

MASSACHUSETTS SMART GROWTH ALLIANCE

March 27, 2018

Rep. Jeff Sanchez
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Sanchez:

We are writing to request a meeting with you to discuss housing and zoning legislation that can successfully pass the House this session.

Our state's housing crisis is at a boiling point, and restrictive zoning and permitting rules over the last 40 years have exacerbated our housing shortage as well as the severe racial and economic segregation that undermines upward mobility for Massachusetts residents. Our development laws have not been significantly updated since 1975 and we are falling behind our competitors in other parts of the country. Local zoning remains outdated and new housing takes years to develop, while sprawl drains local budgets and degrades our natural resources and landscapes.

We need "Great Neighborhoods" legislation to reform our antiquated zoning laws and to expand our housing supply, and we need it now. Dozens of business leaders in Eastern Massachusetts have said housing cost is their number one workforce issue, while Governor Baker's Housing Choice bill is one of his "top two" legislative priorities for the session. The Boston Globe calls the Governor's proposal "well intended, thoughtful, and realistic," but also "an exceedingly small step when so much more is needed."

We agree. The Governor's proposal only remedies one flaw, and it should be incorporated into a more significant package that improves other key aspects of planning and permitting. We cannot squander the historic momentum and leadership we have at this moment.

Real reform is possible. To win broad support from residents, local officials, members of the business community, and advocates, a "Great Neighborhoods" bill would need to advance three goals: 1) address critical housing needs across the state, 2) give cities and towns the tools they need to plan rationally for the future, and 3) protect and improve the environment.

Such a bill is within reach. We recommend that a balanced and realistic bill could be assembled from pieces of the following bills, which are already before the House Committee on Ways & Means:

- House 4290, the Housing Choice bill (Gov. Baker)
- House 3845, the housing production bill (Rep. Honan)
- Municipalities Committee re-draft of the zoning reform bills, House 2420 (Reps. Kulik and Peake) & Senate 81 (Sen. Chandler)

The following is a streamlined framework that the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance could support:

House 4290: Housing Choice

1. Inter-municipal agreements
2. Simple majority vote for zoning amendments that advance housing and sustainable land-use
3. Simple majority vote for special permits that advance housing and sustainable land-use

House 3845: Housing Production bill

4. Accessory apartments (ADUs)
5. Minimum standards for multi-family zoning

Municipalities Committee redraft of House 2420 and Senate 81: Zoning Reform

6. Prohibit discrimination in zoning and permitting
7. Board training
8. Alternative dispute resolution
9. Notice to Boards of Health
10. Site plan review
11. Planning Board review of zoning consistency with plans
12. Minimum requirements for Open Space Residential Design (OSRD, also called cluster development)
13. Manage unplanned, low density growth (allow cities and towns the option of replacing “approval not required” with a “minor subdivision” approval process)
14. Limit subdivision zoning freezes (vesting reform)

Additional Items from original version of House 2420

15. Reform frivolous appeals that slow down housing production even after local approval
16. Reduce required elements of local master plans and add new optional ones (energy management, water management, public health, arts & culture)

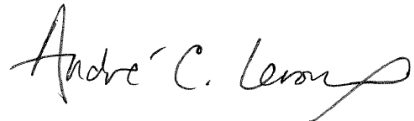
Like you, our goal is to pass balanced legislation that can win broad support across a range of interests. It is unrealistic to expect each stakeholder to endorse every provision in the bill, but it is possible to craft a bill that does “something for everyone.” At a minimum, a successful bill will help cities and towns plan for the future; it will build more homes for the young people, families, and seniors across the Commonwealth; and it will preserve and protect the environment.

Together we can send a signal to the nation that we are taking bold steps to solve our housing crisis and welcome new residents and investment. A Great Neighborhoods bill of this caliber would receive

national news coverage and provide a template for other states to follow. We can accomplish this while making it easier to build walkable, mixed-income communities that nurture local jobs and businesses instead of sprawl.

We, the members of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, have been working on these issues for years. We stand ready to assist you in drafting a bill to bring to the floor of the House. Please feel free to seek our assistance, and thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Best regards,



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On behalf of our board and member organizations:



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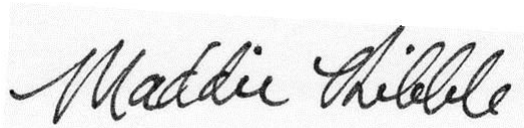
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