

Town of Berlin

Department of Economic Development

March 5, 2021

Transportation Committee

RE: Bill 6570

Senator Cassano, Representative Lemar, Senator Somers, Representative Simms, Senator Minor, Representative Carney and Esteemed Members of the Transportation Committee:

I am the Economic Development Director for the Town of Berlin, and an advocate of creative re-use of properties as well as non-traditional solutions to move communities ahead. I am speaking today concerning Bill 6570.

I am concerned with some of the language of this bill including lines 83 through 87 which requires 50% of the area within a 1/2 mile of a bus rapid transit or passenger railroad station to allow for as of right accessory apartments and residential buildings containing at least 4 dwelling units or mixed-use buildings that allow dwelling units. Conditions at each station will be different in each community where they lie. Creating the 50% rule for multi-family with at least 4 units is arbitrary. In Berlin, much of the land within a half mile of the Train Station is zoned and used for industrial purposes. The 1/2 mile radius area also bleeds into existing single-family neighborhoods.

Berlin's development strategy for the area around its Train Station has been to allow multi-family and mixed-use development in a more compact area around the Train Station. The Town has approved a mixed-use project with 76 units adjacent to the Train Station in the Kensington Overlay zone. Permitted density was increased to up to 26 units per acre in this area from less than 10 units per acre. In addition, we also reduced our parking requirements for multi-family. There is also a mixed use, mixed income project directly across from the Train Station with 16 residential units.

Berlin will be updating its Plan of Conservation and Development by mid-2023 and we anticipate that in this process we will consider other zoning changes to permit more multi-family housing in the vicinity of the Train Station. Berlin is an advocate of multi-family housing near transit hubs, but we do not believe that it is appropriate for this to be accomplished by State mandate that does not consider local conditions.

At present, Berlin has approximately 9.3% of its units that are qualified affordable housing and it is currently 62 units short of achieving the 10% threshold after previously obtaining two certificates of housing completion indicating 2% progress each toward the 10% goal. Berlin also recently approved an 88-unit mixed income project and the Berlin Housing Authority secured approval of a 50 unit senior affordable project and in both cases the sponsors are in the process of acquiring financing. We expect these projects to help Berlin achieve its 10% affordable housing goal in the near future.

I ask for your assistance to reevaluate this bill as written because it doesn't take into account the varied land use conditions that exist in the vicinity of transit hubs and it takes away local planning authority and discretion regarding the best ways to create additional housing in transit-oriented development areas.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher D. Edge
Economic Development Director

Visit our Web Site <http://www.town.berlin.ct.us>

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