



April 26, 2023

Representative Amy Sheldon, Chair
House Committee on Environment and Energy
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: VHCB support for S.100

Dear Chair Sheldon and Committee Members,

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) writes to you to supplement our testimony in support of S. 100 and to support the inclusion of provisions proposed by the Rural Caucus that encourage smart growth housing development in our rural communities.

As previously noted, S.100 seeks to reduce regulatory barriers to the creation of needed housing in Vermont's existing population centers in order to help alleviate our state's housing shortage. Vermont faces a true humanitarian crisis with 1,800 households without housing options.

As presented by Rep. Sibilila, the Rural Caucus's proposal seeks to extend the regulatory relief proposed by S.100 to Vermont's rural communities by including Village Centers among the list of designated areas where the jurisdictional threshold to trigger Act 250 is lifted to 25 or more units. VHCB views this proposed change as an effective means to both ease the regulatory burden on housing development in rural areas and promote smart growth by focusing development in existing population centers. We support this geographically discreet approach to fostering housing production.

The other critical elements in the bill will enhance smart growth principles that will reduce pressures for development on our working landscape and critical natural resources where the biodiversity you seek to support in H.126 can flourish.

This letter seeks to briefly review and emphasize key elements of S. 100 that will help reduce the cost of housing at a time when the construction cost of even modestly sized homes approach and exceed \$500,000 per home. Those elements include:

- Reducing parking requirements. In most of the developments we have funded parking is over built and spaces are empty. Unnecessary parking requirements add cost generally and those costs go up when the only way to meet such requirements means that



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underground parking must be developed. If we are to meet the climate goals that the legislature has adopted we need to encourage Vermonters to give up second cars in favor of public transit, car sharing and bicycle and pedestrian options. The availability of more remote work options will also reduce the need for vehicle ownership.

- Allowing one additional story in buildings that qualify as priority housing projects. This reduces land, permitting and syndication costs and creates other building efficiencies in terms of foundations, mechanical systems etc.
- Allowing duplexes by right will allow for the development of needed modest homes in our communities. Recently, representative of Vermont's largest Habit for Humanity chapter spoke in favor of the construction of duplexes saying they cut their land costs in half along with other savings like shared driveways.
- Providing zoning at five homes per acre will both reduce sprawl and allow more efficiency in constructing neighborhoods and reduce the cost of infrastructure that supports those neighborhoods. Many Vermont villages contain more density than that.

Finally, as too many Vermont families continue to experience homelessness, it is essential that every community allow for emergency housing facilities as proposed.

As Vermont continues to face growth and housing pressures, we must recommit to our smart growth principals to both ensure adequate housing for all residents, and the protection of our natural areas. VHCB urges the committee to support the Senate passed version of S.100 with the inclusion of the amendment to Sec. 16 V.S.A. § 6001. Thank you for your consideration of the bill and your efforts to expand the availability of housing for Vermonters.

Sincerely,

Gus Seelig
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Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
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