

East Norwalk
Neighborhood Association



March 14, 2022

Connecticut General Assembly
Planning & Development Committee – via email

RE: OPPOSITION TO HB-5429 An Act Concerning Transit Oriented Development

Dear Members of the Planning & Development Committee:

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association writes today in opposition to HB-5429.

Our Association represents the over 3,800 residential households in the 06855 area. Our neighborhood center is the East Norwalk Train Station and is already one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Norwalk, and was recently rezoned for TOD.

Residents of East Norwalk participated in the TOD study & plan for the ½ mile radius around the station. Our entire community is just over 2 square miles. In the end, the process was contentious, leaving most residents who participated feeling irrelevant and ignored. The primary feedback to City staff and consultants was this: provide economic development and new housing opportunities that are diverse in style & affordability, **but limit the scale and density of new development** and eliminate objectionable land uses.

Despite the final Plan and zone change being overwhelmingly rejected by our residential community as being too dense (structures & population) and also likely to create the “canyonization” of the primary gateway to our neighborhood, the TOD zone was ultimately approved by our Common Council. The anticipated volume of potential apartments here and those planned throughout our City will overwhelm City services, including our already understaffed police department, overcrowded schools, inadequate sewer facilities, and limited water supply. It will create even more pollution & vehicle emissions despite the well-intentioned but unachievable goal of a “car-free” society in this sprawling City and County. In the end, the only redeeming factors of the East Norwalk TOD development plan were 1) the requirement that any application over 2-1/2 stories would require a Special Permit with its eleven Special Permit Standards review that protect the quality of life in neighborhoods, and the subsequent required

Public Hearing and 2) that the majority of the TOD development zone would require an activated ground floor of retail, services, restaurants, etc. HB-5429 actually eliminates both the rigorous Special Permit review/public hearings *and* the desirable mixed use component, the later of which is a fundamental tenet of Transit-Oriented Development.

And so after reading the text of HB-5429 we were shocked to see it allows for 100% "as of right" development, with density as great as 15 units per acre, consisting of 100% housing. For East Norwalk, this means that the already overwhelming potential of 1,300 additional apartments under our current TOD plan would now become many thousands. We ask if the authors of HB-5429 have considered what the full build-out estimate is for East Norwalk specifically, and their analysis of the impact on our community.

The lobby group Desegregate Connecticut (?) asserts that TOD only impacts 25% of land around commuter stations, however their calculation is based on ruling out obvious non-buildable parcels: streets, highways, wetlands, etc. Therefore the real calculation to consider is that this Bill allows for maximum density of 100% of the buildable acreage.

We also feel it's important to note that proponents of this Bill routinely refer to opponents as NIMBY's and even have referred to residents as "racists". Those demeaning labels are insulting and inappropriate. In fact, we believe that it's the current Norwalk TOD plan itself that will result in unintended gentrification, will out-price any entry level renters and first time homebuyers, and will forever change the diversity we love. Our neighborhood is diverse now, in every socio-economic factor including race, age, gender, religion, income, education, etc.

Finally, our opposition to HB-5429 isn't because we don't support growth or affordable housing. We do. We oppose HB-5429 because it isn't well thought out & creates unintended consequences; because it eliminates the right for the public to be heard on developments of such scale and location as to significantly impact quality of life; because it will not result in meaningful "affordable housing"; because it exploits accepted TOD tenets as a means of achieving only one goal - to increase population; and because this cookie-cutter, one size fits all proposal erodes the rights of every municipality to determine land use, growth, and density.

Sincerely,
Diane Cece
President - East Norwalk Neighborhood Association Board