

March 15, 2021

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

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Melissa Kaplan-Macey and I am Vice President for State Programs and Connecticut Director for Regional Plan Association. Regional Plan Association is a research, planning and advocacy organization. For nearly 100 years RPA has been dedicated to developing and promoting ideas to improve the economic health, environmental resiliency and quality of life of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area. In Connecticut, this metro region includes Fairfield, Litchfield and New Haven Counties. We have developed four, once in a generation, long-range plans, each addressing major issues of its time. Our [Fourth Regional Plan](#), released in 2017, identified the housing affordability crisis as one of the central challenges facing our region today.

**We strongly support the Desegregate CT platform for land use reform in the State of Connecticut as outlined in SB 1024, including-**

- **Legalizing accessory dwelling units** in all single-family zones
- **Encouraging transit-oriented development** with towns choosing 50% of areas within ½ mile of transit for 4+ unit housing
- **Encouraging Main Street housing** with towns choosing 50% of an area within ¼ mile of the main street for 2-4 unit housing, and requiring 10+ unit developments to be 10% affordable
- **Developing model codes for buildings and streets** by creating guidelines towns can choose to adopt to improve and clarify decision making
- **Capping costly parking mandates** by adjusting minimum parking requirements to 2 spaces per 2+ bedroom unit; 1 space per 0-1 bedroom unit; and 0 spaces in TOD and main street areas
- **Requiring training for commissioners** with 6 hours of professional development annually, including on fair housing and environmental issues
- **Modernizing technical standards** for certain sewage disposal systems for the 21st century

We strongly believe - and our research shows - **everyone benefits from these types of inclusive land-use regulations.** They support a more equitable, economically strong and cleaner society.

**“We’re all in this together,”** has been an oft-repeated refrain throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. **But it’s really just an empty phrase when the grocery store workers, teachers, home health aides, delivery people and others essential to the well being of all towns do not have access to affordable homes in the communities they serve.** When we don’t invest in homes for people of all incomes we perpetuate the steady habit of excluding the local workforce, losing our young people, and forcing our seniors to move away from the communities where they’ve spent their lives.

Connecticut needs more homes for more people in all communities, not just in some. We need to recognize that **it’s not a zero-sum game; it is Both/And. Connecticut’s communities can be great places to live and can also be more affordable.** Continuing our steady habits without adapting to the 21st century needs of our residents makes it harder for our state to prosper.

Specific to Fairfield County, our research shows:

- Exclusionary zoning is limiting the County’s ability to build affordable housing in neighborhoods with strong quality of life indicators, despite strong demand. The history of redlining, racial steering, and other discriminatory housing policies and practices, including racially restrictive covenants and the placement of affordable housing, is embedded into the fabric of communities.
- While the racial makeup of Fairfield County is similar to the entire United States, two-thirds of the towns within the county are more than 85% white, highlighting severe residential segregation.
- Owner households make over twice as much as renter households, highlighting glaring income inequality. In almost every town across the county, the median income of renter households is less than half of owner households. Nonwhite households in Fairfield County are three times more likely to be renters than white households.
- In Fairfield County, median income has fallen slightly since 2000, while housing costs remained virtually unchanged until last year -- when the exodus of Manhattanites into the suburbs created a more competitive and expensive housing market than ever before.
- Between 2000 and 2020, the percent of cost-burdened households in Fairfield County increased from 31.5% to 35.7%. The largest group of cost-burdened households are low-income renters.
- Over reliance on local property taxes to fund public education contributes to the region’s housing shortage as communities resist new residential development. This is despite the fact that the data consistently shows that multifamily housing generates few school children.

In particular we believe that accessory dwelling units are an easy way to create more housing in all communities in the state. With 91% of land zoned for single family housing, enabling ADUs in all single family zones is an important part of the solution to creating more housing choice in Connecticut. With respect to the specific provisions for ADUs in the legislation, we would encourage you to consider amending the language regarding lot coverage and dimensional criteria. As currently written, the legislation requires dimensional criteria and lot coverage to be less than or equal to that which is required for the principal dwelling (line 381). However, dimensional and lot coverage requirements for ADUs should always be less than that required for the principal dwelling.

In order to practically accommodate ADUs on a property, coverage rules should be proportional for the accessory unit, consistent with the proposed requirement that ADU floor area be 30% of the floor area of the principal unit (line 377). The legislation should also make clear that existing dimensional criteria and lot coverage for the principal dwelling on the parcel is not included in the calculations for the ADU. This will avoid having compounding dimensional criteria requirements, which in most cases would have the effect of making it physically impossible to accommodate an ADU on a property.

ADUs in single family zones and the other land-use reforms that are being proposed are not radical. They are a baseline of best practices in planning that should be adopted by all communities. As we continue to weather the pandemic, we applaud the Planning and Development Committee and the State Legislature for introducing legislation to advance land-use reform. It is critical that the State of Connecticut set standards that municipalities can use to generate more housing affordable to low and moderate-income individuals and families. This is a critical investment necessary to an equitable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Connecticut and our state's social and economic future.

Respectfully,



Melissa Kaplan-Macey  
VP State Programs and Connecticut Director  
Regional Plan Association