



TESTIMONY ON SB1024  
AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES,  
QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE  
DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.

via email to [pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov](mailto:pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov)

March 12, 2021

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:

Testimony in support of SB1024 on behalf of Preservation Connecticut.

For the past four decades, it has been Preservation Connecticut's mission to preserve, protect, and promote the buildings, sites, and landscapes that contribute to the heritage and vitality of Connecticut communities. While we focus on preserving our state's past, our organization believes in investing in Connecticut's future as well. This bill is one that has the potential to benefit both our past and our present.

In general, historic places are well-suited for residential uses. The materials and techniques used to build historic places tend to be strong and adaptable. But what's more important is that historic places often *were actually used* very flexibly for a mix of residential and other uses. For example, historically, Connecticut's main streets were built with housing above retail shops or service uses. Unfortunately, changes in zoning about fifty years ago banned this kind of mixed-use development. Zoning changes actually hurt main-street businesses, because they resulted in fewer "feet on the street" to patronize them.

For that reason, Preservation Connecticut strongly supports SB1024 provisions to legalize small-scale housing development near Connecticut's main streets. By zoning to allow two to four units as of right within a quarter mile of a town's main street, many of Connecticut's historic buildings will be able to be used as they were before - for housing. Under the bill, towns may still provide architectural standards for the scale, form, and materials of these projects. Towns can also identify where along the main street the housing can be located. But the important thing is that the use will once again be legal.

This bill also supports and restores historic building uses by legalizing accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Many historic houses were built to have separate living units in third floors and accessory buildings like carriage houses. Again here, changes to zoning made these uses illegal - which meant that the historic uses that do exist are in a kind of legal limbo. Clear statewide rules for ADUs will encourage homeowners to bring their units up to code to allow them to be rented out. Allowing rentals is important because it will help historic homeowners earn extra income to help maintain and protect their homes.

Both the Main Streets and ADU proposals will help revitalize Connecticut's economy. A [study](#) from the State Historic Preservation Office shows that for every \$100 dollars invested in the rehabilitation of one of Connecticut's historic structures, around \$83 dollars ends up in the pockets of Connecticut workers. Rehabilitating these buildings by outfitting them with living units will bring economic benefits through expanding the tax base as well as directly, through spending on construction.

Finally, we note that SB1024 caps on parking minimums serve to protect Connecticut's historic buildings. In many parts of the country - including in our cities and towns - historic buildings have been entirely demolished to meet onerous parking mandates. Reasonable caps as proposed by this bill can help to reverse this trend.

While this bill primarily focuses on two-to-four unit housing, we would be remiss if we didn't mention that larger buildings, too, are excellent candidates for housing conversions. The Montgomery Mills rehabilitation in Windsor Locks, which converted a mill building, and 777 Main Street in Hartford, which converted an office tower, are among many housing projects enabled when we allow flexible zoning. Many of these larger projects combine historic tax credits and low-income housing tax credits and create dedicated affordable housing. We would encourage the legislature to continue to pursue policies encouraging the re-use of these buildings also.

By passing SB1024, the legislature can provide important tools to support and protect the historic places we all love.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Montanaro  
Executive Director  
Preservation Connecticut  
940 Whitney Avenue  
Hamden, CT 06517  
[www.preservationct.org](http://www.preservationct.org)