

March 15, 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 Zillow and Members of the CGA Planning & Development Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to you today on proposed S.B. 1024, recognizing that the concepts therein also appear in various legislative proposals also before the Finance, Transportation and Housing Committees. My testimony today applies to all of these concepts generally.

I OPPOSE in part and SUPPORT in part the concepts raised in S.B. 1024.

The Town of Darien has a great story to tell. With the tools already available to us, we have constructed or approved for construction 866 multifamily housing units and with our 12% inclusionary zoning regulation, 32% of those units are “Affordable” as defined by the CT General Statutes. Nearly all of these housing units are within walking distance to transit and commercial areas and we have supported new housing choices for families, seniors and, uniquely, for people with developmental disabilities.

Darien’s inclusionary zoning regulation requires that developments of more than 4 units must allocate 12% of those units as deed-restricted affordable - far surpassing what is proposed in Section 6 (c) of S.B. 1024. **Darien SUPPORTS cities and towns having the option of utilizing Inclusionary Zoning regulations.** Darien is considering additional adjustments to our Inclusionary Zoning regulations to support the development of even more affordable housing!

Last week, our Planning & Zoning Commissioners participated in 7 hours of training. **Darien SUPPORTS professional development for Land Use Commissioners.**

Darien supports replacing the word “character” with “physical site characteristics and structural context” in our zoning regulations although I wish to state for the record, never has an application been denied in Darien because it didn’t fit the character of our town. We have processes in place through our Architectural Review Board to guide projects to better, more consistent design.

Darien SUPPORTS a “not-to-exceed minimum parking standard” as articulated on lines 316-318 but strongly OPPOSES eliminating this minimum standard for areas within 1/2 mile of transit stations and 1/4 mile of Main Street corridors. Eliminating minimum parking

standards will create unsafe on-street parking conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists and is in conflict not only with the good work CTDOT has been doing to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety but also with Section 4(b)2 of this very bill requiring that zoning regulations “shall lessen congestion in the streets”. Darien is already working to reduce required parking for multifamily housing developments proactively.

Darien strongly OPPOSES “as of right” (without public hearing) multi-family housing development within 1/2 mile of transit stations and 1/4 mile of Main Street corridors. This development, as stated earlier in my testimony, is happening organically in our town...without state mandate and, importantly, with the support of our community. Taking away the voices of neighbors who know these neighborhoods and would be directly affected by turning what is today a single-family home lot into **4 or more** housing units is a breach of the public’s trust in government. The housing options built to date in Darien, are strong evidence that we do support multifamily housing and 2-4 unit developments, with public input and in the places determined by our Planning & Zoning Commission to be the best fit for our community. If we eliminate public input for housing development will we also eliminate public input for policies at our Board of Selectmen and Board of Education tables? Darien highly values and wishes to preserve the democratic process by continuing to allow public input on multifamily housing development.

Darien SUPPORTS and is currently considering new regulations to allow Accessory Dwelling Units in certain zones as determined by our local Planning & Zoning Commission. Section 5 (1) clearly states that ADU’s must not be required to be “affordable”. One can only conclude then that the purpose of this bill is to simply increase supply and density of housing...not really address the important goal of housing affordability.

Finally, I respectfully request that the Planning & Development Committee reject S.B. 1024 and allow towns the opportunity to complete and submit our Affordable Housing Plans required under CGS 8-30j before imposing any further housing mandates on cities and towns. You may be very pleased with what you see in those plans!



Jayne Stevenson
First Selectman, Town of Darien
2 Renshaw Road
Darien, CT 06820
p. 203.656.7338 | f. 203.656.7389
jstevenson@darienct.gov