



**Testimony
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Before the Planning & Development Committee
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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) **supports with revisions** HB-6107 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE REORGANIZATION OF THE ZONING ENABLING ACT AND THE PROMOTION OF MUNICIPAL COMPLIANCE.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

Under existing law, municipalities are required to prepare an Affordable Housing Plan by spring of 2022, Sec. 8-30j, CGS. The plan must include a housing needs assessment and consider the role of local and regional housing market conditions on affordable housing development. In addition, the state is encouraging plans to include a community engagement and communications strategy and an evaluation of local land use and zoning laws to identify barriers to affordable housing development.

To help communities develop meaningful plans, the state Department of Housing (DOH) recently released an Affordable Housing Guidebook. These planning efforts will provide municipalities with a strong foundation for supporting the development of more affordable, more attainable housing to meet the needs of their communities and regions.

Section 2 of the bill extends the deadline for preparing an Affordable Housing Plan to June 2023. Given the issues and uncertainty municipalities are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, COST supports efforts to provide municipalities with additional time to complete the plan. COST has actively supported these planning efforts and provided municipalities with information on the Guidebook and other resources to assist them in these planning efforts.

The bill also includes additional changes regarding posting of the plan and submittal to the Office of Policy and Management, which COST supports.

PLANNING GUIDELINES AND COMPLIANCE INCENTIVES

COST supports provisions in Section 3 of the bill establishing a working group to develop guidelines and incentives for compliance with Section 8-30j. Guidelines and assistance, such as an assessment template, would be very helpful in facilitating the development of meaningful affordable housing plans. In addition, there has been some interest in preparing regional



affordable housing planning assessments and COST encourages the committee to explore how to ensure that regional approaches may fulfill the requirements of Section 8-30j, CGS.

ZONING COMPLIANCE – FAIR HOUSING ACT

Section 3 also requires municipalities to demonstrate, by June 2023, compliance with 8-2(b) (4) to (6), as amended by the bill which provides that zoning regulations must affirmatively further the purposes of the federal Fair Housing Act, provide for affordable housing opportunities, promote housing choice and economic diversity and meet housing needs identified in the consolidated plan.

Promoting compliance with the federal Fair Housing Act and promoting choice and economic diversity in our communities are critical public policy goals. As such, COST supports efforts to ensure that municipalities comply with these provisions.

We also appreciate that the working group includes a member of COST. If adopted, COST looks forward to contributing to the important work of this committee.

REORGANIZATION OF THE ZONING ENABLING ACT

COST supports efforts to reorganize the Zoning Enabling Act to provide greater clarity and facilitate compliance. In addition to reorganizing the Act, however, HB-6107 eliminates consideration of the “character of a district” and replaces it with “physical site characteristics and architectural context”.

COST is reviewing this change with legal counsel to determine whether it would create any unintended consequences for our smaller communities. At a minimum, we believe this language should include a reference to reflect considerations of historic features.