

Commerce Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6606

AN ACT CONCERNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE RENOVATION
Title: OF HISTORIC MIXED-USE BUILDINGS IN THE STATE.

Vote Date: 3/22/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/18/2021

File No.: 708 (347)

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Commerce Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

HB 6606 directs the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to conduct and submit a study relating to the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority's Come Home to Downtown program, which will explore revitalizing historic mixed-use buildings and what barriers that may bring. HB 6606 also conveys the conditions that licensees and permittees must meet to engage in outdoor dining and beverage service.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 5844

The substitute language narrowed the study's scope from a general examination of economic development issues to an analysis of a specific program with the intent of exploring its scalability potential. Additionally, the substitute language expands the task force's purview to include all municipalities, not just distressed ones. The substitute language also included the provisions related to outdoor dining and the restrictions associated with permitting it.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

1. **Rep. Jane Garibay – Rep. Jenn Leeper – Rep. Quentin Phipps, Co-Chairs, Main Street Working Group:** They submitted joint written testimony in support of this bill. Their testimony discusses our state's potential for reviving blighted properties and

crafting vibrant downtown spaces. As an example of innovative thinking in this area, they highlighted the Connecticut Main Street Center's work and their initiative "Come Home to Downtown." For the authors, this bill is a great way to begin the process towards Connecticut's downtown resurgence.

2. **Randall Collins Jr., Advocacy Manager, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:** Mr. Collins submitted written testimony in support of this bill. Their testimony highlighted the challenge and potential many cities and towns face when developing often blighted properties. They noted that the bill includes a task force of stakeholders who would conduct a thorough review of existing programs and make recommendations about the process. They suggest that this task force has municipal representation and business development leaders.
3. **Jim Horan, Executive Director, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC):** Mr. Horan submitted written testimony in support of this bill. In their testimony, they briefly discussed their relationship with the Come Home to Downtown Fund. To highlight the challenges organizations face when developing historic buildings for mixed-use, they included a story of a former client who had to back away from the project because of the unique obstacles of redeveloping a historic property. Despite these difficulties, they believe that the potential of these buildings remains untapped. They strongly support this bill which they believe will help preserve historic buildings and contribute to vibrant downtowns.
4. **Genevieve Lattimer, Executive Director, First Town Downtown:** Ms. Lattimer submitted written testimony in support of this bill. In her testimony, Ms. Lattimer stresses the importance of real estate developers and local economic planners recognizing the value of preserving historic buildings. She touched on the needs that local property owners in her community have in keeping up their historic buildings. She urged support of this bill because it will help preserve and restore historic downtowns and main streets.
5. **Patrick McMahon, CEO, Connecticut Main Street Center:** Mr. McMahon provided both written and public hearing testimony in support of this bill. In his testimony, he discussed the pilot program called Come Home to Downtown. He explained the various opportunities and challenges that exist relating to mixed-use development. Mr. McMahon highlighted some of the pilot program's outcomes, including pictures and descriptions of the projects.
6. **Kent Schwendy, President & CEO, Corporation for Independent Living:** Mr. Schwendy submitted written testimony in support of this bill. CIL is a not-for-profit development company that focuses on the restoration of the urban fabric. In his testimony, he highlighted the various completed rehabilitation projects their company has successfully taken on. Because of that experience, he notes the vast potential for mixed-use development and the unique hurdles. He stresses that there is a lack of developers with the expertise to tackle these types of projects. Mr. Schwendy views this bill as an opportunity to identify the problems associated with renovating these properties and find remedies. He urges the legislature to support this bill to ensure that we don't lose these historic buildings and miss out on the economic growth opportunities by utilizing them.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

1. **Francis Pickering, Executive Director, West Connecticut Council of Government:**
Mr. Pickering submitted written testimony about this bill. In their testimony, they urge the legislature to expand what is covered by the bill. As written, the bill only applies to properties in distressed municipalities. In their view, the current language is unnecessarily narrow and omits many buildings that could benefit from being studied. Included in their testimony is a list of various types of buildings they believe would not fall within the scope of the current bill language. WestCOG urges the committee to consider broadening Section 2 within the bill to include a more comprehensive variety of buildings.

Reported by: Peter B. Andrews

Date: 4-6-21