

March 12, 2021

Connecticut General Assembly
Planning and Development Committee
Via email to: pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

SB 1024 - *AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES,
QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL
SYSTEMS*

Dear Planning and Development Committee Chairs and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following testimony on behalf of the Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) for proposed bill SB 1024. The PZC has been closely watching the legislative efforts to bring statewide reform to the existing zoning and housing regulations, and is concerned that the effort to advance multi-family housing will be at the expense of local control and the rural single family community character that Ridgefield resident's value.

Sixty-seven (67) percent of respondents stated in recent polling for Ridgefield's 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development, that what they most like about Ridgefield is the town's character and ambience (POCD, Chapter 3, page 4).

SB 1024 proposes changes that, for small towns like Ridgefield, will forever change the town. Removing local control over zoning decisions, mandating middle-density housing by right, denying consideration for community character, eliminating parking requirements, and forcing sewer expansion will have a devastating effect. Nearly 30 percent of Ridgefield is deed restricted open space. Most residents have private well and septic systems. Many of our roads are so narrow that school busses cannot pass. We have **no** on-street residential parking. Eliminating on-site parking requirements might work in Hartford, but it will not work here.

Under local control, Ridgefield has worked diligently over the last 30 years to expand housing diversity. Thirty-eight (38) 8-30g applications have been submitted and approved. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) up to 1200 square feet and two (2) bedrooms are permitted in residential zones by right. Middle housing is incorporated within our zoning regulations through Multi-Family Development Districts (MFDD), Age-Restricted Housing Districts (AHRD), and Main Street Design Districts (MSDD). All provide for density of six (6) to eight (8) units per acre within the sewer districts. The Neighborhood Business Zone (NBZ) provides for apartments above commercial use. The Mixed-Use Overlay Zone was established to promote socioeconomic diversity with up to 16 units per acre of affordable housing above commercial use in the Business zones. The Central Business District (CBD) allows and does not limit residential density. Ridgefield has provided for, and supports, middle and multi-family housing through the MFDD, AHRD, MSDD, NBZ, MU Overlay Zone, and CBD. Each project advances the state's, and the town's, objective to increase housing diversity without sacrificing the town's character.

Several initiatives do gain our support. We already provide ADUs by right, and administrative approval for middle-housing that is in-line with existing neighborhoods. We have a TOD development plan; however, Ridgefield's only train station is in an area of town without sewer, and that directly abuts the Norwalk River. We support annual training for PZC members.

We fail to see how the effort to legislate as-of-right multi-family housing advances the state's, and the town's, goal to address the need for *affordable* housing. By focusing on density while ignoring affordability, the bill sacrifices too much of what is important to Ridgefield without providing any objective means to provide much-needed affordable housing. 8-30g has proven to be a disappointing effort that only creates dissention within communities and has failed to provide the projected housing diversity. SB 1024 does not address the elephant in the room – 8-30g – and proposes more punitive measures to towns that are unable to comply with the bill's stated objective. How can this possibly be beneficial?

The sweeping legislative reform seeks to address socioeconomic issues with a one-size-fits-all approach that threatens all that makes Ridgefield special. If we lose consideration for community character, regionalize zoning decisions, up-zone residential zones, and eliminate parking requirements, then we lose the small-town rural New England charm that makes our town unique – and we risk becoming just another casualty of New York suburban sprawl.

The proposed legislation seeks to address some of the economic and social challenges that Connecticut faces at the expense of its small towns. The combined effect would be devastating – not just to Ridgefield, but to the state as a whole. We ask that you consider the consequence of the reforms that are proposed in SB 1024 and the impact they would have on towns like Ridgefield.

Thank you for your consideration –

Rebecca Mucchetti

Rebecca Mucchetti

Chair, Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission

Cc: Planning and Zoning Commission
Rudy Marconi, First Selectman
Will Haskell, State Senator
Aimee Berger-Girvalo, State Representative
Ken Gucker, State Representative