

To: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs, c/o Scott Moore, 133 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05633.

Subject: Testimony on Senate **Omnibus Housing bill**

My name is Ray Gonda from South Burlington.

**My first interest** is in having H.68 avoid destructive impacts on the years of hard work and planning that have gone into my community's land development regulations. From the appearance of the statements I see spread throughout the proposed legislation it would appear that our work would be swept away, without a whimper, if the legislation passes as it stands as of 2/15/2023.

One of the most important considerations with several bills now before the legislature is how to house more residents without running roughshod over the state's natural resources and rural beauty. There is a way to do this. That is to move away from the idea, at least partially, of homes being either single unit (single family) or even four or five units. More units built together as a single building is clearly a more efficient use of land.

However, even the above multi-unit designs fall short of optimizing efficient land use through to its logical endpoint – that of optimizing building spaces while preserving open spaces and natural resources. Spreading even multiple units per building across undeveloped lots over the next 20 years will land us right back where we find ourselves now – with a call for more residents to come here and more housing. A continuing cycle, yet progressively continuing to fall short of adequate protection of natural resource lands.

It is a never-ending cycle that gradually consumes most of our open areas - areas that lend quality to our lives, both visual and spiritual and recreational. This should be self-obvious to anyone who has done much traveling across the U.S.

**My second interest** is that what is needed is a paradigm shift in our thinking and how we view ourselves, what we expect of our landscapes and buildings to look like and fit together, and what Vermont should or could look like as a result..

When I moved to Vermont in 1980, I was struck by its beauty, its many old barns and farm houses and quaint villages with extended houses speaking of keeping the whole family intact. I would drive for hours, particularly in the times of brilliant autumn colors. I reacted to such beauty of deeply, even in painful ways I did not understand. My first entry into Montana had a similar effect. I wanted to immigrate there and close the door behind me.

However, things change and many of those old beautiful farm buildings have collapsed, some continuing to partially stand as witness to a beautiful past. Those changes came naturally along with enclosing economic changes. We know change will happen so I propose we be proactive, not reactive and re-examine what we want our state to look like to reserve that worth preserving while meeting the needs of today and tomorrow.

I propose we re-evaluate our conception of beauty and how to preserve open lands by considering building vertically rather than horizontally. This has occurred in many cities and neighborhoods around the world. The basic idea is much taller buildings with internal parking,

surrounded by lots of green spaces, natural resource areas, and recreational lands with multi-use trails – all mixed with forest lands. By taller I mean taller than 4 or 5 stories – perhaps as tall as 10 or 12 stories or in a few places even taller.

In South Burlington this can presently be done along our transit overlay areas where tall buildings would not obscure views of the mountains or on the other hand, Lake Champlain.

In this conception I shun the narrow streets, tall buildings with dark canyons between them that we have created in so many cities. Some poor examples of too closely spaced of tall buildings surrounded by concrete or asphalt currently exists such as those along Farrell Street along the Burlington / South Burlington boundaries. I envision more sparsely located high rises with vast attractive areas of green open spaces as part of a seamless mix of urban and rural.

The best example I can conjure up are areas of Anchorage, Alaska that in places has these characteristics – a city in which I have spent many months spanning a decade.

Such a conception, taken seriously, will require a lot of introspective self-examination and evaluation of what we want for the future. Will we build our own future or will we let it accidentally-incidentally build itself? I will require some measure of letting go of the past.