



SIERRA CLUB

Connecticut Chapter
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Testimony Before the Planning and Development Committee 3/15/21

Dear Planning and Development Committee Chairs Cassano and McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairs Needleman and Goupil, Ranking Members Hwang and Zullo, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 1024.

The Sierra Club is committed to solving the climate crisis we face with just and equitable solutions that will result in a healthy world for everyone. Our current zoning laws and land use laws have contributed to exacerbating environmental degradation and climate change. As global temperatures rise, Connecticut's environmental resources, the health of our citizens, and our economy is put at risk.

Senate Bill 1024- An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Sierra Club Connecticut supports SB 1024 as an important step in updating our zoning laws to protect our environment, make our communities more equitable, and boost our economy. It would reverse the decades of inattention to the nexus between zoning and environmental policy, ensuring that our approach to housing policy aligns with our commitment to environmental protection. The transit-oriented development and main street housing proposals, parking requirement reforms, and amendments to technical standards would accomplish important reforms that promote sustainability.

As we move into the economy of the future, it is vitally important that we think strategically about where we build housing, what kind of housing we construct and what ancillary requirements we attach to new housing developments. This bill would facilitate development where it is most appropriate, near public transit and main street areas. The current low density zoning laws push development pressure outward, putting strain on our open space and forests. Concentrating development in downtown areas and near transit furthers equity, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

This bill also promotes development of housing that is in itself more environmentally sustainable. Multi-family housings economize resources and consume less energy. Also, the parking minimums in this bill are a great step in helping municipalities move away from auto-centric development by capping the most excessive parking mandates.

Although section 4 (c) (3) and (4) encourage and provide incentives for energy efficiency patterns of development, solar energy, and passive solar energy techniques as a first step in meeting our greenhouse gas reduction goals, we would like to see them strengthened. We respectfully submit recommendations that would enhance the bill's building standards to further improve health, economic, and climate resiliency within the communities affected by SB 1024. These standards should be developed and adopted now to future proof new development for our state's climate goals and the impacts of climate change.



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We recommend the building standards for development in SB 1024 should allow for only energy efficient, net-zero, all-electric, zero embodied carbon designs. These standards are the most cost effective and healthy choice for all new buildings. They are the future of clean buildings and cities such as Washington D.C.¹, and towns in California² have already adopted codes that would move them toward this future. And because of advances in technology, the cost of net-zero buildings need not be higher than conventional buildings. Net-zero buildings also have lower lifetime costs, using less energy and supplying their own renewable energy.³ Net-zero buildings are better for human health as they do not have the air pollutants associated with combustion of gas and other fossil fuels.⁴

Homes and infrastructure built now will last many decades. We must ensure buildings constructed now are prepared to comply with meeting our Global Warming Solutions Act targets to avoid costly retrofits later on.

SB 1024 would create more housing, build a more diverse housing stock and protect Connecticut's farmland and forests from continued sprawl. A poll conducted by Desegregate Connecticut shows that 58% of residents support rezoning for transit-oriented development and support more housing and more types of housing by a 2 to 1 margin.⁵ To meet our Greenhouse Gas reduction goals, Connecticut residents are going to need more access to clean, reliable mass transit and updated, energy efficient housing. Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the nation due to past housing and zoning restrictions. This bill is a positive step in the right direction to creating a more equitable, stronger, and cleaner Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer
Sierra Club Connecticut

¹ <https://gettingtozeroforum.org/appendix-z-offers-district-buildings-a-path-to-net-zero-energy/>

² <https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2020/12/californias-cities-lead-way-gas-free-future>

³ <https://rmi.org/insight/the-new-economics-of-electrifying-buildings>

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<https://coeh.ph.ucla.edu/effects-residential-gas-appliances-indoor-and-outdoor-air-quality-and-public-health-california>

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee8c6c9681b6f2799a4883a/t/60484002ee24ad52bccad22e/1615347734324/SB+1024.pdf>