

July 13, 2022

Environment and Climate Committee
City of Bend
710 NW Wall Street
Bend, OR 97701

Re: Home Energy Score Program

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

We are writing on behalf of the Central Oregon Association of REALTORS® (COAR) – representing more than 2,500 real estate professionals – to provide feedback on the Environment and Climate Committee’s Proposed Home Energy Score Work Program Overview.

We commend the Committee for its commitment to climate action and recognize both the investment of time and the amount of work that has gone into this proposal. Our association supported the incentives and voluntary programs aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Bend’s 2019 Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP). But as you are aware, we remain concerned about the impact of a requirement that homes obtain a home energy score from a state licensed home energy assessor prior to listing. As real estate professionals, these concerns are based on industry experience and intimate knowledge of market conditions – they range from the impact on affordability to current and future capacity of assessors – and were shared in detail with the Committee in January by COAR’s Government Affairs Director, Tyler Neese.

While we are happy to further discuss these concerns, this letter is intended to outline specific recommendations and considerations. We ask that you carefully consider these factors before finalizing your policy recommendations to Council.

Intent of the CCAP and community buy-in

It must be noted that when the Bend City Council passed City Council Resolution 3044 in December 2019 and adopted the CCAP, the plan’s focus was on GHG reduction goals and other actions that would allow the City to “model the way,” as well as voluntary efforts and incentives for the broader community. Specifically, the resolution described the plan as follows:

The CCAP is a set of strategies and actions that will guide both the City and the community as we work together to achieve fossil fuel reduction goals established by City Council Resolution 3044. The actions will encourage and incentivize businesses and residents, through voluntary efforts, to reduce GHG emissions and fossil fuel use.

As you finalize your policy recommendations and begin to solicit input from the community, we urge you to honor the spirit in which the resolution was developed by encouraging the community to follow the City's lead through well-designed, voluntary actions.

Involving the community in the development of proposed sustainability policies and programs builds consensus, buy-in, and awareness. Through the City's efforts, such buy-in was achieved for the CCAP, as evidenced by the significant amount of public support it received. But the choice to begin the plan's implementation with a mandatory program risks betraying that public trust.

Precedent for – and value of – voluntary programs

As you are aware, our organization is “pro-home energy score.” As REALTORS®, we believe in transparency and fully support a consumer's ability to access information regarding the energy efficiency of a home. Home energy scores can provide valuable information to both buyers and sellers, allowing homeowners to maximize efficiency and reduce energy costs in their homes. A home energy score is one tool in the toolbox available to consumers that allows them to do this, and a service that is currently available in our community.

As we have shared previously, if the current system is found lacking by the City, we are committed to providing our resources and data to work together to develop a better, voluntary solution. COAR's Multiple Listing Service of Central Oregon (MLSCO) currently includes fields for green features, home energy scores, and green certifications.

It is also worth noting that a voluntary program is not without precedent in the state of Oregon, as both Ashland and Eugene have passed measures establishing voluntary programs. The Corvallis City Council has also recently signaled support for a voluntary program.

Focus on changing behaviors and incentives over mandates

Per the EPA, emissions from businesses and homes arise primarily from fossil fuels burned for heat, use of products that contain greenhouse gases, and the handling of waste. If the intent of the CCAP is truly to reduce GHGs, we urge the Committee to focus its efforts on incentives that seek to change the behaviors and habits of the occupants of a home versus the home itself. Credits or direct tax rebates for improvements – such as adding insulation, installing a smart thermostat, or replacing old windows – have proven effective in other communities and are impactful changes toward better home efficiency.

Public-private partnerships could play a key role in engaging and mobilizing the community in support of the City's climate goals, and COAR would be happy to partner in such initiatives.



We will continue to support a buyer's or seller's ability to determine the efficiency of their home through voluntary action, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the City and serve as a resource and conduit for information and education to both REALTORS® and the broader community.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and recommendations shared on behalf of the local real estate community, as well as your service to Bend. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 541-382-6027 or info@coar.com.

Sincerely,

Cat Zwicker
2022 President
Central Oregon Association of REALTORS® &
MLS of Central Oregon

Cindy King
Chair, Government Affairs Committee
Central Oregon Association of REALTORS® &
MLS of Central Oregon

CC: Bend City Council
Eric King, City Manager
Cassie Lacy, Senior Management Analyst
Ben Hemson, Business Advocate/BEDAB
Makayla Oliver, Community Relations Manager/Neighborhood Leadership Alliance