



State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS REGULATION
Division of Building, Design, and Fire Professionals
560 Jefferson Blvd.
Warwick, RI 02886

March 28, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Committee on Housing and Municipal Government
Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 7978 – AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES – SUBDIVISION OF LAND

Dear Chair Casey:

We write on behalf of the Department of Business Regulation’s Division of Building, Design, and Fire Professionals in strong support of H 7978.

The bill before you today aims to address a critical component of a complex challenge before our State relating to housing production. Specifically, it would expand the successful “e-permitting” initiative established in 2021 to include new requirements for local planning and zoning processes.

To date, the Statewide E-Permitting initiative has focused mainly on building permitting, plan review, and inspections. We have seen broad uptake of e-permitting platforms across Rhode Island, with nearly every municipal building department having adopted an electronic permitting platform. This success is due in large part to successful state-local partnerships – the platform utilized by the State Building Office, OpenGov, is also used by the vast majority of municipal building officials, enabling critical information sharing.

In addition, the General Assembly has funded a full-time program manager at DBR who exists as a key liaison to local stakeholders and a single point of contact for municipalities with questions and concerns about their e-permitting tools.

Finally, the program owes a great deal of success to forward-thinking budget decisions made by the Assembly in the past two fiscal years – program appropriations have allowed the DBR to reimburse local building departments for start-up and associated costs with the adoption of the OpenGov platform, eliminating a fiscal constraint that many municipalities would have otherwise faced.

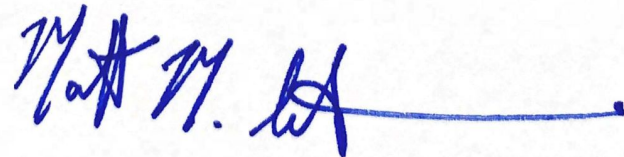
Overall, the broad adoption of e-permitting across Rhode Island has demonstrated clear value with respect to streamline and expediting local building permits. This legislation would take an important expansionary step – introducing similar requirements relating to local planning and zoning approvals, an equally important, and highly complex, aspect of local jurisdictions’ interaction with the housing development challenge broadly. We strongly support this proposal and stand ready to implement the new requirements on the proposed timeline while maintaining the strong partnership with local stakeholders that has proven so successful to date.

Again, we would highlight the critical importance of the reimbursement mechanism in the near-universal adoption of e-permitting by local building offices. Should the General Assembly desire to replicate this

model with regards to planning and zoning, the Department would gladly participate in budget scoping and implementation exercises to the extent appropriate and necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt M. Santacroce", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Matthew Santacroce
Deputy Director
Department of Business Regulation
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Cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Housing and Municipal Government
The Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi, Speaker of the House of Representatives
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Elizabeth K. Dwyer, Esq., Director, Department of Business Regulation
James P. Cambio, CBO, State Building Code Commissioner