

McCall, Brandon

From: Dave Fuller <davefuller84@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2015 2:32 PM
To: HSGTestimony
Subject: Testimony for Public Hearing regarding CGA 8-30g

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Good afternoon,

Below is a written statement I would like to submit as public testimony for tonight's hearing regarding CT's Affordable Housing laws, in the event I am unable to attend.

Dear Honorable State Legislators,

I am communicating with you to offer public testimony in the event I am unable to attend the public hearing on February 5th in Aldermanic Chambers at New Haven City Hall. I currently serve as chairman to the Town of Stratford's Zoning Commission and wish to offer insights as the General Assembly deliberates on now 32 different amendments to CGA 8-39g and how to refine this law to have more positive outcomes for both people in need of affordable housing and the municipalities that host them.

First, I applaud the efforts of the General Assembly in reviewing existing laws and refining and amending them for more positive outcomes. This is the foundations of good public policy and legislative review. With over 30 different bills on the docket, this clearly shows the need to revisit CGA 8-30g. The law is well intended, but it has become a de fact backdoor for developers to circumvent local planning and zoning codes, increase the cost of litigation and appeals for municipalities, and has little to do with affordable housing development in communities. Zoning agendas get slows down in months of hearings while other very important land use issues get delayed.

Developers invoke CGA 8-30g to place in the bare minimum of units, 30 percent of units, while overriding local codes that deal with population density, neighborhood character, environmental considerations and traffic issues. Towns are hindered by this powerful state law and often have little choice to approve such site plans, deregulate or create special exceptions to their zoning codes.

There are several solutions that can help mitigate these problems while also providing a legal mechanism to aid in the development of affordable housing. The first would be to reconsider what is an affordable unit. In Stratford, we have co-ops that are not considered part of our affordable housing total by state standards, however they are considered affordable by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Standard. In fact, with federal metrics, Stratford now has double the minimum affordable housing, while it is below the 10 percent threshold required by the state's definitions of affordable housing.

The affordable housing standards do not consider practical economics, as affordability is defined by Town or County median income as defined in the most recent US Census. However, neighborhoods vary greatly, towns vary greatly and the entire State and County vary greatly. I can afford well above affordable housing requirements in Stratford, but cannot afford an affordable housing unit in Wilton. By this standard, many homes in Bridgeport or Stratford would qualify as affordable in Wilton. State Self Sufficiency standards or a standard minimum income range should be used as the metric to determine if a unit is affordable.

To prevent abuse from developers using this law as a loophole, several requirements should be considered and strengthened. The policy should strive to make affordable housing truly about affordable housing, and increasing the minimum percent of units that fall under affordable standards a larger number. This is beneficial for those who seek affordable housing and for municipalities who then also see an increase in qualified affordable housing units. Municipal land use boards also need a greater degree of latitude in adjudicating whether particular affordable housing site plans make good sense of the community. IN addition to public health and safety concerns, Towns should also be able to reasonably disqualify plans without threat of court overriding such decisions based on density and parking and traffic concerns. Municipalities should still retain the burden of proof in order to promote developers to seek affordable housing projects. Protecting municipalities and their zoning processes is the best way to ensure quality housing for all economic spectrums.

I thank you for your time and service to our great State of Connecticut, and more importantly taking the time to revisit current laws and regulations on the books.

Sincerely,

David Fuller
Chairman, Zoning Commission
Town of Stratford

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