

Amy Ingrassia, Town of Brookfield  
Testimony to House Committee on General and Housing  
February 21, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss H.553 with you. As mentioned, Brookfield has several properties that are delinquent in taxes. Some have set up payment schedules while others are just non-responsive and have an exceptionally large delinquent amount due.

Brookfield is a small rural community. I misspoke when I said that we have about 2600 residents. The correct number from the 2020 Census is 1344. We currently do not have any businesses in town, so the burden of taxes falls completely on the residents.

We are concerned about how this bill will affect us financially should we have to take responsibility for parcels that are in the 1-year limbo state between the sale of the tax lien and the sale, or return, of the property. Currently all our potential tax sale properties have residents living on the property. Most of these residents are not the owners of the property. How would we mandate they evacuate especially when they are elderly people with limited income. This is one of the reasons they are delinquent. They just can't afford the high school taxes here in Vermont on their very limited income. It wouldn't be right for the person(s) who bought the tax lien to have the right to access the property or secure outbuildings which they do not yet own. Many elderly people don't fully understand the legality of what is going on. I just discovered that we have 2 mobile homes on the property with the highest delinquent dollar amount that have deeds giving them life estate to have mobile homes on the property.

Cities like Rutland have other issues with these vacant properties or absentee landlords. Just as Barre City has the resources in officials to inspect, secure and keep safe these properties. Our Zoning Officer and Health Officer are paid a yearly stipend. They are not on salary. As our Selectboard Chair said, we are not in the business of property management, nor can we afford to hire someone who is.

Again, I ask that you consider rural Vermont and small towns like Brookfield in the verbiage of this bill.