

Testimony Regarding

Senate Bill 1024

An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials, and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

March 15, 2021

Planning and Development Committee

Good morning. My name is Maureen Nicholson. I am the First Selectman for the Town of Pomfret. I am here today in support of Senate Bill 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials, and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems.

SB 1024 is the product of the work initiated by DesegregateCT. Pomfret is a member town of the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Government (NECCOG) and has been engaged with DesegregateCT through NECCOG since early last year. NECCOG has been, and continues to be, an active partner in the coalition that is DesegregateCT. Because presently there is not unanimity on all aspects of SB 1024 amongst our membership, NECCOG is not here to testify today. I do want to note that NECCOG, along with the other coalition members, has had the opportunity to contribute to the substance of this legislation and that many elements SB 1024 are the result of a collaborative and inclusive process. I believe this is important to note as the Committee contemplates this legislation.

In October of 2020 NECCOG sponsored, and I hosted, a regional housing forum for our member towns to hear various points of view on housing and zoning reform. A significant result for my town was that noted land use attorney Dwight Merriam offered to work with Pomfret's planning and zoning commission at no cost to develop ADU regulations and participate in an extended educational dialogue. That work is going on now and has been very positively received by both the commission and the community. We have also discussed these proposals regionally at our NECCOG meetings and have participated individually with CCM on detailed discussions of the various individual proposals now contained in SB 1024. I defer to CCM and their testimony for those details.

While there is not necessarily unanimity in our region, or my town, on every element of this legislation - there is agreement that as a package this legislation marks a needed step toward addressing longstanding issues of housing need, zoning statutory reform, ensuring better decision making by requiring trained boards, and assisting commissions with model regulations.

Housing options are needed in my town, this region, and our state. They are needed to accommodate working people who want alternatives to the single-family home. They are needed for persons wanting to operate a business and live in the same location. They are needed to ensure that our children can afford to work and live in our state and their parents can age in place. They are needed to grow our towns in positive ways as places people want to settle in. Zoning should not be used as a means to zone out people because of their economic, social or racial circumstance as it has in the past. It is not the job of zoning boards to protect towns from “too many children” in our schools - based on the myth that more houses - equals more kids - equals higher taxes. Our communities in Pomfret, northeastern Connecticut, and in Connecticut generally are in need of growth - smart growth - in the broadest sense. SB 1024 is, in my view, a smart growth bill.

Importantly, SB 1024 does not remove a town’s zoning commission’s authority to draft regulations that fit each community’s needs. In fact, if enacted, it places more importance on spending time to better develop regulations that best meet a community’s needs - including a stronger connection to each town’s plan of conservation and development. This is very positive as it makes a change from a commission reacting to applications to being proactive by putting in place regulations that fit the town and are more easily administered.

Thank you for your consideration of all views on SB 1024. Should you have any questions or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Maureen Nicholson
First Selectman
Town of Pomfret