

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Jordan Force, Greenwich

Re: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Date: March 14, 2021

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

I'm testifying in support of SB 1024. My reasoning is pretty simple: housing is too expensive, and unnecessary zoning regulations restrict the supply of housing and increase construction costs, thereby increasing prices. Zoning is not the only problem here, but it is the thing that the bill addresses, so that's the issue I will focus on here. Therefore, reducing some of these regulations will lead to increased supply and lower prices. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that one of the main arguments against this bill is that it will lower home values. I quote from an email I received from Representative Arora: "(it will) exert downward pressure on real estate prices - the most important asset of many in our community." Harry has an MBA, and founded a successful investment firm, so I take him at his word when he says prices will go down. In my view, this downward pressure is a good thing; how do we make housing more affordable when home prices continue to rise?

Let's look at another argument against this bill. In Harry's email, he says: "It can create more stress on school systems and further increase property taxes". Here's the problem: the implication of this argument is that towns should be using policy to select for residents who are wealthy enough to afford overpriced housing, and pay the taxes on that housing. That's fundamentally unjust, we certainly shouldn't be using government policies to aggravate inequities in our society.

The fact that these arguments are being made by a *state representative* elected by residents of his district demonstrates the general need for reform. If the attitude of Greenwich residents is that zoning restrictions should be primarily for the financial benefit of existing property owners, then zoning regulations will reflect that attitude. The discourse (including from Rep Arora) about this bill indicates that this attitude is common; so, I don't take much stock in the arguments about "local control".

Now that I've explained why I think this sort of reform is necessary, I'll explain several key aspects of the bill that excite me. I really like the part about transit oriented development: I live in Cos Cob (in Greenwich), a 3 minute walk from the Cos Cob railroad station, and a 10 minute walk from the 311 bus route. I really like living near it, because I'm able to go to Stamford, New Haven or New York without needing to drive at all. Once I started using metro north for this, my driving went down significantly. I think it's really important that we allow more housing near transit stations, so that the community can get the maximum benefit from those

services. Unfortunately, most of the area around the Cos Cob and Riverside train stations are single family zoned, which restricts the number of people who can simply walk to those train stations.

Parking is not free, in multiple respects. It makes things further apart, discouraging walking, and encouraging driving. And, of course, it costs money to build and maintain. The Stamford condo building that my boyfriend lives in has tons of unused parking in the basement (Stamford requires 1.5 spaces per 1-bedroom unit). This is wasteful, and increases the cost of construction and maintenance, and ultimately makes Stamford a less livable city. I think limiting parking requirements to 1 space per 1-bedroom unit makes a lot of sense.

Finally, I'm glad that towns will have to be more specific about what building "character" actually means. If a town is going to regulate building character, it needs to be very specific about what that entails. Both so that architects can follow regulations easily, and so that the regulations can be applied consistently.

Thank you,

Jordan Force