

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION**

JEREMY B. GINSBERG, AICP
PLANNING & ZONING DIRECTOR

DAVID J. KEATING
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/
ZONING ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

FRED W. DONEIT, AICP, GISP
SENIOR PLANNER



TOWN HALL, 2 RENSHAW ROAD
DARIEN, CONNECTICUT 06820-5397
TELEPHONE (203) 656-7351
www.darienct.gov

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GEORGE A. REILLY

LARRY T. WARBLE, JR.

March 14, 2021

Connecticut General Assembly
Planning & Development Committee
Via email to: PDTestimony@cga.ct.gov

RE: ***S.B. 1024*** *AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES, QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.*

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairman Needleman, Vice-Chairman Goupil, Ranking Member Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the CGA Planning & Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on proposed S.B. 1024. On behalf of the Town of Darien Planning & Zoning Commission, we ask for your support in allowing communities to continue to use the tools available within the State Statutes, including inclusionary zoning and the rezoning of properties by local Commissions to make progress in meeting both "middle housing" and affordable housing goals.

This bill, as proposed, will alter and negatively impact Darien's ability to govern itself, transferring decision making away from our locally elected officials, and imposing a one-size fits all approach to planning, largely eliminating the long-established right of municipalities to manage their own land use. These proposals will modify existing flexibility and local discretion on a wide range of policies and issues relative to:

- Decisions regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs);
- Housing density, especially in areas within ½ mile of commuter train stations, or a ¼ mile of commercial corridors;
- Reductions in parking requirements;
- Permitting and public hearing procedures, including the elimination of Special Permit review by the Planning & Zoning Commission, in many cases;
- Creation of one-size fits all zoning guidelines; and
- Traffic and sewer standards.

While S.B. 1024 has admirable/desirable goals, we as a Commission advocate for tailored solutions for communities, reflective of local market conditions, housing, population,

environmental, historic, and natural resources. We believe that these policy areas are best handled by Darien's own elected officials and trained/certified professionals staffing the Town.

We emphasize that Darien has advocated for and made tremendous progress during the past two decades in growing the availability of affordable and multi-family housing throughout our community. This has included the implementation of an inclusionary zoning regulation requiring that 12 percent of housing units, within developments inclusive of more than four residential units, be designated as deed-restricted affordable units. Since 2000, of the more than 850 multi-family housing units constructed and approved for construction in the town, about 32 percent are deed-restricted affordable units. We further note that the Planning and Zoning Commission recently approved 300+ additional multi-family units, 12 percent of which are being developed as affordable units, including units to support the developmentally disabled population. These units were approved as part of three separate mixed-use, transit oriented development (TOD) projects, within a quarter-mile of our commuter rail stations.

The Planning & Zoning Commission, partially in response to ongoing housing and zoning reform discussions throughout the State and within our own community, is currently in the process of undertaking numerous zoning amendments to address identified issues. These amendments include changes regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs), inclusionary zoning standards, parking requirements, and elimination of minimum house/apartment sizes, to name a few. Additionally, the Town will soon embark on the 2021 State-mandated 8-30(j) Affordable Housing Plan, which is expected to identify additional areas of the Town that could be rezoned to increase density and provide more housing diversity within our Town.

As a Commission, we are in full agreement that taking a proactive approach, as we have done in our Town since 1998, is the best way forward to addressing the sensitive issues raised in S.B. 1024. However, it is our experience, that implementing policy at the local level, is far more effective with respect to garnering support from the community when compared to requiring compliance with State mandates. We reject the concept that the Town's residents are better served by one-size fits all rules than by their own locally elected officials and urge the Planning & Development Committee to reject S.B. 1024. We would be honored to share our successes with others and welcome you all to the Town of Darien for a visit and to see our successes in person.

Sincerely,



Stephen P. Olvany, Chairman
Darien Planning & Zoning Commission

Cc: Planning & Zoning Commission
Jayme Stevenson, First Selectman