

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Justin Potter, Kent, Connecticut

Re: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Date: March 11, 2021

Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

I grew up on a dairy farm in Washington, Connecticut, spent about 20 years in New York, and am now a resident of Kent, where I live with my wife and two young children. I'm writing to express my support for SB 1024.

With a 3 year old and a 5 year old, my wife and I are grateful for the space of our single family home, especially during the pandemic. However, for many, particularly younger and older people, the costs, space, and headaches associated with a single family home makes little sense.

A March 3, 2021 *Republican-American* article on the state of housing in my hometown of Washington, "Where to live? Affordable housing hard to find in Washington," notes that "70% of households have three or more bedrooms while only 18% have children" and that starting teachers are unable to afford to live in the town. Towns with an overabundance of underutilized single family homes, and housing that is unaffordable for even teachers, are found throughout Connecticut.

I've seen the costs of a lack of housing diversity in Washington first hand. After college, I started a business in New York and contemplated moving back to the Washington area, but decided against it largely due to the lack of suitable housing. Around the same time, my grandmother was growing increasingly depressed about living alone in the house where she raised her six children, but didn't want to leave Washington, where she had lived for 60 years. When she was finally persuaded to move into a retirement community in New Milford, she was thrilled to have a suitably sized apartment, surrounded by neighbors.

Connecticut needs to create more diverse and inclusive housing. SB 1024 would help make that happen by clearing hurdles for multi-family housing near main street corridors and transit hubs, and making it easier to build accessory dwelling units (ADUs), among other important reforms.

I've seen the benefits of diverse and inclusive housing in Kent. Despite having only about 3,000 residents, Kent has a surprising abundance of multi-family housing clustered in a vibrant downtown, including market rate condos, senior housing, and low income housing. This housing

diversity benefits people in all sorts of situations and stages of life. While waiting for a table at a restaurant downtown, my wife and I met an older couple who had raised a family in town, who had just downsized and moved into a condo a short walk from the restaurant. Another time in the same restaurant, we met a young couple, one of whom had just taken a teaching job in town, who had just moved into one of the condos as well. This fall I met an adult with some challenges but who is nonetheless independent, who lives in a low income apartment downtown, and just about every day rides his bike to his parents' house up Route 7. An older nurse who walks by our house regularly has commented more than once while I'm raking leaves or doing some other yard work how much she loves living in her condo and doesn't have to worry about the tasks I spend so much of my time doing.

Kent is the way it is, and other towns are the way they are, because of the decisions town leaders and residents have made over the years. Unfortunately, Kent is very much an aberration, especially among small towns, in allowing the creation of diverse and inclusive housing. Many towns have gone the other direction, prohibiting multi-family housing and imposing large minimum lot sizes that jack up housing costs and lead to sprawl that quickly fragments Connecticut's open space.

However, the fact that so many municipalities have used their zoning discretion to make it difficult to build housing makes perfect sense. People generally like their communities just the way they are, and homes are the main source of wealth for most Americans. Current residents can benefit significantly by blocking new housing, which limits change and increases property values. While good for current residents, it certainly isn't good for people seeking a home, it isn't good for Connecticut, and it isn't even good for the long-term viability of the towns blocking housing. SB 1024 would help limit the temptation for local zoning commissions to block housing.

What SB 1024 won't limit is the reasonable ability of local zoning commissions to shape housing. Local residents and decision makers would still have a great deal of control over development in their communities.

Finally, like so many Connecticut residents and visitors, I greatly value Connecticut's open space. Growing up, I spent countless hours hiking in Steep Rock, Hidden Valley, White Memorial, and on Roxbury Land Trust properties - these were all private lands that could have been developed, but which are now preserved. If Connecticut wants to preserve more open space, we have to stop relying on single family homes to accommodate growth, and start building new housing in already developed areas. SB 1024 will help Connecticut do just that.

Thank you very much for considering SB 1024. For the good of Connecticut, I hope your committee moves it forward.

Sincerely,

Justin Potter
Kent, Connecticut