



New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions

SERVING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S COMMUNITIES SINCE 1970

TO: House Housing Committee
FROM: Barbara Richter, NHACC Executive Director
DATE: April 14, 2025
SUBJECT: Written testimony regarding SB84

Thank you, members of the committee for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 84.

The NH Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) is a nonprofit organization which serves the 217 municipal conservation commissions in the state. Our mission is to foster conservation and appropriate use of New Hampshire's natural resources by providing assistance to conservation commissions, facilitating communication and cooperation among commissions, and helping to create a climate in which commissions can be successful.

Please vote **Inexpedient to Legislate on this bill**. We are opposed to Senate Bill 84 for the following reasons. Conservation Commissions understand financial incentives are necessary to provide enough housing for our citizens. However we do not feel this is the best way to encourage development, while preserving NH's unique natural habitat, which is why people want to move here.

This bill would encourage development in more rural, environmentally sensitive areas, where infrastructure is more costly to build and has greater impacts on critical natural areas. Rural towns are unlikely to have the public transportation, jobs and social services, many people who are seeking housing need.

We oppose this bill because it would impact local agricultural zoning districts which would discourage future agriculture in New Hampshire. The State should be supporting farmers and protecting prime agricultural lands. This bill would incentivize subdividing prime agricultural land that would be forever lost to dense housing development.

This bill will likely have tax consequences. Land costs are not the only challenges confronting developers. If you add on the fact that the state's smaller and more rural towns are struggling with rising property taxes and aging infrastructure, additional housing will further strain the town's resources. Study after study has found that residential development spends more tax dollars for services than it pays in taxes. Open space requires less infrastructure and services. Open space pays more in taxes and requires fewer services, resulting in a positive balance for the town for that property.

We believe it is important to balance housing with protection of our natural resources. This bill would tip the scales toward development. This solution creates a slippery slope and threatens to erode the intent of the state's most comprehensive land protection program by making development exempt.

Housing decisions should be made at the local level not mandated by the state. NH cities and towns have the critical information necessary to make zoning decisions and should be allowed to determine land use and identify areas for both development and conservation. Local land use boards, along with local conservation commissions and planning departments, use the best available data and information to make sure their communities are growing and expanding in the most suitable places, at a reasonable pace, benefitting the entire community. Let the local boards make the decisions that balance development with protecting natural resources, in keeping with their communities values.

Vote Inexpedient to Legislate (ITL) on SB 84. Natural resources remain critical to our economic vitality and NH towns know how to use those resources to serve their citizens. This is the NH Advantage.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Richter,
NHACC Executive Director