

Rhode Island Land Use Commission:

My name is Emily Tessier, I am a Middletown Town Councilor, and I am writing to you to express my enthusiastic support of the work of the commission and its working groups.

Our nation is clearly in a housing crisis, and Rhode Island is not exempt. Before I became a Town Councilor, I was on the Zoning Board, and it quickly became clear how truly difficult our zoning code makes it to increase our housing supply. Currently, our zoning code does not promote or allow growth or sustainability, and in fact makes it impossible in many cases to create more housing. For example, due to language such as "realize greater financial gain", a resident requesting to turn his single-family home into a duplex was denied. Multi-family housing and other inherently affordable housing typologies such as single room occupancies are not allowed by right. Lastly, our zoning code along with most zoning codes in Rhode Island, are incredibly lengthy and have many outdated ordinances that are both arbitrary and counterproductive.

Other notable issues that inhibit housing include ban of residential development by right in commercial zones, excessive parking minimum requirements, arbitrary minimum lot size and lot envelope requirements, and the incredibly long and expensive process and procedure for implementing residential development, which prevents smaller developers from participating.

Lastly, there are currently no effective remedies for municipalities that are not in compliance with the 10% AH requirement, nor are there incentives in place for municipalities to promote smart, incremental growth. Remedies such as a "builder's remedy" and establishing clear consequences for municipalities that haven't met their 10% goal would be extremely effective.

The housing crisis is the main reason I ran for Middletown Town Council. Based on the evidence, addressing our land use policies is the best step we can take towards making Rhode Island a more livable place for all.

Not only will these changes increase our housing stock, but they also promote a greener community. Our current land use policies promote a car centric environment with inefficient sprawl, forcing residents to require a car to get around. These changes will also allow folks that want to live in the town they work for do so, rather than needing to commute because there is no housing stock near their workplace.

After reviewing the recommendations from Land Use Commission Working Groups, I am in full support of all the proposed changes put forth. We need more housing not only in Middletown, but across the state. Let's be a national example of how to successfully address this housing crisis.

Sincerely,
Emily Tessier – Middletown Town Council