

TO: House Committee on Environment & Energy
FROM: Kati Gallagher, VNRC, on behalf of those signed below
DATE: Apr 26, 2023
RE: S.100 "Housing Opportunities Made for All"

Vermont does not have enough homes - in quantity or diversity - to meet the needs of current and future residents. Where, how, and what type of homes are built can have positive or negative social, economic, and environmental impacts.

We believe that to address these impacts, Vermont should pursue sustainable development through smart growth principles. S.100 as passed by the Senate adheres to these principles by encouraging housing in higher densities in areas in and around Vermont's town centers.

Smart growth, as embedded in Vermont's planning laws, require that housing "that meets the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each community" is provided while maintaining "the historic development pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside"(24 V.S.A. § 2791).

Smart growth housing is a critical climate solution.

The Vermont Climate Action Plan identified compact settlement (also known as smart growth) as a "cross-cutting pathway" and key strategy to address climate change. Critically, smart growth reduces reliance on cars by providing access to public transit, walkability, and other low-cost/low-carbon transportation options.

Restrictive zoning enacted in Vermont and across the country has exacerbated inequality, loss of forest and farmland, and transportation-related climate pollution. Reforming local zoning laws is one critical step to supporting more homes on less land.

These land use laws raise home prices, encourage development to consume unnecessarily excessive land, and push homes further away from town centers – requiring Vermonters to drive longer distances to get to where they need to go.

S. 100 as enacted by the Senate would help to reduce the impacts of rural sprawl by increasing housing choice and affordability in desirable, sustainable places. Specifically:

1. **More Small-Scale (2-4 Family) Housing.** Increasing the flexibility of what can be built will enable creative housing solutions and historically common "missing middle" housing.
2. **Capped Parking Mandates.** Reducing parking mandates can free up valuable downtown property, provide developers flexibility to add units, greenspace, or other needs, and reduce stormwater runoff and other environmental impacts of pavement.

3. **Smaller Lot Sizes.** Allowing smaller lot sizes in areas planned for growth means less land consumption and the ability to create compact, walkable neighborhoods.

Local regulatory reform is not the only or last effort to address our housing crisis, and we look forward to continuing to work toward sustainable land use in the upcoming legislative session, informed by the evaluations underway of the State Designation Programs and Act 250 Program, and recommendations for improvement.

S.100 makes significant changes to both of these programs, but the Senate acknowledged that these studies will provide important insight to improve our understanding and ability to craft more comprehensive and equitable reforms for land use and smart growth housing.

As the General Assembly continues to deliberate how to best increase the supply of housing, we urge you to support S.100 as passed by the Senate to provide much needed support for affordable homes, community resilience, farm and forest viability, and climate pollution reduction.

Signed,

Audubon Vermont

Sierra Club Vermont

Vermont Conservation Voters

Vermont Land Trust

Vermont Natural Resources Council

Vermont Public Interest Research Group

Vital Communities

