

Comments for Public Hearing on HAB
28 January 2020
Phillip Earl Wilson

I am Phil Wilson, Planning Board member in the Town of North Hampton, Immediate Past Chair of the Rockingham Planning Commission, and former North Hampton Select Board member.

There are many good reasons to repeal the legislation that established the Housing Appeals Board.

I want to deal with one:

The economy of New Hampshire depends heavily on tourism and hospitality businesses, which in turn rely on the extraordinary attractiveness of our state. The institution of a statewide Housing Appeals Board jeopardizes this exceptionally valuable asset

New Hampshire is strikingly diverse. Whether on the seacoast, in the mountains, on the lakes or on the slopes, or in the wilderness, people come to New Hampshire for rest and recreation because it offers them what they want.

Far better than alternative destinations, New Hampshire has balanced natural beauty and cultural preservation with development.

Our state offers many and various amenities without having destroyed its diversity, natural beauty, culture, and heritage – in contrast, for example, with New Jersey, which is greatly overly developed with all the attendant bad consequences, and with Vermont which is far less developed but offers fewer, less diverse, and less attractive amenities.

The range of diverse amenities offered by our state may well be more of a New Hampshire Advantage than our tax structure.

This diversity is a direct consequence of the degree to which state government has delegated planning and zoning authority to individual municipalities. These municipalities have chosen to execute this authority consistently with conditions under which it was granted.

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New Hampshire's diversity resulted from municipalities' all over the state establishing zoning ordinances, site plan review regulations, and subdivision regulations that express and preserve the unique characteristics of their individual cities, towns, and villages.

I won't recite my list of representative diverse communities that have evolved and persisted in New Hampshire. I know each of you in this room could recite his or her own list that would be at least as illustrative as mine.

However, I shall say unequivocally that this remarkable diversity with the immeasurable value it brings to our economy, to our society and to our culture results and persists because local planning boards propose and legislative bodies enact master plans, ordinances and regulations uniquely suited to their communities, their histories, their cultures.

Planning boards strive to propose master plans, ordinances and regulations that preserve the character of their communities while complying with state laws and regulations and while enabling growth and development consistent with the community character they cherish.

I think of this task as similar to the way an oak tree grows over time: An oak tree starts as an acorn. It is quickly identifiable by its leaves as an oak, albeit it a tiny one. As it grows and develops, an oak can become extremely large and complex, but it is always identifiable as an oak tree. Being an oak is inherent in each of its cells, regardless of its dynamic growth over decades. This is the "trick" planning boards must manage for their communities.

Having control of master plans, zoning ordinances, site plan review regulations and subdivision regulations in the hands of local, duly elected or appointed boards made up of individual citizens who care deeply, ensures that the unique character of our diverse municipalities may be preserved as they grow and evolve over time.

Putting veto power over decisions of local boards and legislative bodies in the hands of a very small number of appointed individuals who lack in-depth knowledge of the state's many communities, ensures that over time our state's

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remarkable diversity will be homogenized to comport with standards, values and interest of an HAB, and as a result our attractiveness to tourists, as well as for ourselves, will be severely diminished.

We do not need to run this risk. We have sufficient “safety valves” for unduly restrictive ordinances and regulations and errant decisions by planning boards and boards of adjustment – even with respect to workforce housing.

An HAB is unnecessary, and it will ultimately be harmful to our economy, which is supposed to be the rationale for bringing it into being.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phil Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".