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Land Bank Authority will create new tool for revitalizing polluted land in Oregon

HB 2734 will help prompt clean-up and development on brownfields

SALEM – The Senate approved House Bill 2734 this morning, legislation that allows local governments to create land bank authorities to clean up brownfields – former industrial or commercial sites where development is hindered by a real or perceived environmental contamination. Left untouched, these properties pose threats to human health and the environment while also undermining economic development and failing to contribute to the local and state economies.

“HB 2734 addresses a problem that affects every area of our state,” said Senator Arnie Roblan (D-Coos Bay), who carried the bill on the floor. “There are an estimated 13,500 brownfield sites across Oregon. They are found in both urban and rural areas and range from former gas stations and dry cleaners to large industrial sites. HB 2734 offers a new option for Oregon communities as they take on the challenge of brownfield cleanup and redevelopment.”

Under the bill, a local government may establish a local land bank authority that would be able to acquire derelict brownfield properties and use a variety of strategies and funding sources to clean them up and return them to productive use. Establishment of a separate, independent entity would protect the local government from exposing its general fund to the risks associated with acquiring and owning contaminated property. At the same time, the land bank authority would be protected under state law from liability for pre-existing contamination and would also have the ability to pursue cleanup costs from responsible parties.

“To be clear, no single tool will solve the brownfields problem in Oregon. No single strategy will work for all of our state’s diverse communities and the many different types of contaminated

properties that are holding our communities back,” said Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), chair of the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee. “However, HB 2734 gives local governments a new, completely optional tool that can, in the right circumstances, help to end the cycle of disinvestment and decay caused by the presence of brownfields in our communities.”

HB 2734 was crafted by the Brownfields Coalition, which includes more than 40 public, private, and nonprofit organizations that joined together in 2014 to address the need for new tools to tackle the challenges associated with the 13,500 brownfield properties in Oregon.

HB 2734 will now go to the Governor for her consideration.

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