

February 15, 2023

Concerns re housing density as proposed in DR 23-0091, draft 6.1 (1/27/23)

I am a member of the Hinesburg Planning Commission, which was recently alerted to proposed statewide changes in municipal zoning to address Vermont's housing crisis. The Commission has not yet had an opportunity to discuss the proposed legislation and formulate its response, so I am forwarding my own concerns in advance of the February 26 joint committee hearing.

The proposed legislation is clearly well-intentioned and contains many good provisions, but the one-size fits all approach to building heights, parking, and density requirements will have unintended consequences in Hinesburg and likely in other communities as well.

I will focus on the proposed requirement for municipal bylaws to allow five or more dwelling units per acre in districts served by municipal sewer and water infrastructure.

In Hinesburg, our water and sewer service area was established long before anyone had thought of designated village growth centers. The water and sewer lines were laid out many years ago in response to topography, public health concerns, and historic settlement patterns. More recently Hinesburg worked long and hard to define a village growth center based on environmental constraints (flood hazard areas, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.), proximity to the village core, pedestrian connectivity, municipal water and wastewater capacity, and the desire to maintain a compact, walkable, and mixed-use village area. This has resulted in a mismatch between Hinesburg's designated growth center and its water/wastewater service area, with the latter extending several miles beyond the boundaries of the former.

As it is, Hinesburg is struggling to provide water and wastewater infrastructure within its designated growth area. Nevertheless, in an effort to increase our housing supply, the Planning Commission is in the midst of revising zoning and subdivision regulations that, among other things, would increase the allowed housing density in the water/sewer service area that extends beyond the growth center from the current 0.3 units/acre to one unit/acre. A density of five units/acre in this part of town would potentially siphon off capacity from the village core to more outlying areas. This would be counter to the goals of our Town Plan and the principles of smart growth.

Many Vermont municipalities likely have their own unique circumstances that would make increasing housing density outside a village growth center ill-advised and counter to years of thoughtful planning. I encourage the committees to revise the proposed legislation to allow and encourage municipalities to increase housing density in places and in ways that match the opportunities and constraints of their particular situations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Lenore Budd