



People Friendly Stamford

Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2100
Hartford, CT 06106

March 2021

Re: [SB 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 Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

We are People Friendly Stamford, a local community advocacy group dedicated to transforming our city and state so that they are safe and accessible places to walk and bike. We would like to testify in strong support of Desegregate Connecticut's legislative proposals to upzone land near transit stops, legalize multifamily dwellings in more zones, limit excessive parking requirements, and allow accessory dwelling units as of right.

Connecticut's restrictive land use regime contributes to many societal ills: economic weakness, racial/class segregation, housing unaffordability, and environmentally destructive suburban sprawl, as well as car dependency and the associated costs of air pollution and vehicular violence.

Economic opportunity

We will focus on economic opportunities in Fairfield County, where we are based. Connecticut's close proximity to New York City should be an economic boon for the state, as NYC is the most vibrant metro area in the country. Yet our state's population is declining, in large part because we actively impede our state's economy by refusing to permit enough housing. Wealthy towns in Fairfield County, with direct rail access to the densest core of Manhattan, use restrictive zoning rules to artificially prevent housing development. As a result, they turn away residents who instead choose to live in Northern New Jersey, Westchester County, or Long Island. Connecticut's exclusionary tactics do little for the next generation of people who want to start homes and businesses. They also hurt existing retail stores, service providers, and restaurants, who lose out on patrons. Our state is leaving massive economic gains on the table in the form of lost jobs and untapped tax revenue. If people don't live here, they don't pay income taxes or property taxes to Connecticut. As just one illustrative example, in Stamford an average

single-family home on an acre lot may pay \$10,000-\$15,000 annually in taxes, while a condo complex of 40 units on an acre lot may pay roughly a combined \$250,000, all while housing 39 additional families. Desegregate Connecticut's proposals would not legalize large buildings such as the one in the example, but SB 1024 would at least help our communities start an important conversation about what multifamily housing can do for all of us. We must reform our archaic development laws to allow for more urban growth and development.

Racial/class segregation

Connecticut is one of the most segregated and unequal states in the country. The historical origins of restrictive zoning nationwide make it abundantly clear that our local laws that prohibit multifamily housing or otherwise restrict denser living arrangements were almost entirely driven by racial animus and the desire of wealthy white homeowners to prevent minority communities from living near them and to exclude those of lesser means from enjoying local amenities such as schools and parks. In Stamford and many other communities across Connecticut, today's most racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods are in areas that were redlined 100 years ago, demonstrating the lasting, destructive effects of state-sanctioned housing discrimination. Cities and states across the country are moving toward dismantling exclusionary zoning laws in an effort to right this historical wrong, and Connecticut must follow.

Housing affordability

Allowing only single-family detached housing with large setbacks in residential areas makes it illegal to construct all kinds of other types of housing that have historically been part of our urban fabric: townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, etc. Multifamily housing makes more efficient use of land, is more environmentally friendly due to lower heating and cooling costs per home, and allows for less expensive homes as land is being shared. Young people have been moving out of Connecticut for years due to their inability to find affordable homes. In a place like Stamford, the cost of an average condo is half the price of an average single-family home. With the average single-family home valued over \$600,000 today, a household making Stamford's median income of \$89,000 would be unable to own their own home without the availability of multi-unit housing. While Stamford may be slightly ahead of the curve in Connecticut, still nearly 80% of the city is zoned only for single-family homes while families residing in single-family homes make up only 40% of all households. If Connecticut wants to be more than just a gated retirement community, we must make room for young people and other newcomers to settle here. That's what the proposals in SB 1024 do: they will legalize accessory dwelling units and legalize housing near main streets and transit. By ensuring that more diverse housing options exist, the state will make a commitment in its own future.

Car dependency

Banning multifamily housing and forcing parking requirements on all development forces homes and businesses to be spread out from each other, making it impossible to walk or bike to places and necessitating driving for even minor trips. This creates more traffic, air pollution, carbon emissions, and increases deaths and injuries from car crashes. In Stamford, neighborhoods with more pedestrian and bicycle commuters are naturally centered around the denser downtown and the train station. Rental occupancy levels in newer downtown developments remain around 97% in spite of the pandemic. Allowing for more homes to be built near transit stops and businesses - like the "transit" and "main

street” proposals of this bill do - can reduce unnecessary driving, promote walkable neighborhoods, and make our streets safer for walking and biking. The proposals in SB 1024 that limit the amount of parking that zoning boards can require is another proven way to help wean us of our unhealthy dependence on cars. Another part of this bill, to develop a model code for streets, will give communities a guidebook to ensure our streets are better scaled to our neighborhoods and can accommodate a range of users.

Environmental sustainability

Land use and transportation are the major excess drivers of carbon emissions in Connecticut. Single-family-only zoning and the suburban sprawl that it promotes is destructive to the environment on many levels. By forcing homes to spread out over a larger area instead of making efficient use of land, it causes habitat destruction as new homes require ever-increasing amounts of land. Sprawl also necessitates more driving, which increases our carbon emissions and air pollution. The energy required to heat and cool single-family homes is also far greater per home compared to multifamily homes or townhouses (due to the greater efficiency from sharing walls). If we are serious about mitigating climate change, we must work to build more mixed-use developments around transit stops, reduce car dependency, facilitate better-design streets, and promote walking, biking, and transit as more important forms of transportation. That’s what SB 1024 proposes to do.

As part of the Desegregate Connecticut coalition, we urge you to support the land use reforms put forth in this bill, which would be a small but important step to move Connecticut in the right direction.

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