Testimony for Housing Committee Public Hearing March 1, 2016

Re: HB 5363

To: Chairs Senator Winfield and Representative Butler

Vice Chairs, Ranking Members and Members

From: Susan Simmat

200 Pond Point Ave

Milford, CT 06460

I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5363 which calls for modifications to Public Act 8-30g. This well intended law has become a vehicle for abuse by greedy developers to circumvent planning and zoning rules to construct dense developments on properties zoned for much smaller building both in size and height.

Affordable housing is critical to our community. I would like to see responsible development in keeping with the character of our neighborhoods. It should not result in spot zoning with developments that overwhelm existing neighborhoods. Done responsibly it should fit in seamlessly. Instead Milford is being inundated with proposals that do just the opposite.

An example of this abuse is a proposed 8-30g development at 86 Pond Point Ave. in Milford. This property is zoned single family R-12.5 and is 2.73 acres, rectangular in shape and currently has one single family ranch house. The developer, Colberg LLC. has, under 8-30g proposed an 8 building 22 unit condominium development for the property leaving the single family on the property as well. The condominiums would be 1 bedroom plus loft, rising 3 stories. Parking would include 1 and 1/3 spaces per unit. The units were to be marketed to the young professional who per the developer would not otherwise be able to afford to live in Milford. Clearly this is not enough parking. If more than one person lived in the unit or had visitors there is no parking. The street is heavily trafficked and is not conducive to parking if you want your car to stay in one piece. With just one person residing in each unit a minimum of 22 cars would be added to the street.

At the public hearing the developers paid expert reported that traffic was not a problem as there had only been one accident in the 2 years previous. Curiously, and possibly self-serving, the expert looked only at the one block that the parcel is on and only DMV reported accidents. Residents obtained statistics for the same time frame from Milford

Police for several block lengths of Pond Point Avenue and found 47 reported accidents. The area of Pond Point reviewed by the neighbors would almost certainly have to be traveled by the residents of this proposed project to access highways, shopping, schools, beaches or to go anywhere from the property.

The property is surrounded on 3 sides by ranches and small capes. Until this past fall the property was heavily wooded and contained deer, turkeys, hawks and many other wildlife. I say until this fall as the developer has proceeded to cut down most of the trees although the project is still in litigation. If these units were to be built almost every inch of the property would be paved over. There is no green space in this proposal. Three story structures would loom over the backyards of the neighbors. The property is also quite wet and neighbors are concerned that with only a proposed retention pond that the area water problems would be exacerbated.

Although P&Z denied this project the developer appealed and won. The city appealed the Housing Court decision and is awaiting a court date.

The developer offered a compromise last year that would have placed 14 single family and 2, 2 family houses on the property. This is still way too dense and was not considered a compromise by any stretch of the imagination by the neighbors. As the city attorney wrote in his brief for the court the property could at the most hold 9 homes. He qualified that this would not leave any access (roads, driveways, etc.). So a realistic number is substantially lower unless the residents plan to drop into their property from the sky so as not to need vehicular access. These homes would surely attract families resulting is a minimum of 32 additional cars on the street not to mention the impact on the just finished school redistricting plan.

My intent in giving you the detail on this project was to share with you the impact of this project on the existing residents. There are numerous other projects proposed/built in Milford with similar stories of abuse by the developer to cram as much as possible on a piece of property.

I would also like to support the proposals offered by Senator Slossberg in her recent letter to the Chairs of this Committee. Senator Slossberg's proposed amendments support the goal of responsible development. Please incorporate them in the final version of this bill.

Milford has numerous apartments that by price alone would meet the definition of affordable but do not count towards the 10% threshold because they do not meet all of the criteria, such as being deeded. There is a large complex built in the 60's as apartments and converted to condos in the 80's. Many of the units are now owned as investment properties and rented out. Rents there include heat and are in the 1,000 to 1100 range for a one bedroom. This is lower than I have heard developers quote for some 8-30g proposals. The complex offers a pool, playground and grassy areas for grilling/picnicking.

It is also very unfortunate that 8-30g gives lesser points to senior housing. A town should be able to determine the needs of existing residents in developing affordable housing and should not be penalized with lesser credit for doing so.

In closing I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please work with the cities and towns to change 8-30g to promote affordable housing that is responsibly developed and respectful of the existing residents.