

## Issues and Concerns with LD 2003

I am the Chairperson of the Vinalhaven Housing Committee, a Select Board authorized committee in the Town of Vinalhaven. I also serve on the Vinalhaven Planning Commission. The following comments are from me, personally.

I appreciate the legislature's willingness to tackle the critical lack of affordable housing in Maine. Thanks to extensive publicity, we are all aware this issue affects every community in many and different ways.

The Vinalhaven Housing Committee was formed in March of 2021. With the financial support of the Select Board and the Island Institute we conducted an island wide Housing Assessment by way of the internet and an anonymous paper survey. Thanks to the fine work of our consultant Mary Terry we have a clear understanding of the barriers our residents face in having affordable year round housing.

The Housing Committee has made suggestions for revisions to our zoning ordinance and worked with the Vinalhaven Planning Commission to enact many of the suggestions in your bill.

Not everyone in our island community wants the focus to be on affordable housing, but housing in general. New teachers, medical workers, postal employees, contractors, temporary workers, etc. cannot find housing here. They cannot live in the next town over, unless they are willing to take the 1 ½ hour ferry, twice a day, weather and schedule, permitting. The lack of all types of housing is severely impacting the community.

Additionally, rental housing is very limited and often in old, inefficient buildings, where heating costs and other necessities are beyond the financial ability of the occupants. Also, many people are living in homes owned by seasonal residents, and they have to vacate those homes in the summer. They sleep on friends couches, in boats, in their cars, camp in the woods etc.

The Housing Committee and Planning Commission are proposing more intense development in the village area served by Town water and sewer. We intend to eliminate the set back and lot dimension requirements and lower the parking space and location requirements. We are also proposing the re-purposing of accessory structures into dwelling units in the same area, as long as they meet specific residential standards.

As we have come to these recommendations ourselves we hope other communities will create zoning and incentives to meet their individual community needs. A state wide mandate may make it difficult to pass area specific zoning, and create legal obstacles delaying the good work intended by this bill.

Some communities have established non profit volunteer organizations addressing the need and appropriate residential development for their specific communities. They have queried their residents, many with families, who want single family homes, with a place for gardens and play areas, not apartments.

Rather than a one size fits all mandate we suggest incentives and encouragement which each community can choose for their unique circumstances.

To utilize what we have and meet the immediate needs, why not subsidize the repair and improvement of existing residential structures in order to keep people in their present homes. Historically, some of

the larger homes on our island were two and three family homes. They could serve this function once again. If rental property, perhaps the landlord could be incentivized by low interest or no interest loans to make the repairs/improvements. Funds could be also be utilized to acquire reverse mortgage foreclosed properties and rehabilitated for affordable housing. These incentives could be tied to affordable housing requirements.

**There are several issues presented in this bill which would be a problem for us:**

On many small grandfathered residential lots in the village four unit housing would be undesirable if not impossible.

Vinalhaven, like other islands, is a sole source aquifer with limited water resources. Soils are shallow, and not always appropriate for larger developments. We are looking carefully at town owned land to identify where we might be able to have any form of a housing development to meet some of our housing needs.

Islands have greater expenses for everything; food, fuel, utilities, transportation. Many residents are seasonal workers, and seasonally earn the majority of their annual income in the lobstering industry, doing forestry work, carpentry, care taking, gardening, cleaning, etc. or work in low paying jobs at Vinalhaven Eldercare or the grocery store.

How could these higher expenses and inconsistent work patterns be taken into consideration to benefit these residents housing needs? Can we determine affordability as pertains to Vinalhaven separately from the Knox Co. median income?

The minimum 30 day rental requirement does not solve the year round rental need. We would suggest a yearly renewable lease, as long as the terms of the lease are met. All housing benefiting from subsidies or programs should be registered with the community Code Enforcement Officer.

Offering \$25,000 thru a competitive grant process over three years is too long a process. We are ready to hire a planner now, not two years from now. Please give us the tools to move forward as quickly as we can.

Rather than prohibiting specific descriptions of land use, “character of location, overcrowding of land, concentration of population” we would rather see a requirement for multi family housing to blend with the existing character of communities and neighborhoods in which they are built.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts and concerns on this very important issue facing our community, and others,

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