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 B. Colig
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  
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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 D'yke  
8th Middlesex District

Todd M. Smola  
1st Hampden District

Marjorie C. Decker  
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

Joan Meschino
3rd Plymouth District

Frank A. Moran
17th Essex District

Elizabeth A. Malia
11th Suffolk District

William C. Galvin
6th Norfolk District

Louis L. Kafka
8th Norfolk District

Angelo J. Puppolo, Jr.
12th Hampden District

John J. Mahoney
13th Worcester District

Kenneth I. Gordon
21st Middlesex District

Jay D. Livingstone
8th Suffolk District

Susannah M. Whapps
2nd Franklin District

Solomon Goldstein-Rose
3rd Hampshire District

Sean Garballey
23rd Middlesex District

Tricia Farley-Bouvier
3rd Berkshire District

Dylan Fernandes
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket

William L. Crocker, Jr.
2nd Barnstable District

John C. Velis
4th Hampden District

Danielle W. Gregoire
4th Middlesex District

Ann-Margaret Ferrante
5th Essex District

Russell E. Holmes
6th Suffolk District

James J. Dwyer
30th Middlesex District