

Offered by Councilors Kenzie Bok



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING ZONING RELIEF FOR AFFORDABLE PROJECTS

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WHEREAS: The City of Boston is in a housing crisis, with 49.6% of Boston area renters “rent-burdened” by putting more than 30% of their income toward housing costs, more than 50,000 families on the waiting list for a Boston Housing Authority public housing unit, and a growing population of Black, Brown, immigrant, and low-income renters at risk of eviction, especially with the loss of recent eviction moratorium protections; *and*

WHEREAS: Decent and affordable housing is a social determinant of health, with well-documented direct and indirect effects on respiratory health, sleep quality, educational attainment, ability to access and maintain a suitable job, stress levels and feelings of isolation, mood, and many other aspects of wellbeing; *and*

WHEREAS: The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the public health need to ensure that all of Boston’s residents have access to decent and affordable housing, including deeply affordable housing for residents that are homeless or unstably housed, and a Housing-First approach for those facing other challenges; *and*

WHEREAS: Often the individuals most in need of housing are underrepresented in community planning and development processes, as documented in a 2018 study by Einstein, Palmer, and Glick, frequently leading across Massachusetts to the delay or altogether rejection of much-needed affordable projects; *and*

WHEREAS: The current Article 80 development review process outlined in Boston’s zoning code and administered by the Boston Planning & Development Agency does not reduce or streamline requirements for proposed all-affordable developments; *and*

WHEREAS: Such projects, once they win approval, are also then frequently delayed by lawsuits, a problem which the state’s new Housing Choice law also sought to tackle by requiring such lawsuits to post a significant bond; *and*

WHEREAS: A recent example of this problem is the legal suit against a joint project proposed by the Pine Street Inn and The Community Builders with strong community support, a lawsuit which delayed and threatened the financing of this much-needed supportive affordable housing development; *and*

WHEREAS: To reduce these kinds of lawsuits and prevent the use of parking requirements as a bad-faith effort to stall affordable housing projects, Councilors Bok and O'Malley filed "An order regarding a text amendment to the Boston zoning code with respect to parking minimums for affordable housing" which in 2021 was unanimously passed by the Boston City Council, approved by the BPDA Board and Zoning Commission, and signed by the Mayor on December 22, 2021; *and*

WHEREAS: This change in zoning will remove one barrier to building affordable housing in the City of Boston, but there remains a great need to explore the many other potential options for reasonable zoning relief for affordable developments, including an affordable housing zoning overlay such as those recently taken up in the cities of Cambridge and Somerville, other forms of density bonusing, the SMART Housing Program implemented by the City of Austin, Texas which includes an expedited review process for affordable project proposals, or the many other incentives for building affordable housing utilized by municipalities throughout the country; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss options for zoning relief for affordable projects including zoning overlays, density bonusing, and expedited Article 80 review processes for affordable projects, and that representatives from the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Boston Housing Authority, and the Boston Planning & Development Agency, along with housing advocates, developers of affordable housing, and the public, be invited to testify.

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