

MASSACHUSETTS SMART GROWTH ALLIANCE

An Act promoting housing and sustainable development (SD1609)

Sponsor: Senator Harriette Chandler

Why we need this bill:

Restrictive zoning is silently crippling our economy, health and environment

- Economists estimate that restrictive zoning drives up housing prices in metro Boston by nearly 20% and leads to a 20% decline in employment. Outdated zoning has cost our region at least 156,000 jobs.
- We are building fewer than half of the homes we need annually to meet our current state-wide needs and prevent job loss to other states. Meanwhile, combined housing and transportation costs now eat up an average of 50% of family budgets.
- At least 52% of Americans want to live in places where they do not have to use a car very often. People who live in walkable neighborhoods are twice as likely to get the exercise they need, reducing the risk of obesity and making our communities more livable.
- Every day, thirteen acres of forests and farmland are lost to low-density sprawl caused by inefficient and outdated zoning, generating more traffic in addition to infrastructure costs that drain municipal budgets.

The bill will stimulate home & business development

- Communities will increase “multi-family” zoning to build more of the homes we need.
- Allowing homeowners to create “accessory dwelling units” on their property will enable them to create new housing for relatives or to generate rental income to help them stay in their home.
- Special permits, which are a common approval process, would no longer require a supermajority vote.
- Variance reforms will make it easier for property owners to make improvements.
- Developers will have longer, more reasonable time periods to use their permits.
- Reforming the appeals process will reduce frivolous lawsuits and lengthy court battles over development, saving time and money for local government, taxpayers, and developers.

Provide our cities and towns with the modern planning tools they need

- Other states use a rational and predictable process to assess impact fees from development to offset the cost of infrastructure—our cities & towns should be able to do that too.
- Local master plans will become easier and less costly to create.
- Once a community has started to change its zoning, development rights should become protected only when an owner has more than an imprecise preliminary plan for the property.
- Cities and towns can implement affordability requirements through inclusionary zoning.
- Local planning and zoning board members will be able to access more training opportunities.

And preserve open space, discourage sprawl, & promote public health

- Developers who want to cluster their development to conserve land will be able to do so.
- Communities will be able to improve the design of unregulated roadside sprawl by establishing a minor subdivision ordinance.
- Cities and towns will be able to “opt in” to additional tools and benefits if they meet state standards for compact housing and economic development while protecting open space and water quality.
- Natural Resource Protection Zoning is a new tool to preserve large and important resource areas.

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