

February 11, 2009

To: Distinguished Chairs Senator Gomes and Representative Green, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members and Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Housing Committee

Re: Proposed Bill #206 AN ACT CONCERNING MORATORIUMS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING APPLICATIONS

From: Westport, CT Planning and Zoning Commission, Ron Corwin, Chair/Ellie Lowenstein, Vice Chair

The members of the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission are in full support of Proposed Bill 206 to modify Section 8-30(g) of the Connecticut General Statutes to raise the housing equivalent points for elderly units from 1/2 and to define median income as the area median income.

Towns should be encouraged to provide housing for the elderly living on fixed incomes, when that income is below the set affordable limit. Presently, the points given for any restricted elderly affordable unit, owned or rented at or below 80% of median income is 1/2 moratorium point, even if restricted to those elderly at 40% or 60% of the median income.

CGS 8-30(g) could be adjusted to raise the points to the same given to any other housing unit in the same class of restricted affordability. We all know seniors are increasing demographically and the need for housing units will follow. If a town has an overabundance of "elderly" affordable apartments, sitting empty, it will soon discover that restricting them in this manner is not in the town's interest. At the least, point distribution must be fair and allow elderly units restricted at 40%, 60% and 80%, whether rented or owned, to receive points no less than 1/2 point below that given to the family units.

In lower Fairfield County, there is more than a \$30,000 difference between the state median income and the area median income. In our area, wages and therefore building costs are higher. The entire state of Connecticut is being treated as if all areas are equal in this respect.

In Westport, any attempt through planning to require affordable and market rate units in the same project to be comparable in size and/or quality of construction is virtually impossible. A reduction in size and number of bedrooms means these units are serving singles or very small families, resulting in few units for larger families needing housing. To be able to rent or sell the affordable units based on income as a percentage of the area median income would help allow comparable units to be built, a goal of this Commission.

It is our understanding that the state and federal affordable housing funding bodies have restrictions based on using the area median income. If the providers of affordable housing can receive funding to help them build through these programs, then their requirements should be investigated as a possibility for changing the way in which affordability is calculated.

The Westport Planning and Zoning Commission asks that you consider our recommendations. We are in the process of writing regulations to expand affordable housing units and can see the downside of the present manner in which moratorium points are currently awarded and elderly units are counted.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Cc: Honorable Toni Boucher, Senator District #26  
Honorable Joe Mioli, Representative District 136  
Honorable Kim Fawcett, Representative District 133