PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

Partnership for Strong Communities promotes equitable change in Connecticut housing policy by coordinating advocacy, advancing research, and uniting diverse partners

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2025

Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, Senator Gordon, Representative Zullo, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 6960. I am Alysha Gardner, Senior Policy Analyst with the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide nonprofit research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice.

We respectfully request that the committee support HB 6960:

HB 6960 is a smart, practical policy designed to remove known barriers to expanding Connecticut's housing supply. As reported by ECOnorthwest to the Planning and Development Committee earlier this session, **Connecticut has the most constrained housing supply in the nation, with a vacancy rate of around 7%**. Though zoning regulations and construction costs impact our ability to create needed housing, **there has been less concerted attention to the relationship between housing supply and the infrastructure needs of our communities.**

The construction of new housing is limited not only by laws and zoning ordinances, but also by the physical infrastructure of a given area.[1] New housing construction must be served by water lines and sewer lines to comply with existing state health and environmental regulations; however, the expansion of this infrastructure is particularly costly to prospective developers and partnering towns. Less costly construction options, including smaller single family "starter" homes and middle housing addressed in this bill, typically do not have the minimum lot sizes required for safe operation of wells and septic tanks.[2]; the construction of affordable and accessible housing therefore requires connection to a centralized water and sewer line.

[1] Robert Ellickson, "Zoning and the Cost of Housing: Evidence from Silicon Valley, Greater New Haven, and Greater Austin." *Cardozo Law Review (2021);* Nathan Cummings, "Septic Shock: Wastewater Infrastructure, Urban Growth, and Local Exclusion." *Yale Law and Policy Review (2022).*
[2] Robert Ellickson, *America's Frozen Neighborhoods* (2022), p. 69-73.

Using data from the CT Open Data Portal, we see that **only 15% of Connecticut's land area is connected to a sewer system[3], with 40 towns that are not connected to a centralized wastewater system (see Table 1).** While 78% of all land within the urban core of the state is connected to a wastewater system, this number drops off disproportionately as population density decreases in the state. Only 46% of all urban periphery land in the state (characterized as moderate density transitional towns between urban cores and the suburbs) is connected to a wastewater system, and high-opportunity suburban and wealthy towns both have less than 15% of their land area connected to a wastewater system. **Lack of infrastructure investments prevent the construction of needed housing near economic and job centers in our state.**

5CT Classification	*Number of Towns*	*Total Square Miles*	*Sewage Square Miles*	*Percentage of Area Covered by Sewer System*	*Number Towns with No Sewer Coverage*
Urban Core	7	113	88	78%	0
Urban Periphery	30	685	317	46%	0
Suburban	61	1753	226	13%	20
Rural	63	2200	98	4%	18
Wealthy	8	216	28	13%	2
Totals	***169***	***4968***	***758***	***15%***	***40***

Some towns choose to limit their infrastructure as a strategy to prevent needed housing development in the region. However, many towns who would like to expand their housing supply are limited by the lack of available infrastructure. **This bill provides grants-in-aid to these towns, allowing them to invest in both their residents and economy through a joint investment in infrastructure and affordable housing construction.** We encourage the members of this committee to support this bill and any related funding requests as a key component to remove barriers to housing construction in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Alysha Gardner
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[3] See CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, "Connected Sewer Service Areas", CT Department of Transportation "CTDOT Municipalities" and the CT Data Collaborative's "The Five Connecticuts" classification.