

Bob Flint Testimony – House Commerce – 4/25/25

Many thanks for allowing me to appear before the Committee today. My apologies for not being with you in person!

I'm Bob Flint from Springfield Regional Development Corporation and I'd like to share a project that we've been working on for several years, the mixed-use redevelopment of the former Park Street School in Springfield, which certainly could benefit from the proposed CHIP legislation.

(after pics/video)

This 90k sf building was last used as a school roughly 15 years ago (I went there many, many years ago!), but still has public use space (historic gym, auditorium) that has been limited by code requirements and also houses BRIC, a tech-focused ecosystem. But much of the building is vacant.

As part of our redevelopment, it is our intent to convert the original part of the building into 25 housing units, roughly 25-30% of the footprint

While what you saw may have been impressive, but please appreciate that, even when that work is completed, we're looking at least \$18 million of additional investments – much of that for the housing portion and most of that for energy needs/building envelope. We have met with several housing developers and applied to the LIAC program, but while everyone loves the historic building, we haven't had any takers for the housing portion. Why? The math doesn't work.

Within a mile of this site, there are currently over 400 income restricted housing units. The average home sale price for Springfield in 2024 was \$236K. We would ask for no affordability covenants in this proposal.

I know there has been discussion about repurposing former school buildings in General Affairs/Housing. Please note that one inherits those facilities as is, dimensions, conditions, infrastructure and they generally don't easily lend themselves to a single use.

We would ask for the definition of "housing development" (currently on Page 1 of the latest draft) to allow for mixed-use projects, with a less stringent minimum sf requirement for housing. Adaptive reuse of historic buildings requires flexibility.

In terms of eligible uses of TIF funding, I would advocate for expansion of the infrastructure definition to incorporate energy code, as was briefly mentioned this morning. We have spent over \$70K this winter just maintaining basic heat to keep the building from freezing, using two

old, large, oil boilers (one of which is a converted coal furnace). We not only have to install a modern HVAC system, but also need to address the building envelope.

Within our region, towns have a variety of existing infrastructure. Communities like Springfield and Windsor, in particular, have robust wastewater capacity, but need creative assistance, like this proposed legislation, to help drive housing and other commercial construction. Any development in this region is difficult, because of the lack of ROI compared to, say, Chittenden County or even the Upper Valley. Note that, even with the current TIF program, no town south of Rt. 4 has elected to participate.

There are other potential projects in our region that could benefit from this legislation from another school/housing reuse to a new housing development proposal in Springfield and a potential mixed-use project in Windsor, adjacent to the soon to be completed Central & Main housing project, which Gov. Scott and his team visited recently.

But back to the Park Street redevelopment, which could be a wonderful test case for project-based TIF. Here's a property that was tax exempt as well as a brownfield. We are trying to turn it into something that is a true contributor to our community, from a grand list point of view as well as creating workforce housing stock, as well as utilizing the existing historic features (auditorium) as a catalyst for community activity, leading into our downtown.

As always, thank you for your consideration and for the time.