

The Town of Salem Planning and Zoning Commission fully supports and recognizes the need for affordable housing. The Plan of Conservation and Developed (POCD) which is currently being reviewed and revised outlines the goals and action plans in place to encourage the development of affordable housing. In our efforts to achieve these goals we learned from our local housing authority the importance of having resources which are necessary for successful and sustainable affordable housing. These resources include sewer and water, public transportation, easy access to essentials such as grocery stores, doctors, hospitals and supportive services. As we navigate our way to encourage development of housing for people of all ages, backgrounds and incomes we must plan with the current characteristics of our town and our future business development plans to assure success.

The goal of the Salem Planning and Zoning Commission is to have more affordable housing opportunities available to a diverse population varied by age, income, and work status while ensuring that housing development is compatible with other important community goals. In the POCD, some of the community goals include preservation of Salem's rural small town atmosphere, to manage growth according to the best environmental practices available, to protect the town's environmental assets, to protect the natural beauty and the conservation of our agricultural lands, and to protect the federally recognized Eightmile River watershed area.

The Salem Planning and Zoning Commission has identified homes and apartments which could qualify as affordable but are not deed restricted. We also identified homes where vouchers are used to cover rent which were initiated by the tenants. We understand according to our local housing authority that vouchers have not been available for many years and there is a long waiting list to obtain vouchers. We also understand that a unit is not considered affordable unless it is deed restricted or leased by someone with a voucher even though the rent is considered affordable for the district of Salem.

Currently, two bills being considered by the Connecticut legislature (SB-1024 and SB-804) which are intended to promote the construction of affordable housing in all Connecticut municipalities. The bills would eliminate local control over accessory dwelling units and some multi-family housing. If adopted, these bills would limit local zoning control. Local municipalities would have no authority to influence the diversity and balance of the property base assuring available housing while incorporating the goals set forth in the POCD to protect the environmental assets and maintain the rural characteristics unique to the area.

In summary, we echo the sentiments of the neighboring towns such as Old Lyme, East Haddam, and East Lyme striving to meet affordable housing state requirements while desiring to maintain the unique qualities of each community. The Town of Salem Planning and Zoning Commission strongly believes that prior to any new legislation being considered it is necessary to redefine the term affordable housing to ascertain what already exists in each community but is not identified under the current definition. This redefinition is vital for rural towns as well as maintaining local authority to influence the process integrating affordable housing into residential communities without sacrificing the characteristics of individual towns.