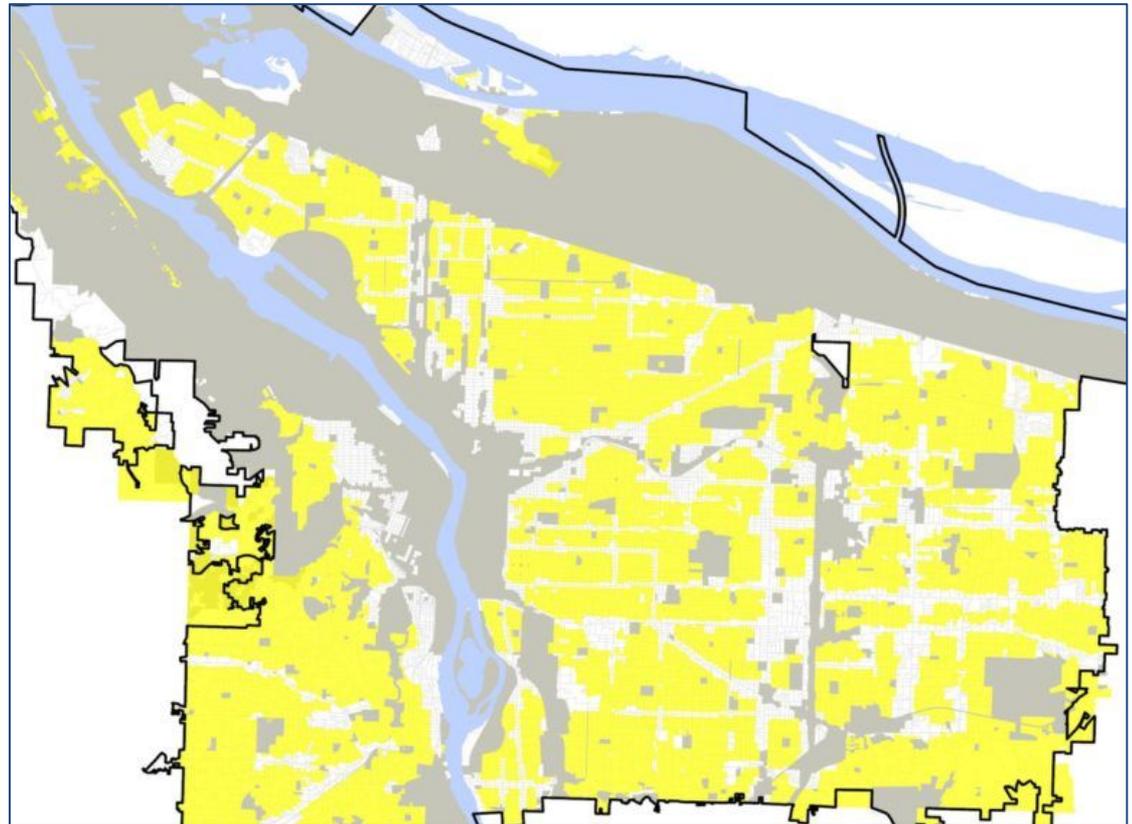
Messaging lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Root your story
in your
community's
specific history:
in Portland, the
year we started
banning middle
housing was
1924...



Messaging lessons from fourplex re-legalization

...and the year
our ban went
citywide was
1959.



Map: Neil Heller.

Messaging lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Signal
friendliness to
"soft NIMBYs"
(anti-change but
not anti-people)
by positioning
yourself against
McMansions

Every month Portland's infill rules aren't changed, the city looks more like this

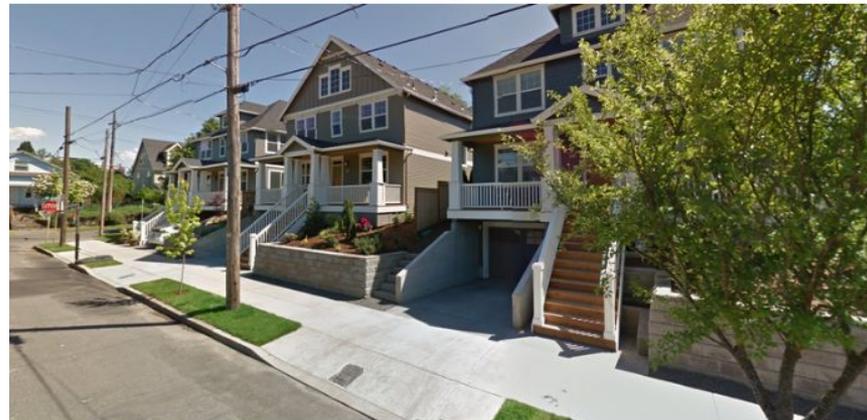
An annotated gallery of middle-class displacement.

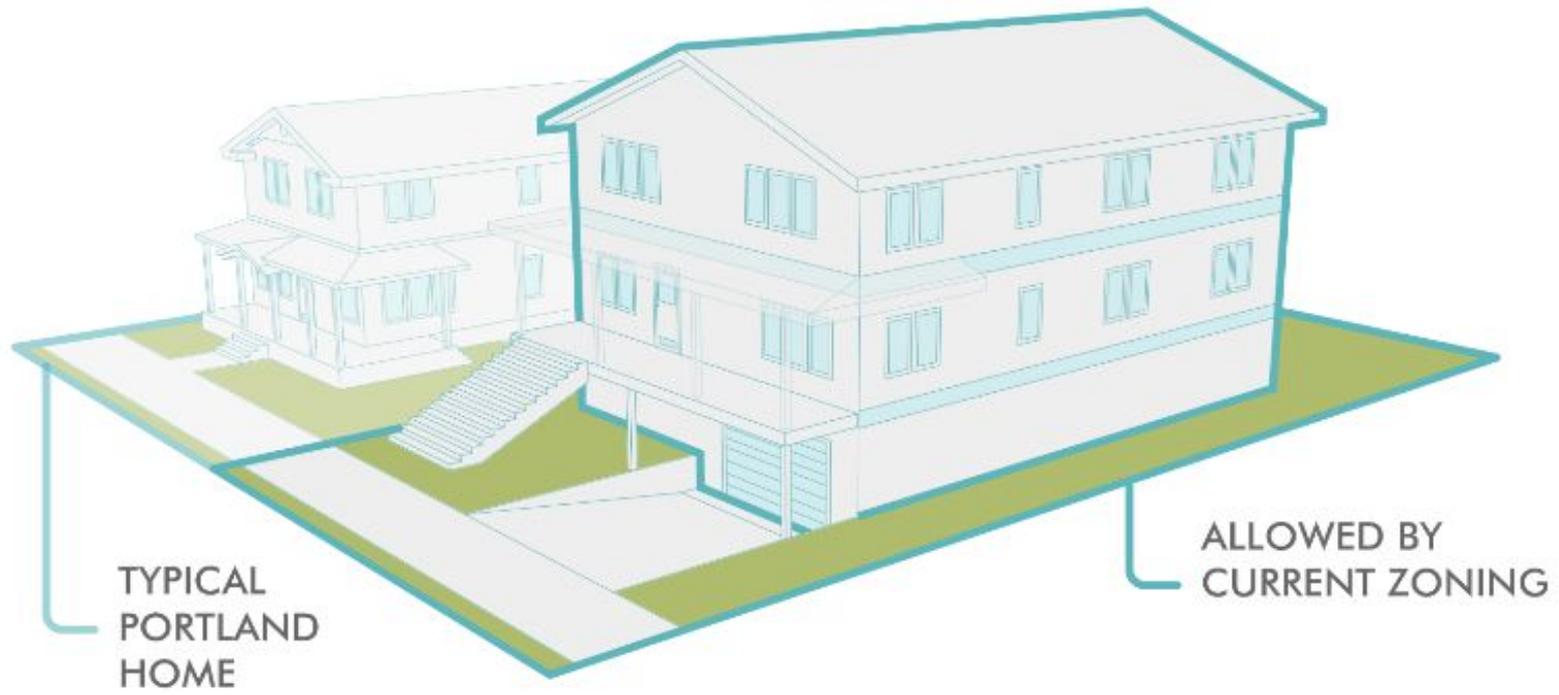


Portland For Everyone [Following](#)

Jan 16, 2018 · 5 min read

by Michael Andersen | Jan. 16, 2018

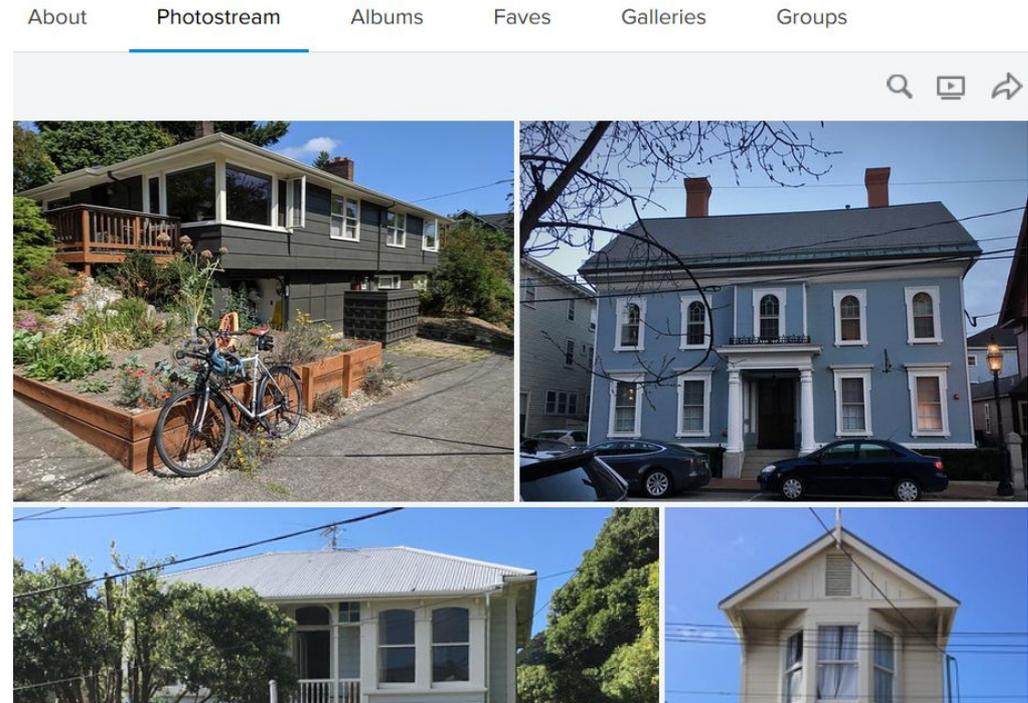






Messaging lessons from fourplex re-legalization

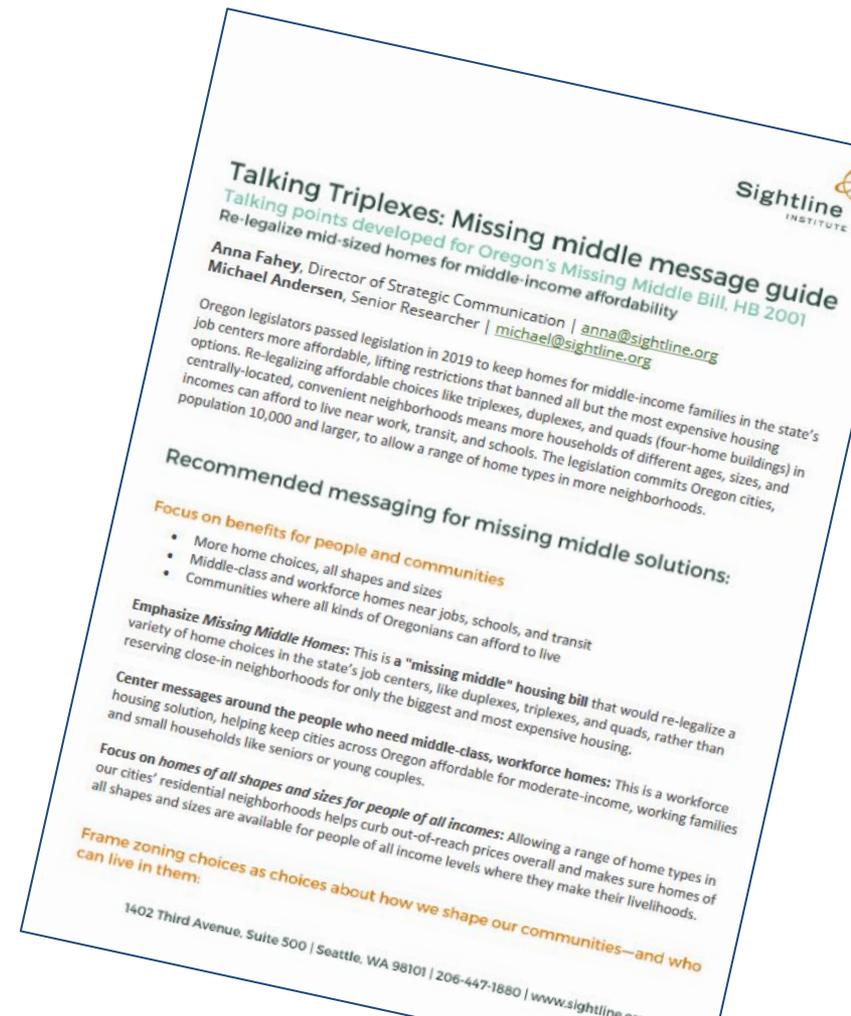
Show, don't tell:
do your best to
ensure that no
one ever hears
about the
proposal without
seeing an image
of an actual
duplex



Messaging lessons from housing re-legalization

Our memo:
bit.ly/TalkingTriplexes

Our housing research:
sightline.org/signup



Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Find a
committed
leader: Rep.
Kotek decided
to get state
reform done,
and did



Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland.
Image: Lynn Howlett Photography.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Make an
ideologically
diverse case, even
when cooperation
seems impossible

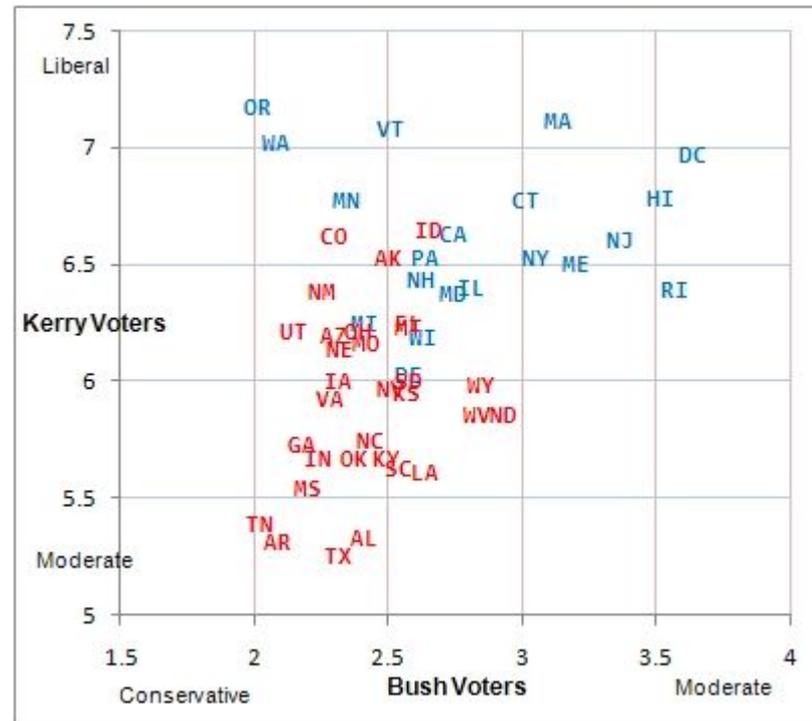
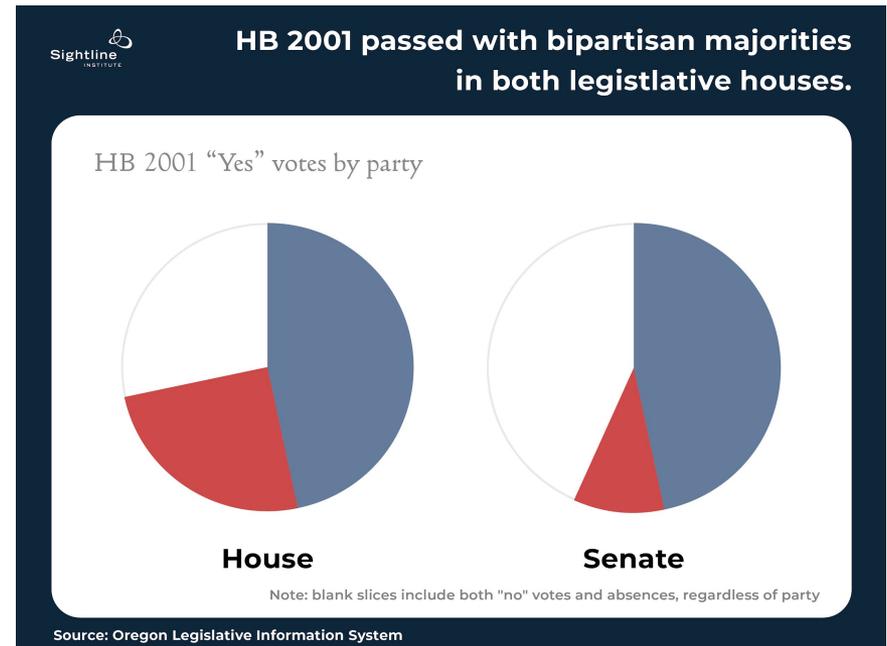


Chart: [FiveThirtyEight](#).

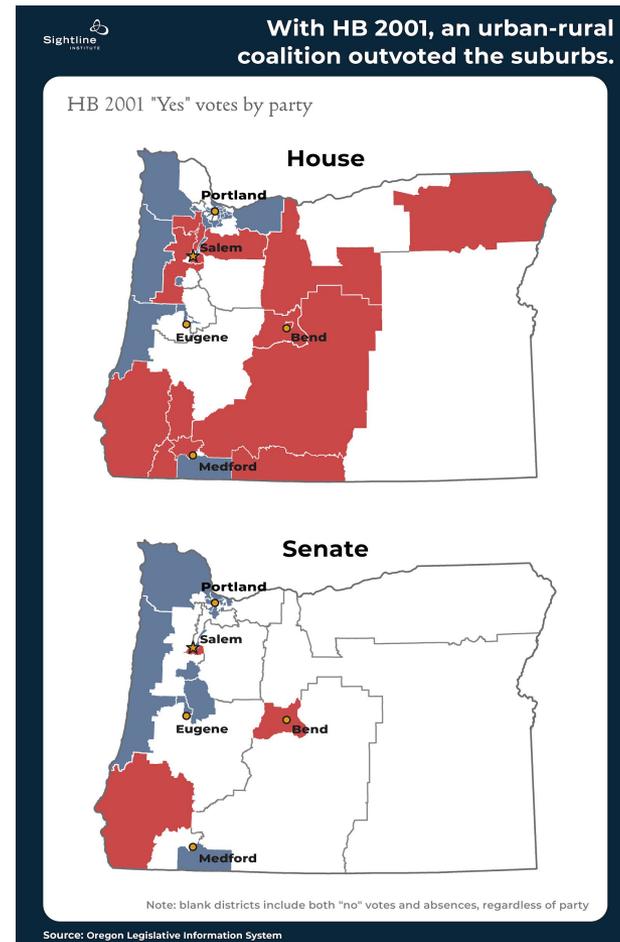
Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

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Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Housing shortages spill across city limits, but no one city has the power to end them - or, therefore, the incentive to try. So pursue state and regional action.



Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

When you're trying
to draw something
new, it helps to to
shake the
Etch-a-Sketch



Image: Sightline.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Nonprofit housing
developers can be
ideal partners



Photo: Portland for Everyone.

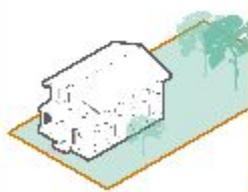
Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

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Photo: Habitat for Humanity Portland Metro/East.

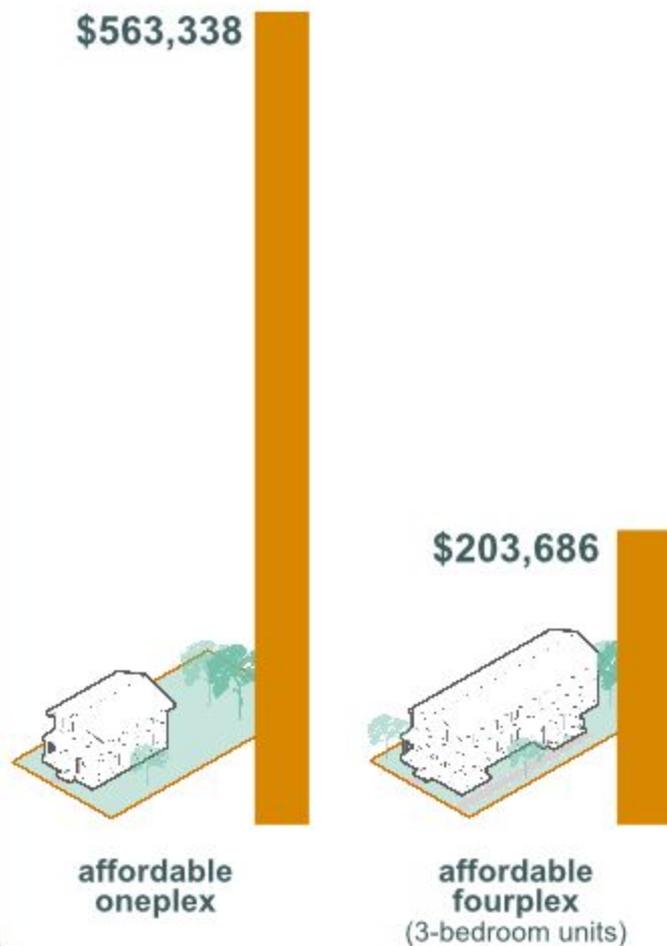
\$563,338



affordable
oneplex

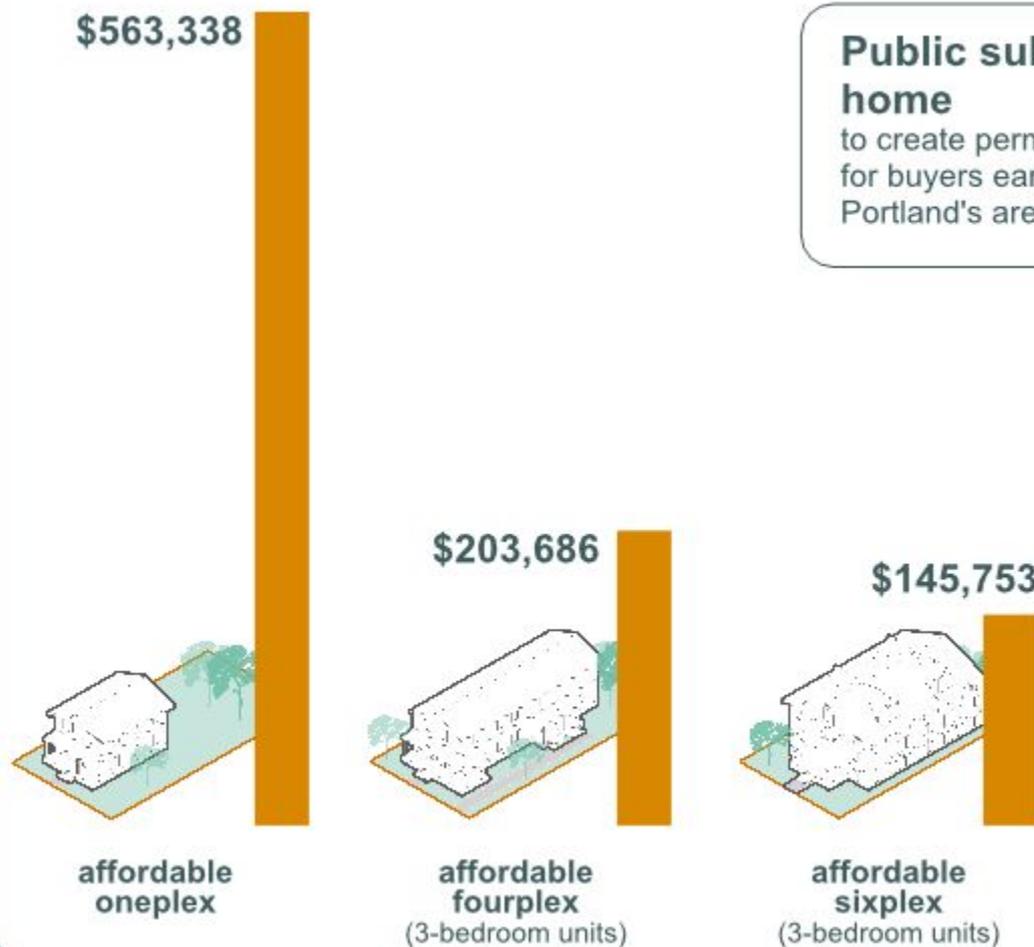
Public subsidy required per home

to create permanently affordable homes for buyers earning at or below 60% of Portland's area median income



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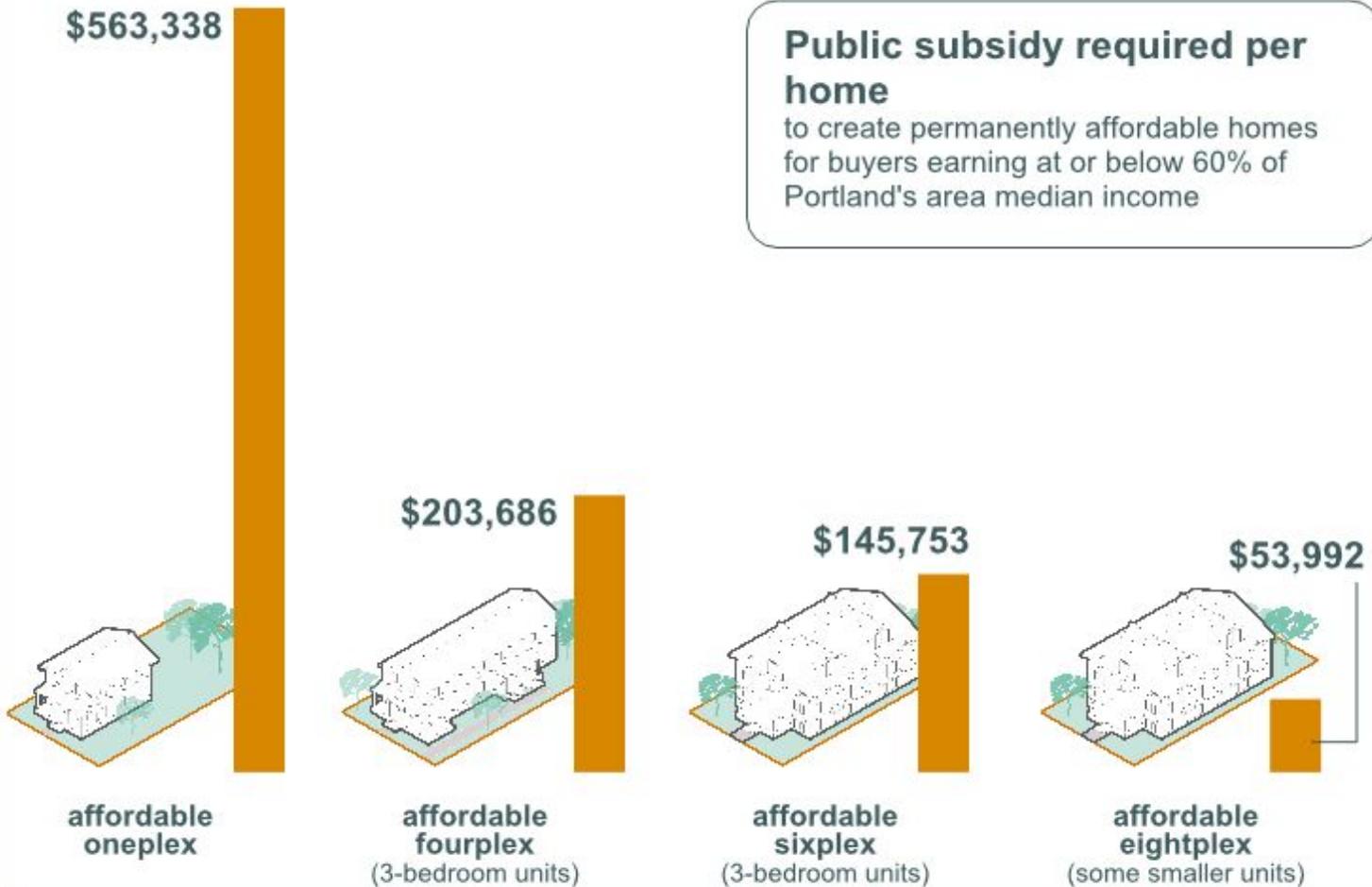


Public subsidy required per home

to create permanently affordable homes for buyers earning at or below 60% of Portland's area median income

Source: Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Proud Ground. Compiled by Neil Heller.

Letting nonprofit developers build bigger is the same as cutting a big check for affordable housing — except it's free.



Source: Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Proud Ground. Compiled by Neil Heller.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Higher unit
counts may
actually be
politically easier

	Triplex	Fourplex
Average Size	1,166 Square Feet	875 Square Feet
Average Sale Price	\$360,500	\$270,375
Average Price per SF	\$309/SF	\$309/SF
Average Rent	\$2,500/month	\$1,900/month
Average Rent per SF	\$2.17/sf	\$2.17/SF

Image: Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

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Image: Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

The best day to
start building a
relationship was 10
years ago; the
second best day is
today.



AARP "missing middle housing" walk. Photo: Portland for Everyone.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

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- Led mostly by environmental groups
- Funded mostly by foundations interested in housing affordability and environmentalist individual donors
- Face-to-face interactions with 3,000 Portlanders from 2016-2019
- Phone/email list of 1,200 housing supporters built from these events

Unexpected alliances

- **AARP** (affordability, accessibility, community)
- **OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon** (affordability, transit access)
- **The Street Trust** (walkable, bikeable proximity)
- **Portland Public Schools** (race/wealth integration)
- **SunrisePDX** (carbon-efficient housing)
- **Homebuilders and Realtors** (lower-priced market segment)

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Find shared facts
and trusted
authorities

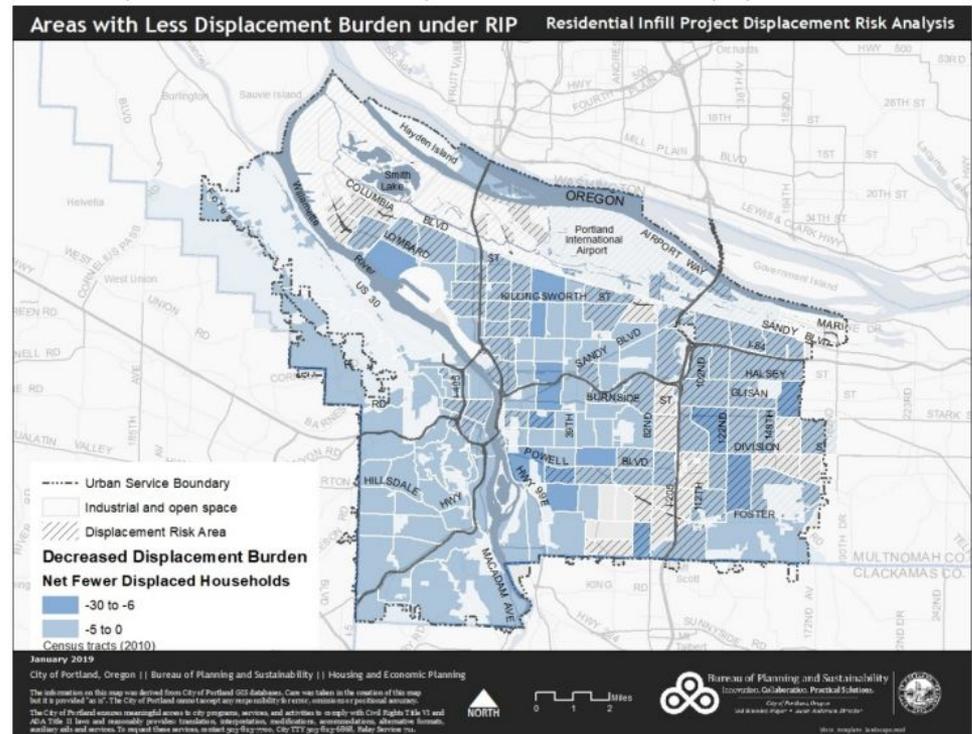


Image: Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

Political lessons from fourplex re-legalization

Find common
ground by
thinking bigger



Image: Neil Heller.

The happy ending



Photo: Portland: Neighbors Welcome.

The happy ending

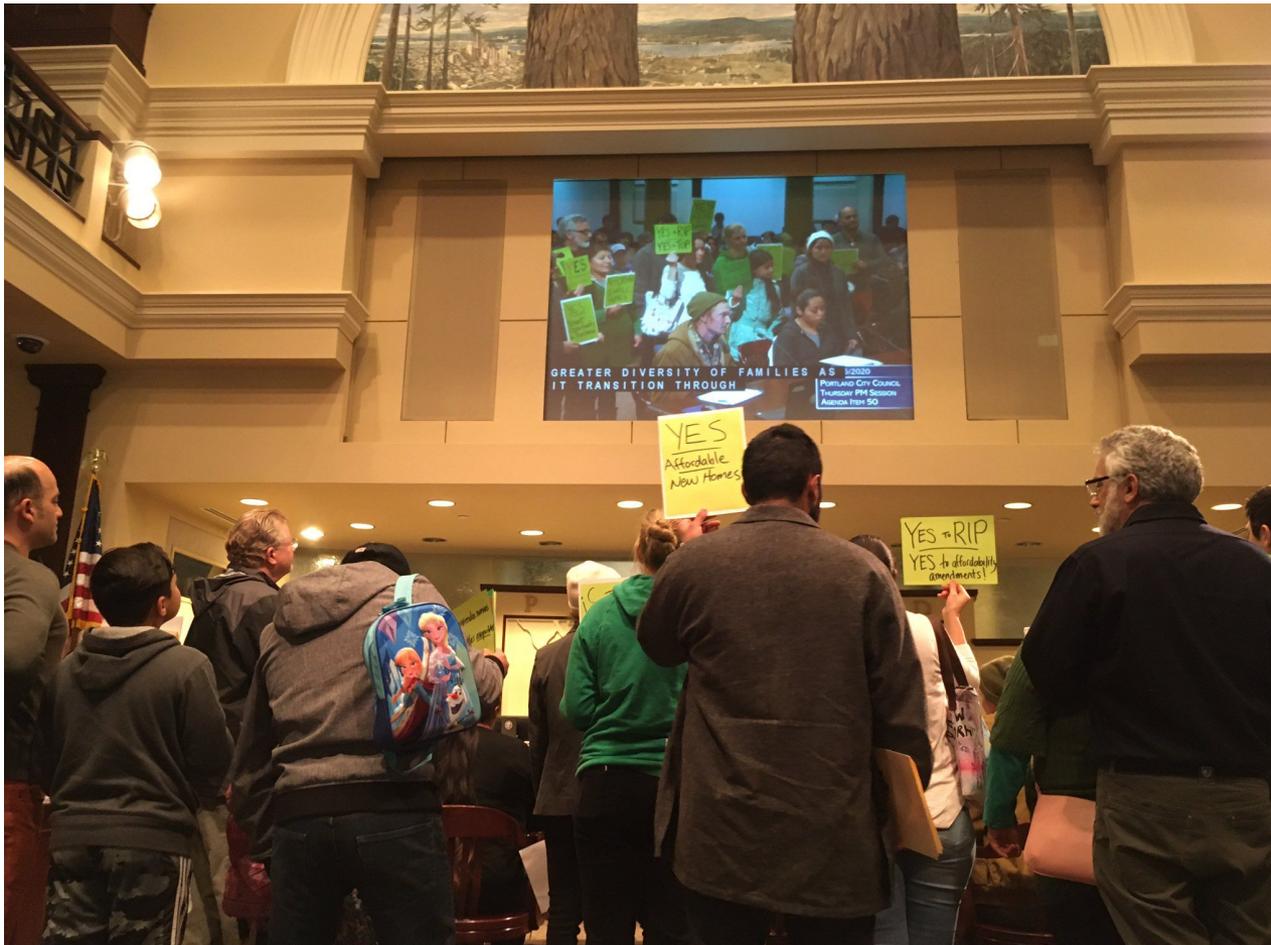


Photo: Sightline Institute.

The happy ending



Photo: K. Kendall.

“Who knew putting people at city council, testifying, writing letters and convincing their elected officials could change public policy?”

- Commissioner Jo
Ann Hardesty



These slides are online at bit.ly/LincolnReportOR

michael@sightline.org



[@andersem](#), [@sightline](#)