

Planning and Development Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5473

AN ACT REQUIRING THE MAJORITY LEADERS' ROUNDTABLE GROUP ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO STUDY THE ELIMINATION OF MUNICIPAL

Title: DESIGN REVIEW PROCESSES.

Vote Date: 3/22/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/13/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

HB5473 is a study that shall include, but need not be limited to, (1) an analysis of current required design review processes and the impact of such processes on the cost and development time of affordable housing, as defined in section 8-39a of the general statutes, (2) the identification of barriers within such design review processes that may hinder the construction or renovation of such affordable housing, and (3) the examination of successful models from other jurisdictions that have streamlined or eliminated such design review processes for such affordable housing. Currently, legislators are looking for solutions to combat the housing shortage in Connecticut. This bill is meant to be a step towards fostering a more conducive environment for affordable housing. By studying and potentially eliminating municipal design review processes that impede progress, the process of housing development and addressing the pressing demand for affordable homes can be accelerated.

LCO 3164: Substitute language added new Secs. 1 & 2, which require that, in any municipality in which greater than 50% of such municipality's housing stock is composed of single-family housing, such municipality submit plans to OPM concerning sewage infrastructure to support the development of additional housing opportunities. OPM shall establish the sustainable and equitable infrastructure support program and provide grant funding to municipalities for the improvement of sewer infrastructure to support additional housing developments.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association, Government Relations Chair, John Guskowski: supports HB 5473 with a caveat. They fully support a study to better understand if various municipal design processes are impeding worthwhile developments. They strongly encourage requiring representation from both professional municipal planning staff and local land use board members, as they will provide valuable perspective on pros and cons for design review regulations. They state that they would be happy to assist the Roundtable Group identify potential working group members for such a study. They conclude by expressing that if local planners and land use board members have a role in shaping the study, CCAPA believes this bill is worthy of support.

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Jason Rojas: states that municipal design review boards and ordinances aim to prevent the construction of projects that would clash with or reduce the value of neighboring buildings. They express that the work of these boards and ordinances often hinders the creation of the affordable housing this state desperately needs. They state that the completion of this study, coupled with any necessary action on the part of the General Assembly, would ensure fair review processes for all housing proposals in Connecticut.

Home Builders and Remodelers Association, CEO, Jim Perras: Support HB 5473 with possible amendments. They recommend the language be changed to clearly define the term "design review process." They state that a clear and concise definition will provide clarity and consistency in its application across municipalities. They express that this ensures that the study accurately assesses the specific challenges posed by design review processes and allows for more targeted recommendations to streamline or eliminate obstacles.

Partnership for Strong Communities, Policy Director, Sean Ghio: states that municipal design review boards and ordinances are often part of efforts to prevent affordable housing development through denying, delaying, or making the proposal financially infeasible. They express that as Connecticut continues to combat the shortage of affordable homes across many municipalities, it is importance to understand how design review processes are used to support or hinder housing creation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Tina Courpas: understands that legislation involves the balancing of different interests and arriving at difficult compromises for the public good, but she expresses that this study is not exploring evidence on both sides of the argument. She states that it explores sacrificing the design review process, which she explains is vital to preservation of the state's historical buildings, without requiring any corresponding benefit of furthering affordable housing goals. She concludes by expressing that fixing the state's affordable housing problem is a very important cause, but it cannot be achieved at any cost and without a full exploration of what those costs might be, as the study in this Bill contemplates.

Maureen Ciardiello: asks the committee please consider that currently, builders can use 8-30g to knock down historic buildings since 8-30g law overrides design review, but it requires

30% affordable on those projects. They state that this bill is solely a handout for builders looking to create high density market rate development without the requirement to provide the 30% affordable units. They express that this does not improve affordability, it only enriches developer's profits. They state that if passed, this bill would allow developers to create designs that do not align to a town's character or its historical heritage. They explain that it will not create adequate affordable, as they are looking to expand their control over design in projects that require less than 30% affordable

[RiverCOG, Executive Director, Samuel S. Gold:](#) states that eliminating design review processes, which in the vast majority of Connecticut are advisory, will hinder other efforts to create vibrant, transit-oriented development and to preserve the historic resources that makes this state unique. They express that according to state statutes and case law, municipalities can only require design review in historic and village districts, everywhere else design review is advisory. They share that only a very small portion of this state is in a historic or village district, and these districts are intended to protect historic places and assets. They explain that such districts are used to get developers to do better, creating buildings that fit into the existing built environment, and typically contribute to denser, walkable, and vibrant neighborhoods. They express that historic and village districts are not responsible for the lack of affordable housing in Connecticut and repealing their ability to protect the state's unique and historic places will not create affordable housing.

[WestCOG, Executive Director, Francis Pickering:](#) states that it is unclear what the genesis of this bill is. They share that as a member of the Majority Leaders' Roundtable, they can say that elimination of design review was not suggested in their discussions. They express that on the contrary, recent housing initiatives have emphasized the importance of design in creating places for people to live and work. They state that the ability to set and review designs is integral to form-based codes; without these tools, the diverse, human-scale downtowns, town centers, and main streets they produce are hard if not impossible to achieve and to maintain.

The following people also submitted testimony opposing this bill:

[Connecticut Liberty Alliance, Member, Dennis Crowe](#)
[Connecticut Republican Assembly, President, Anne Manusky](#)
[CT169Strong, Co-Founder, Maria Weingarten](#)
[East Hartford Planning and Zoning, Debbie Rieck](#)
[Alexis Harrison:](#)
[Andrea Sandor](#)
[Ann Katis](#)
[Arthur Delmhorst](#)
[Beverly Allen](#)
[Brian Rathbun](#)
[David Landau](#)
[Dori Wollen](#)
[Dorothy Stasney](#)
[Eddie Imp](#)
[Gary Corigliano](#)
[Grayson Braun](#)
[Harry Clark](#)

[Henry Backe](#)
[Jack de Graffenried](#)
[Joanne Romano](#)
[John Hair](#)
[Kathryn Chester](#)
[Katie Montgomery](#)
[Laine Johnson](#)
[Linda Dalessio](#)
[Mary Connolly](#)
[Melissa Longo](#)
[Michele LaCrosse](#)
[Michelina Giuliani](#)
[Nora Maloney](#)
[Scott Springer](#)
[Subha Clarke](#)
[Warren Serenbetz](#)

3 people submitted testimony anonymously opposing this bill:

[Anonymous](#)
[Anonymous](#)
[Anonymous](#)

Reported by: Ashley Orser

Date: 4/4/24