

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

House of Representatives

State House, Boston 02133-1054

May 22, 2018

Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House of Representatives
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Zoning Reform and Housing Initiatives

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We are writing to express our support for a zoning reform and housing initiative package that reflects a balance and compromise of concerns and impacts expressed by interested parties in the fields of housing, planning, environment and municipal government.

Massachusetts families, especially seniors and young people, face a housing crisis that threatens to tear them from their communities and undermine our economic success and quality of life. Businesses indicate that housing scarcity makes it difficult to attract and retain employees, while many cities and towns struggle to create vibrant, walkable places that can attract new investment.

Governor Baker's "Housing Choice" bill, as reported out by the Housing Committee, can serve as a starting point to modernize the Commonwealth's planning, zoning and permitting rules. It contains simple majority approval for zoning improvements and special permits that help to produce and preserve housing, along with local option inter-municipal agreements to share costs and revenue from development.

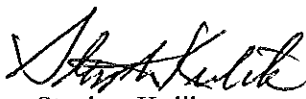
In addition, we support including the following provisions:


1. A training program for residents who serve on local planning and zoning boards. Funding has been included in a supplemental budget and will be distributed through the Department of Housing and Community Development.
2. Expediting certain kinds of appeals by limiting court review to whether or not the local permit decision was made appropriately.
3. A mediation process at the local level to resolve permitting disputes.
4. When a zoning change is considered, requiring the planning board to provide an advisory report on whether the proposed change is consistent with the master plan.
5. Providing notice to the board of health when a development project application is submitted to a municipality.


6. Authorizing "site plan review," a tool that helps communities to improve project design while ensuring prompt approval for developers.
7. Making it easier for developers to "cluster" homes in a subdivision to conserve land and reduce construction costs.
8. Enabling more single family homeowners to create a modest "accessory apartment" within the home for relatives, caretakers, or rental.
9. Extending the time municipalities have to exercise a right of first refusal to purchase agricultural land or recreational land.
10. Reform of unregulated "Approval Not Required" development, if a community is willing to adopt a Minor Subdivision Ordinance or By-Law.
11. Encouraging more multifamily housing in sensible locations.
12. Clarifying that discriminatory actions in zoning and permitting are not allowed under Massachusetts law.
13. Establishing sensible parameters for property owners to vest their property rights, which will encourage municipalities to update their zoning.


State zoning, planning and subdivision statutes have not been significantly updated since 1975. Passage of such a bill would be a worthy accomplishment and in line with the House's tradition of reform. In that regard, we respectfully request that the House take action on a comprehensive zoning reform and housing initiative package by the end of session. Thank you in advance for your consideration.


Sincerely,



 Stephen Kulik
 1st Franklin District



 Sarah K. Peake
 4th Barnstable District


 Patricia A. Haddad
 5th Bristol District



 Paul A. Schmid, III
 8th Bristol District



 Paul McMurtry
 11th Norfolk District



 Andres X. Vargas
 3rd Essex District



 Christine P. Barber
 34th Middlesex District


 Byron Rushing
 9th Suffolk District


 Brian Murray
 10th Worcester District


 Timothy R. Whelan
 1st Barnstable District


 Carmine L. Gentile
 13th Middlesex District


 John W. Scibak
 2nd Hampshire District

Daniel M. Donahue
16th Worcester District

David Paul Linsky
5th Middlesex District

Jay R. Kaufman
15th Middlesex District

Cory Atkins
14th Middlesex District

Randy Hunt
5th Barnstable District

Mike Connolly
26th Middlesex District

Paul W. Mark
2nd Berkshire District

Jonathan Hecht
29th Middlesex District

Natalie Higgins
4th Worcester District

Aaron Vega
5th Hampden District

Stephan Hay
3rd Worcester District

Kay Khan
11th Middlesex District

Brian M. Ashe
2nd Hampden District

Shaunna L. O'Connell
3rd Bristol District

James K. Hawkins
2nd Bristol District

Adrian Madaro
1st Suffolk District

Thomas M. Stanley
9th Middlesex District

Paul Tucker
7th Essex District

Denise C. Garlick
13th Norfolk District

Jack Lewis
7th Middlesex District

Jose F. Tosado
9th Hampden District

Frank I. Smizik
15th Norfolk District

Juana B. Matias
16th Essex District

Carolyn G. Dykema
8th Middlesex District

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1st Hampden District

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25th Middlesex District

David M. Rogers
24th Middlesex District

Mathew Muratore
1st Plymouth District

Paul J. Donato
35th Middlesex District

Bud Williams
11th Hampden District

Harold P. Naughton, Jr.
12th Worcester District

Jay D. Livingstone
8th Suffolk District

Smitty Pignatelli
4th Berkshire District

Joan Meschino
3rd Plymouth District

Susannah M. Whipples
2nd Franklin District

Carlos Gonzalez
10th Hampden District

Frank A. Moran
17th Essex District

Solomon Goldstein-Rose
3rd Hampshire District

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13th Bristol District

Elizabeth A. Malia
11th Suffolk District

Sean Garballey
23rd Middlesex District

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William C. Galvin
6th Norfolk District

Tricia Farley-Bouvier
3rd Berkshire District

Daniel J. Ryan
2nd Suffolk District

Louis L. Kafka
8th Norfolk District

Dylan Fernandes
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket

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4th Bristol District

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12th Hampden District

William L. Crocker, Jr.
2nd Barnstable District

Ann-Margaret Ferrante
5th Essex District

John J. Mahoney
13th Worcester District

John C. Velis
4th Hampden District

Russell E. Holmes
6th Suffolk District

Kenneth I. Gordon
21st Middlesex District

Danielle W. Gregoire
4th Middlesex District

James J. Dwyer
30th Middlesex District

Shawn Dooley
9th Norfolk District

Joseph W. McGonagle, Jr.
28th Middlesex District

Diana DiZoglio
14th Essex District

Mary S. Keefe
15th Worcester District

Daniel Cuffinone
12th Suffolk District

Tackey Chan
2nd Norfolk District

Alan Silvia
7th Bristol District

Evandro C. Carvalho
5th Suffolk District

Jennifer E. Benson
37th Middlesex District

Rady Mom
18th Middlesex District

Gerard Cassidy
9th Plymouth District

Linda Dean Campbell
15th Essex District

Jeffrey N. Roy
10th Norfolk District