

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives:

My name is Allan Strong and I am a 20+ year resident of South Burlington. I am writing with some comments regarding the omnibus housing bill.

South Burlington has been working diligently on the issue of affordable housing, particularly over the last 10 years. Our city has regulations that require at least 10% of all new developments to be permanently affordable and provide density bonuses if additional affordable housing is included in a development proposal.

In polls, South Burlington residents have also shown protection of natural resources to be one of the highest priorities in the city. In that vein, South Burlington has taken a number of steps to push development away from sensitive natural areas, in particular, the natural resource protection (“NRP”) areas. Here, one single family or duplex home is permitted on 15 acres, and 3 single family or duplexes permitted on larger lots. But we have allowed landowners to sell 1.2 TDRs (transferable development rights) for every acre of NRP land. This program has been very successful, with approximately half of the original TDRs having been utilized, providing permanent protection for hundreds of acres of natural resource lands in South Burlington.

With South Burlington’s new Land Development Regulations, we have created a Conservation Planned Unit Development option for landowners who own lands that contain natural resources. The Conservation PUD requires a landowner to conserve a portion of his or her land, in exchange for developing densely on the remainder (minimum of 4 dwelling units per acre with incentives for higher density). These protections were adopted after hundreds of hours of discussion, meetings, and public hearings before the South Burlington Planning Commission and City Council.

The proposed bill, which would allow five or more dwelling units per acre in any district served by municipal sewer and water infrastructure, would seem to override most of these environmental protections and potentially allow suburban sprawl across hundreds of acres of forests and meadows in South Burlington that are now protected from development.

There are other ways to incentivize affordable housing that would not jeopardize important natural resources. The South Burlington City Council has weighed in on some of these options, and I urge you to take their recommendations seriously.

Thanks for your consideration.  
Allan Strong