

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Jennifer So Godzeno, AICP | Resident of Stamford, CT

Re: Support for 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

I write as a Stamford, CT homeowner and credentialed urban planner (a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners) to express my support for SB 1024. This legislation is essential to promoting economic opportunity and environmental justice across Connecticut. As a parent of two children who will attend public schools, it is also very important to me that zoning reform is a critical precursor to having more equitable and diverse school systems in every city and town in the state.

This testimony is submitted in my capacity as a private citizen, my perspectives draw upon my expertise as:

- An appointed member of the Stamford Planning Board, where my colleagues have elected me as secretary
- A program director at the National Association of City Transportation Officials
- An alumna of Culture of Health Leaders, a health equity program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

I am fortunate to own a home within a 4 unit multi-family development in an in-demand neighborhood of Stamford that is zoned for transit-oriented development (TOD). The provision of SB 1024 that requires a portion of land within a half-mile of a transit station to be zoned for multi family housing will spur the establishment of more medium density housing that appeals to the preferences of Millennials like myself. When I entered the housing market in CT, I found there were very few areas that met preferences and priorities that are increasingly common among home buyers and renters. I wanted to walk or bike to a one-seat commute to NYC, have diverse neighbors, and live near ethnically diverse restaurants and other locally-owned small businesses . Our state's ability to retain and attract a young, skilled workforce and taxpayer base depends upon increasing the supply of modest-density TOD that provides more equitable access to the full extent of our state's investment in transit infrastructure.

The lack of racial diversity in the vast majority of CT towns is also a significant limitation of our housing market. Though I could have afforded to purchase a home in some of Fairfield County's more leafy, restrictively-zoned towns, I chose to live in Stamford because it is critical for my multiethnic children to be able to attend public school with racially and economically diverse classmates. People of color like me often face the hard and unnecessary choice between living in a place where our identities will be seen and affirmed, or sending our children to "better" (code for mostly white and affluent) school districts. I also know many white Millennial parents who also have chosen to send their children to school in communities like Stamford because

diversity is a non-negotiable value for so many people in our generation. Provisions of SB1024 that promote TOD, reduce parking minimums, and normalize Accessory Dwelling Units are fundamental to desegregating our state so that more towns welcome the presence and investment of people of color in their communities and schools.

I am in strong support of the provision of SB1024 that sets a very modest training requirement for zoning officials. As a professional urban planner and a member of the Stamford Planning Board, I have seen how well-established best practices in equitable zoning and development are often ignored or misunderstood by typically well-meaning volunteer planning and zoning officials. Too often, officials are overwhelmed by the volume of conflicting information on the internet or testimony from their constituencies. Officials may even be inclined to approve more affordable housing or increased density, but feel pressured to vote based upon the loud voices of a vocal minority at a given public hearing. SB1024 would set the stage for all of our state's zoning officials to have access to credible, accessible education that helps them make sound, equitable decisions for their communities.

In closing, I call the attention of the Planning and Zoning Committee to the overwhelming evidence that access to affordable housing is a critical "social determinant of health" that drives a wide array of public health outcomes. The health of all Connecticut residents depends upon the provisions of SB1024 that dismantle a system of housing segregation in which your zip code determines your life expectancy.