



March 28, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chairman House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St
Providence RI, 02903

RE: Bill Number: 7979 AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- LOCAL PLANNING BOARD OR COMMISSION

Dear Chairman Casey and Honorable Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

I am writing to express our support for House Bill 7979, which serves as enabling legislation to create a pilot program granting municipalities the authority to consolidate zoning and planning boards into a single entity. This innovative approach has the potential to significantly enhance efficiency and effectiveness in local governance, while also addressing challenges related to board member recruitment and participation.

The proposed pilot program outlined in House Bill 7979 represents a proactive and pragmatic response to the evolving needs of our municipalities. By providing local governments with the flexibility to combine zoning and planning functions under one board, the legislation offers a streamlined approach to decision-making and regulatory processes. This not only expedites the review and approval of development projects but also ensures a more cohesive and coordinated approach to land use planning and zoning regulations.

Importantly, House Bill 7979 does not impact the local appointment of board members, preserving the autonomy of municipalities in selecting individuals who best represent their communities' interests and expertise. Instead, it empowers municipalities to leverage existing resources more effectively and adapt to changing circumstances, such as difficulty in filling board vacancies or fluctuations in workload.

Furthermore, the requirement for agenda transparency stipulating that the agenda must clearly indicate the authority under which each application is being heard, ensures accountability, and maintains transparency in the decision-making process. This provision safeguards against any potential confusion or ambiguity regarding the jurisdiction of the consolidated board, thereby upholding the integrity of local governance.

We believe that House Bill 7979 has the potential to serve as a model for promoting efficiency, collaboration, and innovation in local government operations. By piloting this approach, municipalities can assess its effectiveness firsthand and determine its suitability for broader implementation based on their unique needs and circumstances.

In conclusion, we urge passage of House Bill 7979 and its efforts to empower municipalities with the authority to consolidate zoning and planning boards. This legislation represents a forward-thinking solution to improve local governance and ensure the effective management of land use and development activities.

On behalf of the League of Cities and Towns, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express our views.

Sincerely,

David M. Bodah
Associate Director

Cc: House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
Ernie Almonte, Executive Director, RILCT