



Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's Planning & Development Committee in support of H.B. 6890 An Act Concerning Qualifying Transit-Oriented Communities

March 15, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Kavros-DeGraw, Chairman Rahman, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairman Chafee, Ranking Member Zullo, Ranking Member Fazio, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

My name is Pete Harrison and I am the Director of Desegregate Connecticut, a pro-homes coalition of nearly 80 neighborhood and non-profit groups. We emerged as an organization in June 2020 in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd to address one specific aspect of the staggering economic and racial segregation in Connecticut-exclusionary land use and zoning practices in our state. Through our original research, on the ground organizing, and advocacy work, we have reached thousands of residents all across Connecticut who want and need to see a better Connecticut. We believe that by reforming our local and state zoning laws, we can create abundant, diverse homes and communities to promote economic prosperity, social inclusivity, and environmental sustainability for all of us.

DesegregateCT strongly supports H.B. 6890. As members of this committee know, this bill represents the bulk of DesegregateCT's Work Live Ride proposal, which is the genesis of months of discussions with local officials, local planning and zoning commissions, state agencies, councils of governments, public and private developers, advocacy groups, business and faith leaders, and homeowners and homerenters from across the state. Three consensus points emerged from these discussions: 1) the housing crisis is harming our state's economy and its ability to meet our climate goals; 2) the state needs to take more action, but needs more capacity for planning; and 3) local governments don't like state mandates, even if they want development and need help. We internalized this feedback and dramatically altered our approach to addressing these challenges through legislation. We believe that Work Live Ride represents an opportunity to address all three of these concerns and to create a new policy framework and political mindset to move our state forward into a brighter 21st century.

Work Live Ride/HB 6890 has two equally important parts organized around a reinvigorated Office of Responsible Growth. First is a robust process to support local governments in developing more jobs and homes around their transit infrastructure. HB6890 avoids a "one-size-fits-all" approach by creating multiple categories of



transit-oriented community (TOC) districts to reflect a community's population, transit infrastructure, and geography. Within those categories, local governments have immense discretion to design the size, location, and characteristics of their district. As of the date of this testimony, we have spoken to three dozen planning and zoning commissions in all corners of the state and have overwhelmingly been well received.

Second is an effort to streamline state government to ensure that all agencies and grant programs around infrastructure expansion are working together towards meeting our state's development goals and climate needs. HB6890 makes interacting with the state easier by providing professional land use planners to work with local communities and staff to coordinate the design and implementation of their TOC districts and to expedite funding for critical projects. We are pleased that funding for this state level staffing for Work Live Ride is included in Governor Lamont's budget proposal, which further demonstrates broad support for this approach.

As currently written, HB6890 includes some language that we recommend amending, as follows:

- In high opportunity areas, the 20% affordability requirement should be instituted for developments below 10 homes.
- The language from Section 1 (5) saying "or..is located within a reasonable distance, as determined by the coordinator" should also apply to qualifying rapid transit communities.
- To clarify confusion about what discretionary funding applies to Work Live Ride, it should be clear that it does not include any funding impacting public health or tied to federal requirements. The intent of the bill is to include only certain discretionary funding tied to the expansion of infrastructure, and we recognize that it is not clear as currently written.

Work Live Ride aims to reject, once and for all, this false choice of "local control" vs "state mandates." We are not just residents of a specific town or city and we're not just residents of Connecticut. We are both. Work Live Ride strikes a balance between local control and state direction. This is the positive, inclusive dynamic Connecticut has long needed.

The majority of residents support transit oriented communities and we believe HB6890 is the right framework for moving them forward in Connecticut. According to a recent poll by Growing Together Connecticut, 76% of likely voters in the state want to see more homes near public transit. The time is right for investing in our shared prosperity, racial integration, and environmental resilience. We urge you to support this bill.

Respectfully,
Pete Harrison
Director, DesegregateCT