

The Village Common of Rhode Island

Aging Better Together

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on March 20, 2025,

in support of 25-H 5800 by Rep. Robert Craven, et. al.

ZONING ORDINANCES — VILLAGE/MIXED-USE ZONING REQUIREMENTS

Thank you, Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing for this hearing. **I testify in strong support for 25-H 5800 by Rep. Robert Craven, legislation that would amend sections of state law on Zoning Ordinances to require municipalities to provide for village or mixed-use zoning to allow residential use in some or all areas of their commercial zoning districts.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that helps older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate volunteer services through locally organized and operated villages in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Warwick, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, and Jamestown. The Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. **Our volunteers save lives and money. Our motto is: "Aging Better Together."**

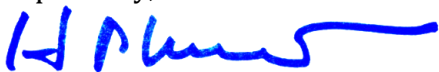
We in the Village Common strongly support Rep. Craven's legislation to require that municipalities allow residential development in their commercial districts. In response to the nation's severe housing shortage, many jurisdictions have recognized the need to allow apartments units above storefronts and in other configurations within districts that are currently zoned for commercial use.

Starting at Page 3/line 31ff, 5800 requires local communities to establish objective standards for providing residential development "integrated with commercial uses in a mixed use or village development..." Municipalities retain control of their own process but are required to (1) deal objectively with residential above commercial use, (2) permit "medium to high density residential development" within commercial zones, and (3) establish "flexible and reasonable dimensional standards that allow for the mixed use or village development."

Representative Craven's legislation provides a rational and pragmatic process for municipalities to permit denser development than most already have. 25-H 5800 will require them to create an objective rather than a political process for developers. It will move Rhode Island communities toward higher density, greater affordability, and improved walkability.

On behalf of The Village Common, I urge the Committee on Municipal Government and Housing to recommend 25-H 5800 for passage by the full House. It's time for Rhode Island to encourage cities and towns to evolve beyond suburban sprawl as standard housing.

Respectfully,



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