

S.135 Testimony  
Charlie Baker, Executive Director  
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission  
April 12, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding the housing, Act 250, and permitting provisions of S.135 on behalf of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC). This is a very important and positive bill in supporting implementation of our regional plan and municipal plans.

The CCRPC works with our municipalities and partners to plan for a healthy, inclusive, and prosperous region per our Chittenden County's Regional ECOS Plan. As one of eight key strategies, the ECOS Plan strives for at least 80% of new development to occur in areas planned for growth, which amounts to 15% of the land area of Chittenden County. Since 2010 we have been exceeding the 80% goal. And last year, we partnered with Housing Vermont and Champlain Housing Trust to lead a "Building Homes Together" campaign to build 3500 housing units in 5 years to address our serious housing needs.

Our ECOS Plan also includes our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs). As part of this effort we conducted an employer survey about positive and negative aspects for job growth. The second most frequently cited barrier for employers trying to hire was the lack of housing that is affordable.

In general, we are very appreciative and supportive of the State providing more regulatory process incentives for development in the right places. We need to keep looking for ways to provide regulatory incentives rather than regulatory barriers for this kind of development.

Here are some specific comments on the 4/3/2017 Draft No. 1.1:

Page 53 – There are only 8 towns with populations above 10,000, most of them concentrated in Chittenden County. From a statewide perspective, I recommend increasing the threshold of what constitutes a priority housing project. This will allow other towns that are trying to encourage growth in their centers the same benefit that the large towns receive. A town with 6,000 population has about 3,000 housing units. I suggest a threshold of 5% of the municipality's housing units as determined by the most recent decennial census. This would be 150 units for a town with 3,000 units.

Pages 55-57 – I support the changes in how mixed-income housing is defined.

Pages 59 and 60 – The requirement that a priority housing project (PHP) comply with pre-existing permit conditions can be problematic and seems to be unfair. We are trying to encourage mixed-income housing in these locations. The idea that one property owner has to comply with Act 250

requirements while an adjacent property owner proposing the same project can move ahead without Act 250 involvement is not fair. This should be a simple process of jurisdictional determination to decide if the project would be exempt under the PHP provisions. If the project would be exempt, then an administrative process with notice should happen to cancel or void the previous permit. If a previous party wanted to ask for a hearing, one could be granted. The current language still imposes too many barriers to achieving the State's land development goals.

Page 60 – While the goal of achieving the stretch energy codes is desirable, it does not seem fair or right to impose an additional requirement on building housing as part of a PHP. Although not covered in this bill, I would suggest that we have one energy code requirement and not two which is what this provision means.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me with any questions.

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