Justin Hellem

I live in the Yakima Valley and own a local homebuilding company. I see how much planning and cost go into building a home for a family, and how added requirements can affect what a home ultimately costs. I support protecting Washingtonâ€™s shorelines and preparing for the effects of sea-level rise and severe storms. Iâ€™m concerned, though, that broad new buffers and added permitting or mitigation requirements could make housing more difficult and expensive to provide. Please keep local governments meaningfully involved, with clear and predictable rules that protect the environment while allowing communities to meet their housing needs.

I"m concerned about provisions that give Ecology a larger role in local permitting decisions. State agencies should provide guidance and technical expertise, but they shouldn"t become the final decision-maker on projects happening in local communities. Cities and counties are accountable for their decisions. If a project is approved or denied, they have to defend that decision and bear the consequences.
What troubles me is that Ecology can influence local decisions significantly without the same level of accountability. If an agency can"t be sued over a permitting decision, it shouldn"t have the authority to effectively dictate the outcome. Too often, local governments spend months reviewing a project, holding public hearings, and reaching a decision, only to face pressure to reverse course. That creates a murky process where applicants aren"t sure who is really in charge. The result is more delay, more uncertainty, and higher costs. State agencies should partner, not serve as a veto point after the fact. Ecology should revise this proposal to preserve local decision-making authority and provide a clear, predictable permitting process that supports housing production rather than making it harder to build the homes Washington needs.