

February 13, 2023

To: Vermont Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs and the Vermont House Committee on General and Housing

Re: Testimony for public hearing on housing, 2/16/2023

Dear Honorable Representatives:

I am joining the chorus of voices concerned about both the housing shortage and the environment to urge you to include explicit protections for natural resource lands and open space in any housing bill under consideration, and to adopt policies that disincentivize use of Vermont housing stock for second homes.

Housing and conservation are too often seen as being at odds with each other, but clearly we need both. If you agree that we must balance the need for housing with protections for natural resources, the only solution can be a comprehensive policy that integrates both. One approach would be to align H.68 or any other housing bill with the '30 x '30 initiative as outlined in H.606. Furthermore, every municipality should be supported in their efforts to protect open space, forests, wetlands, habitat blocks, and agricultural land within their borders so that all residents can be assured the benefits of these vital spaces now and in the future. Preserving natural resource lands is critical to preserving our quality of life and our ability to withstand climate change.

Along with this, please consider ways to reduce the growing demand for second homes in Vermont by increasing the non-homestead tax rate, imposing additional fees or other restrictions, and ensure that existing and new housing stock is prioritized for those needing year-round homes. Whether they are used as vacation homes or short-term rentals, second homes consume valuable resources, inflate costs for year-round residents, and reduce the amount of housing available for full time residents. They are likely a major driver of the perceived "housing shortage" and policies to disincentivize them could resolve the housing crisis without sacrificing open space to build more homes. Failure to address this imbalance will in fact lead to uncurtailed development as the demand for second homes in Vermont will undoubtedly grow as climate change, demographic shifts, and economics make owning a part-time home in Vermont ever more appealing. This would undoubtedly lead to massive waste and worsen inequality, while offering very little benefit to Vermonters.

Thank you for your service and dedication to Vermont, and to your thoughtful consideration for ways to address our housing needs without sacrificing Vermont's most valuable resource - our environment. I do hope that you use this opportunity to make improvements that will leave us better prepared to withstand not just the housing crisis, but also the long-term challenges of climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Sincerely,

Kayla Moore  
Resident, South Burlington, VT