

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

I am a resident of Greenwich and I encourage you to support SB 1024.

SB 1024 will not have the drastic consequences that some of our elected officials are making up. But it will offer best practices for planning for the future and it will nudge our town to embrace once again what made it an attractive, vibrant place to live in the first place.

My family have been members of First United Methodist Church of Greenwich for over 21 years. It is one of the few places where people who live in very diverse housing situations come together as one community.

At any given worship service (at least when there is not a pandemic), we have:

- a retired teacher who has lived in the same house for over 50 years
- an empty-nest couple who recently struggled to downsize to a smaller rental
- a 92-year-old woman who has lived for decades in the town's public housing, after having come from the Bahamas to Greenwich to raise other people's children
- a woman who lives in a very large house with columns and manicured landscaping
- a couple who live in a condominium complex, who attend our church because it is across the street and is accessible by wheelchair.

My church congregation is a beautifully diverse body not simply because of what the *church* has done but because of what the *town* did decades ago in its housing policy, allowing for a diversity of housing to meet a variety of needs. It is worth noting that all of the people I described are older than I am and have lived here for decades.

Like the town and the state, the church is aging.

The town's policies and priorities that laid the groundwork for my church to be what it is began after World War II. At that time, homeowners could subdivide their property, which expanded the supply of moderate density housing. During this time the town also built public housing for the elderly, veterans, and low-income families.

In response to this growth—and the arrival of more racially and socioeconomically diverse populations — the town then changed course and moved to *limit* the supply of housing through stricter regulation.

Instead of allowing denser and more affordable housing, the town began combining parcels and increasing minimum lot sizes. New public housing projects were litigated to their deaths and ground to a halt. Moderate-density, middle class neighborhoods were transformed to allow for very large properties that would be home to the likes of Donald Trump and Ray Dalio.

Between 1960 and 2010, the population of downtown Greenwich *decreased* by nearly half.

Let me say that again: Between 1960 and 2010, the population of downtown Greenwich *decreased* by nearly half.

Today when I drive down Milbank Avenue (next to Greenwich Avenue), the homes are 4000- to 5000-square feet, costing several million dollars, squeezing out the middle class, the upper-middle class, town workers, families and the variety of people we want to live here. Teachers, police officers, and fire fighters who care for the town cannot afford to house their own families here. And the people who clean houses or mow the lawns or stock the grocery stores have to look farther and farther away for a place to sleep at night.

That change in our town's character is a result of our restrictive zoning laws, which prevent property owners from building an extra unit or two of housing on their own property.

When the rest of the world looks at Greenwich, they see mansions and Maseratis, gated driveways and designer stores. And that narrow vision of our town has slowly begun to eat away at us. This singular image of what every one of us in this town *should* be -- of the ideal life and house that we should all aspire to and that only the smartest and best can attain — it breeds a resentment that's been festering for years. We have started to look at our neighbors across town -- and potential new residents -- with anger and fear. And now that resentment has boiled over to the point where we are at war with one another in our town in a way that I have never seen.

I look at what's happened to my town and I know that that's *not* who we are. I know that with such certainty because Greenwich is *not* mansions and Maseratis and gated driveways and designer stores, it is my church. And if everyone could see this incredible gathering of people from different walks of life every Sunday, who have loved each other

through some of the most tumultuous years in our nation's history, they would know that this town is a special place where so much more is possible.

But that is not where our zoning laws and practices are leading us. Our zoning laws and practices are the product of knee-jerk opposition by small groups reacting to the possibility of *other* people moving here. Meanwhile, Greenwich Avenue reflects our town's paralysis, with empty storefronts and incoherent planning.

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Respectfully,

Mareta Hamre
Greenwich, CT