

*To:* CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

*From:* Chris Janson, Darien

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

*Date:* March 15, 2021

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

My name is Chris Janson, I use they/them pronouns, and I'm from Darien, Connecticut. I'd like to testify in whole-hearted support of SB-1024 because it is good, focused, data-driven policy that provides avenues for housing diversity that will benefit my town, and which gives our state an opportunity to address its long, well-documented history of residential segregation.

As a young person for whom home ownership is neither affordable, nor even necessarily desirable, opening up avenues to greater housing diversity is a no-brainer. I support the ideas of allowing accessory dwelling units by right and of encouraging multi-family development around transit nodes.

I also support common-sense proposals such as: prohibiting extraneous parking requirements such as the one that requires three spaces per studio apartment in Darien; replacing nebulous "character," a word mentioned 56 times in my town's zoning ordinances, with architectural standards; providing training for P&Z staff and volunteers; and, modernizing our standards for sewers.

I voice my support for Transit Oriented Development as a resident of a neighborhood which is centered within the ½-mile radius around a transit node, my own house being a mere 0.62 miles from the Noroton Heights Train Station. Proposals regarding Transit Oriented Development have been a particular cause for concern for some residents of my hometown, however these concerns are largely divorced from the reality that our town's zoning policies in times past and present ultimately amount to Transit Oriented Development. When our town first wrote its P&Z regulations in the late-20s, one of our three zoning designations was "business," which applied to the land around our two train stations as well as our main commercial corridor along the Post Road. This designation allowed for a whopping 100 families per acre and 75% lot coverage, without a requirement for setbacks or side yards. In effect, it was much more aggressive "Transit Oriented Development" than anything being considered now. It wasn't until 1937, the same year Darien was assessed for its own "redlining map" which labeled the few neighborhoods in town that were home to black residents as "hazardous for investment," that Darien reversed course, banned apartments and boarding houses, and drastically reduced the permitted density in business districts. This policy inversion was clearly connected with a suite of legal and cultural practices aimed at keeping lower income and minority populations out of Darien. After decades of exclusionary policy and practice, Darien has begun to take steps to chart a new course. Ever since 1984, when we allowed our first mixed-used zoning allotment, Darien has been moving back in the direction of Transit Oriented Development. Right now, 2.6% of our zoned municipal area allows multifamily by right, 4.1% with a public hearing, and

the vast majority of this is around our train stations and main commercial corridors. We appear close to meeting the standard set by SB-1024 without much adjustment of our current zoning code. In this sense, SB-1024 represents a logical next step for the Town of Darien and the State of Connecticut by setting a reasonable standard for all our communities to follow.

SB 1024 offers simple, targeted, common-sense solutions that will allow our state to develop more diverse, affordable housing stock, through natural processes. It will benefit renters, home-owners, businesses, and municipalities. Addressing our state's legacy of residential discrimination will take long term commitment as well as coordination across policy areas from health and education to criminal justice. Passing SB1024 is an important step to take on this journey. It will remove barriers to the development of the kind of diverse housing stock we need across this state. For all these reasons, I ask you to support SB-1024 and to commit to its swift passage. Thank you for your consideration.