



Testimony in Support of An Act Promoting the Planning and Development of Sustainable Communities (S.122)

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to the
Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Businesses
Massachusetts General Court

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Chairwoman Ferrante, Chairwoman O'Connor Ives, and members of the Committee, my name is David Bryant, and I am the Director of Advocacy for the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC). MACDC is an association of mission-driven community development organizations dedicated to working together and with others to create opportunities for people of diverse incomes and backgrounds to access housing that is affordable, to benefit from economic opportunities, and to fully participate in the civic life of their communities.

On behalf of our member organizations, I am testifying in support of S.122, an Act promoting the planning and development of sustainable communities to overhaul and update our state's dated and confusing planning and zoning laws.

This proposed legislation will encourage new jobs and more housing, offering new models and resources for community planning and additional safeguards for public health and natural resource protection. The bill presents a balanced, well-crafted approach that offers greater certainty and predictability for developers and property owners, enhanced protections for important natural and agricultural landscapes, and an enhanced set of tools and incentives for local officials and citizens to guide and shape the future of their communities.

Our members have a long track record of balancing these three goal. CDCs work collaboratively with local residents and local governments to identify community goals and develop projects with strong local support. Over the years, our members have developed more than 17,000 apartments and hundreds of homeownership units as well as dozens of commercial buildings and green spaces. In 2014 alone, our members built or preserved 1,459 homes and provided 1,284 jobs to local workers in real estate construction projects. This represents 30 different projects and \$246 million of investment. Our members understand the challenges presented by our local zoning laws, and we believe this legislation will allow us to do more of these projects with greater efficiency.

Massachusetts and, in particular, the Greater Boston region will undergo dramatic changes in population over the next 25 years. More than a million workers will retire during this time, and we will need to attract younger workers from other places to sustain and grow our economy. With this shift in demographics and housing needs, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and other experts suggest we need to build 500,000 new housing units between 2010 and 2040; 87 percent of that projected housing need is in Greater Boston, approximately two-thirds of which should be multifamily housing.

CDCs will benefit from the additional and expanded definitions and authorizations for many useful zoning techniques, including cluster development, inclusionary zoning, and variance provisions that will facilitate more community-scale residential projects as well as a consolidated permitting process that will benefit larger, more complex projects. We are pleased that the bill includes innovative and creative smart-growth provisions in Chapter 40Y. These changes offer communities that voluntarily “opt-in” a predictable “by right” housing and commercial development opportunity in smart growth locations as well as additional financial incentives and regulatory resources to manage future growth and development sustainably.

MACDC members appreciate the leadership of Senator Wolf and Representative Kulik, who have been champions for comprehensive zoning reform, as well as the support from the many legislators and community partners who support this bill. We urge the committee to report favorably S.122, so that all communities may benefit from updated zoning, subdivision, and planning laws that encourage balanced development and land preservation and will meet our Commonwealth’s housing demands now and for years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

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