



Testimony to the Planning & Development Committee  
by David Fink, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities  
Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Representative Sharkey, Senator Coleman, honored members of the Committee,

I am David Fink, policy director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide housing policy organization that engages civic and political support to solve homelessness, create affordable housing and develop strong, vibrant communities.

I am here today to suggest several changes in House Bill 5383, An Act Concerning Regional Economic Development.

The Partnership for Strong Communities believes deeply that an affordable, energy-efficient home, located in a transit-oriented community is the cornerstone for both individual economic opportunity and the growth of Connecticut's economy.

Today, in Connecticut, we have a shortage of homes that our workers can afford. That is why those with the education, skills and income to leave are leaving. We have lost more 25-34-year-old population than any state in the nation since 1990, largely because we produce few affordable rentals, condos, townhouses and starter homes for those workers.

We support the goal of 5383 – the creation of regional economic development districts that can help regions identify problems and opportunities, assess their needs and develop comprehensive strategies for economic growth. The bill as written touches most of the right bases – having a strategy, seeking public input, developing ways to measure success.

But the bill should include a specific requirement that regions determine whether they have sufficient housing and transit infrastructure to support economic growth and, if not, how they plan to create it.

That type of planning is central to the direction of federal policy today. As we speak, the Obama Administration, through its Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Transportation, and its Environmental Protection Agency, are asking for grant applications from regions that are able to develop communities and jobs by marrying housing, transit, environmental quality and energy-efficiency.

If Connecticut regions and communities are to succeed, they will have to dovetail their efforts with federal policy. That is the way federal dollars will be distributed in coming years and, frankly, the way state policy is headed. Our DECD, DEP and DOT are working together to ensure that their grants and spending are aligned to ensure that we have the housing and transit infrastructure for the growth industries and regions in our state.

This is a very good bill, but it should include a requirement that regions provide an affordable mix of housing options, near transit, in energy-efficient designs, to adequately support the labor pool we hope to attract to our state to work in biotech, high tech, the film industry, the pharmaceutical industry and other strong and emerging industries.

Housing tied to transit is not the only ingredient in developing strong economic regions and a strong state economy. But those goals cannot be reached without a strong housing/transit infrastructure. This bill should require that those plans be part of a regional economic district plan.

Thank you.