

Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

I urge you to support SB 1024 to reform zoning laws in Connecticut with the goal of increasing housing supply and expanding the diversity of housing in our towns. Housing data supports zoning changes that will facilitate attracting new residents, maintaining current residents, helping economic development to thrive, and managing property tax increases. These changes can support construction of different types of housing while protecting open space and preserving rural character.

Such measures include making it easier for homeowners to add accessory dwelling units to their current homes or for builders to create new homes with accessory dwelling units; emphasizing the construction of multifamily—such as 2- to 4-unit—housing near “Main Street” areas, which contributes to the vibrancy of local businesses and fosters walkable, bikeable neighborhoods; and reducing unnecessary and burdensome parking requirements on some housing.

Canton suffers from zoning regulations that reward the construction of large, single-family houses on large lots and restricts or limit the construction of more diverse types of housing. The town fails to gain residents of different ages, fails to retain residents once their children finish school, has less economic development, has higher property tax rates, and suffers more environmental destruction as a result of current zoning restrictions. Zoning reform that facilitates multifamily housing—such as 2- to 4-unit buildings near “Main Street” areas and accessory dwelling units throughout the town—also has significant benefits for the environment. The construction of single-family houses on large, 2 to 5 acre lots—the majority of housing construction in town over the past 30 years—results in “suburban sprawl” and is the worst thing that can happen to farmland, forests, and preservation of open space.

For the town to be economically and culturally vibrant, we need to be a place where residents of all ages can procure housing that meets their needs. For our youth, considering whether they can return to the community in which they grew up, the lack of apartments or accessory dwelling units makes living in Canton unattainable. For young couples or families, the lack of smaller houses—or potential investment in a two-family house that supports multi-generational living—makes Canton unaffordable. For empty-nesters, deciding to downsize may result in the unfortunate necessity of leaving the town where they created a lifelong community of family and friends, because there are so few apartments or smaller houses. For those hoping to age in place in their homes, or for residents hoping to care for aging parents, restrictions on accessory dwelling units make doing so more difficult.

Fortunately, there is not a trade-off between measures that increase the quantity and diversity of housing types in a town and the property values of existing homeowners. On the contrary, extensive research has shown that property values *increase* for those in existing single-family houses who live closer to newly constructed multi-family housing. Similarly, adding an accessory dwelling unit *increases* a house’s value, and changing zoning to make it easier to add one is a gift to property owners. Current homeowners benefit from an increase in the quantity and diversity of housing in Canton as it keeps increases in our property tax rate at a minimum. I hope the future of this town where I have raised my children for over 20 years, becomes the kind of town that fellow residents can remain in and contribute to both economically and socially once their children are grown.

Sincerely,

Michelle Fenton Begley

Canton, CT