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Connecticut General Assembly
Planning & Development Committee
Via email to : PDtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Re: SB 1024: An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines,
Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal
Systems;
SB 1027: AAC Accessory Dwelling Units and Zoning Regulations
SB 6107: AAC the Reorganization of the Zoning Enabling act and the Promotion
of Municipal Compliance
SB 6611: AAC a Needs Assessment and Other Policies Regarding Affordable
Housing and Development
SB 6613: AAC Accessory Apartments, Middle Housing and Multifamily Housing

March 11, 2021

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman
Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking
Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

As a planning professional and a member of the New Canaan Planning and
Zoning Commission, I have been closely watching the legislative efforts to bring
statewide reform to existing zoning and housing regulations. While I applaud the
goals behind some of these efforts, including those of Desegregate CT, I am
deeply concerned about the unintended consequences of the foregoing bills.
**For this reason, I am writing in opposition to SB 1024, SB 1027, SB 6107, SB 6611
and SB 6613.**

I believe that diversity is the backbone of any strong community and that the Town of New Canaan – as others in our region – needs to do more to increase the diversity of our housing stock, age and income demographics, and racial composition. Local planning and zoning can play a role in ameliorating some of the homogeneity, but is not the only factor that has created, nor will remedy, our existing situation. Federal housing policy, State fiscal policy and local infrastructure needs will continue to complicate efforts to diversify. The intense scrutiny on zoning as the problem and solution misses the larger picture.

That being said, I support accessory dwelling units, middle housing and more multi-family housing in areas with appropriate infrastructure. However, the Desegregate CT platform and SB 1024 seem to rely on the assumption that more housing will result in cheaper housing. I think that is false, at least in Fairfield County. Adding these types of units to our housing stock will help to diversify it, but without deed restrictions on income, it seems unlikely to add to income or racial diversity. SB 1024 removes our ability to use inclusionary zoning to ensure that some of what is built is affordable and the addition of more market rate units will move us further from our 8-30g goals. In a town like New Canaan, to truly achieve income and racial diversity, we need income support, rental support and below market rate housing for the population that earns less than the area median income.

Finally, I object to the “one size fits all” approach of all of these bills. Local control and decision making empowers the residents and taxpayers of each town and city to carefully tailor zoning policies that reflect their unique geography, economy and housing market. For example, SB 1024’s elimination of parking requirements for multi-family developments along main streets and near transit may work in an urban location, but is completely unrealistic in a small town that already struggles with parking issues.

As I said at the outset, I think many of the Desegregate CT goals have merit. However, for the reasons I have outlined above, I don’t believe that a legislative agenda pushing statewide reform is the best way to implement them. I’d prefer to see the Desegregate CT platform be required as a consideration in POCD updates and/or 8-30j Housing Affordability Plans. Such an option would push

local municipalities towards a more progressive planning agenda, while allowing them to do it in the way that works best for their community.

Sincerely,

Krista L. Neilson