

Moratorium on warehouses demanded by East Portland residents, school leaders

Updated: Mar. 17, 2023, 8:17 p.m.]

Published: Mar. 17, 2023, 5:43 p.m.



San-Francisco based company Prologis, which has built several warehouses in the Portland area -- including this one in Northeast Portland -- is planning to construct a massive distribution center at a former Kmart site across from Parkrose High School. The school board and neighbors have asked the city for a temporary warehouse moratorium so officials can consider community health impacts of warehouse proposals. Dave Killen / The Oregonian

By [Gosia Wozniacka](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

School leaders and neighbors in outer Northeast Portland who [oppose a proposed distribution center at a former Kmart site](#) are demanding Portland pass an emergency moratorium on large warehouses.

The request comes as residents and the Parkrose School District have unsuccessfully fought a proposal by San Francisco-based developer Prologis to build a large concrete freight distribution center just opposite Parkrose High School's athletic fields and student street crossings. The design calls for 37 truck loading bays.

Portland officials have declined to comment directly on whether they would support a temporary freeze on warehouse applications.

Commissioner Carmen Rubio, who oversees the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said the decision on how to zone the former Kmart property stemmed from residents themselves and would be hard to reverse. The bureau focuses on land use planning and environmental stewardship.

“The decision for allowable uses for this property dates back to 2015 and was driven by community input that largely centered on the need for local jobs,” Rubio told The Oregonian/OregonLive. “Unfortunately, state land use laws create real barriers to changing that decision.”

[Oregon law requires](#) a 45-day notice prior to the final public hearing on moratorium adoption. As related specifically to the Prologis project, the city would have to show that existing code is inadequate to prevent irrevocable public harm from the proposed project and that the harm caused by a lack of a moratorium would outweigh other adverse effects, such as reduced economic development.

The local campaign mirrors movements in other cities, including Vancouver and cities in California, New York and New Jersey that passed moratoriums last year, advocating a freeze to examine the impact of warehouses on community health, climate and the economy.

Prologis spokesperson Mattie Sorrentino said the proposed warehouse will create new jobs, help the local economy and deliver essential products to people in Portland. She said the company has complied with all local requirements.

“We believe there are better ways for local governments to work to address community concerns about the impacts of local logistics activities than to institute a blanket moratorium,” Sorrentino said.

Rubio said she’s reached out to Prologis and the company has agreed to meet and talk about the community concerns and how to “find alignment with the city’s environmental and climate goals.”

OPPOSITION PETITION, LETTERS

[Nearly 5,000 people have so far signed a neighborhood petition](#) to oppose the 260,000-square-foot Prologis warehouse, urging Thuy Tran, D-Portland, who represents Northeast Portland to speak out against the project.

The Parkrose School District Board of Education also this week sent a letter to City Council members requesting the moratorium on developing so-called logistics warehouses over 250,000 square feet in East Portland. The Argay Terrace Neighborhood Association and the Parkrose Neighborhood Association said they will send letters with the same request next week.

Opponents have said the warehouse would bring significantly more diesel pollution and increase heavy freight traffic to the [low-income minority](#) neighborhoods already overburdened with pollution, hemmed in by two major freeways and [the city’s industrial zone](#).

Portland officials have said that – despite the city’s strong commitment to “geographic equity, social justice, racial justice, environmental justice” – they can do nothing to stop the warehouse from being built because the city [lacks the tools to implement its ambitious equity policies](#).

School officials and neighbors have argued that jobs should not come at the expense of students' and residents' health and traffic safety. They point out that [another large distribution center](#) is already being built nearby and that it's unclear just how many local jobs distribution centers create. Prologis has declined to say how many workers its warehouse will support.

"As a community that already faces significant barriers to livability and thriving, Parkrose School Board joins with the Parkrose and Argay Neighborhood Associations to call the Portland City Council to honor the city's commitment to environmental justice for historically underserved communities," said the letter that was also shared with The Oregonian/OregonLive.

MORATORIUMS MULTIPLY

In Vancouver, the City Council has taken a different approach than Portland.

In December, the council [approved a six-month emergency moratorium on warehouses over 250,000 square feet](#) after city officials said large warehouses create a significant amount of truck traffic and may be inconsistent with the goals of Vancouver's Climate Action Plan.

"Such facilities consume vast amounts of limited industrial land yet provide very few jobs per acre and are typically low skill and low wage positions," City Manager Eric Holmes [wrote in a staff report](#). Vancouver enacted the moratorium as eight warehouse applications were working their way through the city's application process.

In California, dozens of cities in the Inland Empire – the mecca of e-commerce just south of Los Angeles – have passed similar moratoriums as warehouses [have proliferated in residential neighborhoods](#), with hundreds of trucks rumbling by homes and schools. Towns in [New York](#) and [New Jersey](#) have also passed such bans.

In January, a coalition of environmental, labor, community and academic groups called for a two-year moratorium on new warehouse development in Southern California. [In a letter to California Gov. Gavin Newsom](#), the group said "warehouse growth is one of the most critical environmental justice issues of our time" that has led to a "public health emergency" caused by truck emissions.

WAREHOUSE TAX BREAKS

Portland has promoted large warehouses, handing out tax incentives to them as part of Portland's enterprise zone program to foster economic development.

The proposed Prologis warehouse could benefit from a property tax break because the former Kmart site is located within the city's [enterprise zone program](#).

The Oregon law authorizing enterprise zones sunsets in 2025, and renewing it this year is among Portland's top legislative priorities, city officials have said.

Critics have said the [tax breaks should not be extended for mega-warehouses and data centers](#) because they [don't necessarily play a role in site location](#). Warehouses typically locate near cities because they need to be close to their customers.

Portland's director of economic development, Andrew Fitzpatrick, said the city isn't planning to take a position on the exclusion of warehouses from such zones.

"The City of Portland strongly supports the extension of the enterprise zone program as an important tool to encourage job growth, commit participants to public benefit agreements, and deliver on local economic development goals," Fitzpatrick said in an email.

Since 1986, he said, more than 75 companies have participated in the city's enterprise zone program and about 45 are active today. The companies have created and retained from 5,000 to 10,000 full-time jobs, Fitzpatrick wrote.

Prologis has not reached out yet to Prosper Portland, the city's economic development agency, to ask about the enterprise zone program. Prosper Portland said the company could apply after the building is complete.

The project's [building permit application](#) is still under review, said Ken Ray, Bureau of Development Services spokesman.

But the demolition permit needed to tear down the former Kmart building is in "approved to issue" status. Prologis must pay permit fees before the demolition permit is issued.

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