

TESTIMONY ON *SB 1024, SB 1026, and HB 6611*

SB 1024 - AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES,

QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.

SB 1026 - AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING FOR CERTAIN PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICIALS.

HB 6611 - AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND OTHER POLICIES REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT.

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

I am a member of Spring Forward, a neighborhood group established to increase housing equity in Hamden. We support SB 1024, HB 6611, and SB 1026, in conjunction, because these bills tackle the reason our group exists: to address the historic structural racism in Connecticut housing. Our state's exclusionary zoning laws are well documented, and have been used for decades to maintain historic patterns of segregation that were established early in the 20th century. Therefore, we strongly support zoning law reforms like SB 1024 and SB 1026, which can make our neighborhoods more diverse, more vibrant, and more cohesive. However, we must also confront the consequence of longtime housing discrimination—which is the dearth of affordable housing in Connecticut, and the massive racial and economic disparities that housing inequity perpetuates. That's why the Fair Share Zoning practices laid out in HB 6611 must also be passed if we hope to achieve truly effective reform.

Spring Forward is an all-volunteer, bi-partisan and multigenerational neighborhood action group interested in expanding housing opportunity for all. Over the last six months, Spring Forward has quickly grown to include nearly 200 interested community members who want to see more equitable distribution of housing opportunity across our neighborhood, town and state, as well as investment in the businesses and housing of historically underserved districts. Amidst the racial inequities highlighted by the pandemic, last summer's tragic murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter protests that followed, we realized that if we wanted to see social justice and racial equality, we literally needed to start where we live. While Hamden is a diverse town, our closely knit neighborhood remains primarily white. While many of us were aware of the practice of redlining, we didn't know the extent to which it had been practiced in our own neighborhood. We have spent months researching this history and examining the reasons for our homogenous demographics and housing stock.

It could not be more clear that historically racist practices, abetted by outdated zoning, have kept Connecticut towns segregated and inequitable. Resolving this housing crisis will require a long term, multi-pronged approach. SB 1024 offers great first steps. Spring Forward supports the allowance of smaller multi-family units and accessory dwelling units in our neighborhood and others like it. Village-based neighborhoods like ours were built to accommodate socioeconomic diversity, but zoning has become increasingly prohibitive toward affordable housing. Hamden, like more than half of Connecticut towns, allows for ADUs; however, the additional restrictions applied to ADUs often make them unfeasible to build, own or occupy.

- ADUs will diversify our housing stock to fit the needs and budgets of housing insecure individuals and families, especially as we see more households that seek different sizing and pricing options than our current stock of overwhelmingly single-family houses provides.

- Increasing the housing stock overall with ADUs will help combat the artificial increase in rent and home prices we currently see.
- Studies demonstrate that ADUs can increase property values by 50% and help lower- and moderate- income homeowners to generate additional income and wealth.

Transit-oriented development is also a sticking point in our neighborhood. A largely unused parking lot along our transit corridor takes up desirable and much-needed real estate due to overly restrictive zoning that effectively prohibits development.

- This provision will increase housing options for people who do not own cars and will connect workers with their jobs.
- Upzoning near transit will increase the housing stock overall, which will lower prices and help fulfill our current housing shortage.

Finally, we strongly support the need for mandatory commissioner training, as set out in SB 1024 and SB 1026, though we recommend that additional training hours be devoted to educating commissioners on the history of housing discrimination in Connecticut, and their own localities. Many commissioners are unaware that the neighborhoods they oversee were once segregated *by law*, and that many zoning codes maintain Whites Only rules by default.

Zoning reform is essential to addressing housing inequity, but it cannot, on its own, address the fact that Connecticut is one of the most racially, ethnically and economically segregated states in the nation. Because our massive disparities in education, employment, and health are largely due to a long history of housing discrimination, Spring Forward strongly supports HB 6611 in conjunction with the zoning reforms above. The Fair Share Zoning practices set out in this bill provide towns the tools to actually provide the affordable housing that is required by federal law to remediate decades of discriminatory housing law. And while local governance is important, local decisions have perpetuated social injustice and economic inequity. Localities must be held responsible for creating the abundant, diversified housing that we need, and this bill will enable them to do so.

- Open Communities Alliance estimates that the 300,000 market rate and affordable housing units generated through Fair Share Zoning over 10 years will generate \$59 billion in new income for Connecticut residents, \$12 billion in state and local tax revenue, and over 80,000 jobs.
- There are over 135,000 families in Connecticut who earn less than 30% of the area median income and pay more than half of that income towards housing costs. That is the equivalent of a family of four earning around \$30,000 and paying \$15,000 a year towards rent. (Source: [OCA's 2020 Fair Share Study](#))
- Current laws require all towns to zone for multi family housing and housing diversity and play a role in meeting the regional need for affordable housing, but most suburban communities are not currently doing so. Fair Share Zoning provides towns with more structure for complying with existing laws while honoring local control.
- The Fair Share Planning and Zoning Bill was developed based on the successful Fair Share system currently in place in New Jersey. This has allowed us to learn from the 50 years of trial and error in New Jersey that has put that state on the road to generating over 100,000 units of housing.
- As one of the most racially, ethnically and economically segregated states in the nation, Connecticut is home to massive disparities in education, employment, health, and more. Fair Share Zoning will contribute to equitable revitalization in cities and a greater array of housing choices for groups like Black and Latino families who have historically faced and continue to face barriers to housing mobility.

- HB 6611, Fair Share Planning and Zoning, is both the right thing to do on social justice issues and the smart thing to do to boost our state's economy.

While our group is intent on starting the process of housing reform, we can't accomplish goals of widespread environmental and economic solutions piecemeal. SB 1024, HB 1166, and SB 1026 are bills that, together, make our communities more inclusive, environmentally conscious, prosperous and beautiful. Please support these bills.

Isabel Buck McEachern
Member, Spring Forward
Hamden, CT