



**HARTFORD
COMMUNITY
LOAN FUND**

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RE: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

via email to pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

Hartford Community Loan Fund (HCLF) strongly supports SB 1024. HCLF is a community development financial institution (CDFI) with a mission to provide and promote just and affordable financial services that benefit the low wealth residents in the communities across Connecticut that we serve. HCLF works to create strong and stable neighborhoods in Hartford and other cities in our state through the financing of high quality housing affordable for low and moderate income households. As a result of our work with developers statewide, we've witnessed firsthand the impact that local zoning ordinances can have on housing and commercial development projects.

HCLF is in strong support of the zoning principles outlined in SB 1024, because we believe they will empower local residents and help Connecticut's economy grow in a more equitable and just manner. The bill as proposed contains policies that we are confident can increase economic opportunities for communities that too often are left behind.

Two components of the bill in particular that we believe will have a long-term, positive impact in the state involve **nonconforming uses** and **parking**.

Nonconforming Uses: Lines 278-303 of the bill empower municipalities to phase out detrimental nonconforming uses that are nuisances or inconsistent with the respective neighborhood's plan and/or the municipality's plan of conservation and development. This provision, which only applies to nonresidential uses, is extremely important to cities, including Hartford.

For example, in the north end neighborhood where I live residents have sought to replace certain vacant and blighted commercial properties at an already problematic, congested intersection with less dense residential development. Housing developers have expressed interest in assisting the neighborhood with implementation of the strategic plan for this intersection, and HCLF has been willing to invest our capital in support of the proposed development which would be more consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.

Unfortunately the non-conforming use designation of the blighted parcels at this intersection ties the hands of neighborhood stakeholders and the city. The current designations and uses can't be phased out; consequently the neighborhood has been stuck with these dilapidated and vacant buildings for more than a decade and as a result, values of adjacent properties - virtually all owned by black and brown residents - have either stagnated or declined. We urge you not to overlook the importance of this provision and the impact of the state's current zoning requirements on communities of color especially.

Parking: SB 1024 would cap parking minimums at reasonable levels, as noted in Lines 316-318 of the bill, and would eliminate mandates in the transit-oriented development and main street areas. This is smart economic development policy for Connecticut's towns and cities. We've seen the impact of such a policy in Hartford.

A study by UConn showed that in 2014, excessive parking spaces in downtown Hartford were costing the city [\\$50 million dollars](#) in lost tax revenue on an annual basis. In 2017, however, Hartford went further than SB 1024's proposals to implement modest caps on parking mandates and did away with such mandates entirely.

This change is slowly encouraging development across the city, including in historic properties HCLF has been proud to finance. For example, in 2019 HCLF led a \$2.5 million financing of a historic, formerly vacant and blighted mixed use property in the center of Hartford's downtown. Rehab of historic properties is always expensive, and had the developer been required to also construct and provide parking for each unit, the project would not have been financially feasible and I'm confident that property would still be vacant today.

Limiting parking mandates lead to lower development costs and subsequently, more affordable housing options. When parking mandates in Minneapolis were [cut](#), the average price of studio apartments fell from \$1,200/month to less than \$1,000. Apartments in the aforementioned downtown project that HCLF financed are some of the most affordable of the new residential developments created in downtown Hartford over the past five years. As a result, every unit in that building is still occupied at the original 2019 lease rates, despite the pandemic and the resulting exodus of residents from downtowns across the country.

Residents in that property can be counted on to spend their dollars within their own local economies, at local businesses on their block. But they'll spend across town lines, too. When purchasing power increases in Hartford, that benefits small businesses in towns surrounding the city. Decreasing the cost of housing dramatically increases the purchasing power of a municipality's residents, leading to all-around benefits for both the local and state economies.

Finally, we note that this bill was developed with municipal leaders and local organizations like HCLF, from all over the state. SB 1024 will empower towns, cities, and their stakeholders to work together for a better future. At the same time, it will help bring new economic life into our state, which has faced extended challenges that would have been unimaginable just a year ago.

Sincerely,



Rex Fowler
Chief Executive Officer

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