

Planning and Development Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5396 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ON
Title: CERTAIN LAND OWNED BY A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION.

Vote Date: 3/13/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill seeks to give religious organizations the option to construct affordable housing development on their property, subject to summary review.

The legislation is well-received by individuals in the religious community, and they are adamant about helping the state increase its affordable housing supply. This appears to be Connecticut's first encounter with legislation themed on the Yes In God's Backyard (YIGBY) motto, however, CT would be joining various other states in taking up similar legislation.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language adds a definition for "affordable housing deed restriction", allows a municipality to impose certain density, height, setback, and parking requirements on such developments, and clarifies that portions of real property not used for tax-exempt purposes shall not be exempt from local property tax.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

United Church on the Green, Member, Kristine Zalliger:

First Church of Christ, Member, William White:

St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Scott Wetzel:
First Church of Christ, Member, Lynn Weisel:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Marcella Vidoli:
Grace Lutheran Church, Member, Darrell Urban:
Temple Sinai, Member, Ellen Thomson:
Archdiocese of Hartford Catholic Church, Member, Norris Taylor:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Member, Anne Stanback:
St. Patrick St. Anthony Church, Member, Patricia Spring:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Housing Director, Thomas Smith:
First Church Congregational, Member, Rita Skog:
Church of Christ Congregational, Member, Karen Serio:
First Presbyterian Church, Pastor, Emily Scott:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Parishioner, Barry Ryan:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Member, Mike Rollins:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Senior Pastor, Edwin Perez Jr.:
Unitarian Universalist Society, Minister, Josh Pawelek:
First Church Congregational, Member, Jacque Paige:
First Church of Christ Congregational, Member, Jim O'Brien:
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Minister, Craig Nowak:
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Member, Cathi Nelson:
Temple Beth Tikvah, Rabbi, Danny Moss:
Granby Congregational Church, Member, Stephen Miltimore:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Member, Natalie Mendes:
Unitarian Universalist Society East, Member, Stanley McMillen:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Valerie McGuire:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Jeanne Mathews:
First Church of Christ, Member Matthew Marks:
Unitarian Society of Hartford, Member, Sherry Manetta:
United Church on the Green, Member, Emily Ma:
First Church of Christ, Member, Harmony Lovell:
Collaborative Center for Justice, Executive Director & Reverend, Teran Loeppke:
New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Associate to the Bishop, Mark Lingle:
First Church of Christ, Member, Steven Lewis:
Temple Sinai, Member, Judy Lederer:
Immanuel House, Board of Directors Secretary, Steven Law:
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Member, Cynthia Kozak Buckley:
Christ the King Parish, Member, Nancy Kiely:
Congregation Beth Israel, Member, Andrea Igdalsky:
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Member, William Hoelzel:
Trinity Church, Member, Donna Hannay:
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Member, Henry David Hall:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Member, Frank Hagaman:
Congregation of Beth Israel, Member, Sue Fulleton:
Congregation Mishlan Israel, Cantor, Sierra Fox:
Unitarian Society of New Haven, Member, Kenny Foscue:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Thomas Flynn:
First Church of Congregational, Member, Mari Flicker:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, JoAnne Fabry:

First Congregational Church of Woodbury, Pastor, Jacob Dell:
North United Methodist Church, Pastor, Andrea Davidson:
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Member, Alice Cruikshank:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Sister, Joann Compagno:
First Church of Christ Simsbury, Member, Mario Chiappetti:
United Church of Christ Glastonbury, Member, Lisa Chandler:
Westminster Presbyterian church, Member, Thomas Buckley:
United Church on the Green, Member, Josephine Buchanan:
First Church of Christ Congregational, Member, Linda Bronstein:
Unitarian Society of New Haven, Member, Roye Bourke:
Sisters of St. Joseph, Member, Elaine Betoncourt:
Westminster Presbyterian church, Member, Dan Bender:
Unitarian Universalist Society east, Member, Malcolm Barlow:
United Church on the Green, Member, Cheryl Balkcom:
Congregation Beth Israel, Member, Jane Zande:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Member, Sandra Wood:
United Church on the Green, Member, Shelley White:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Caroline Wetzel:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Virginia Weir:
First Church Congregational, Member, Virginia Vocelli:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Member, Jane Torrey:
Ministerio Nueva Creación, Member, Luz Berrios-Taveras:
Temple Sinai, Member, Deborah Stein:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Donna Spigarolo:
Spring Glen Church, Member, Ian Skoggard:
Good Neighbors Community Fund, Chair, Colleen Shaddox:
St. Mary's Catholic Parish, Member, Mary Ellen Schoonmaker:
First Congregational Church, Member, Katherine Salk:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Member, David Roozen:
Congregation B'nai Israel, Rabbi, James Prosnit:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Parishioner, Kate O'Mahony:
Universalist Church of West Hartford, Member, Joan Nicoll:
United Church on the Green, Member, Mindy Misener:
Granby Congregational Church, Pastor, Ellis Miller:
St. Mary's Catholic Church, Member, Holly McGrath:
First Church of Christ, Member, Sarah McCoy:
Emanuel Lutheran Church, Member, Stanley Maticka:
Hartford Monthly Meeting, Member, William Marut:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Member, Donna Manocchio:
Center for Leadership and Justice, Executive Director, Cori Mackey:
First Presbyterian Church, Member, Peter Haberlandt:
Trinity Episcopal Church, Reverend, Matt Lindeman:
St. Anthony Parish, Member, John Marshall Lee:
Spring Glen Church, Member, Hannah Leckman:
St. Patrick St. Anthony Church, Member, Paul LaMonaca:
Community Baptist Church, Member, Natasha Koonce Webster:
First Congregational Church, Reverend, Gini King:
South United Methodist church, Member, Jeff Kieft:
Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry, Executive Director, Michael Johnson:

St. Mary's Catholic Parish, Member, Mike Hoyt:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, John Hanrahan:
Trinity Episcopal Church, Member, Janet Hager:
**Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, Executive
Conference Minister & President, Darrell. L. Goodwin:**
Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, Lead Organizer, Jocelyn Gardner Spencer:
St. Patrick St. Anthony Church, Member, Francis Forand:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Margaret Joyce Flynn:
St. Jerome's Church, Member, Maureen Faulkner:
Westminster Presbyterian church, Pastor, Julie Emery:
St. John's Episcopal Church, Senior Warden, Errol Earle:
Spring Glen Church, Senior Pastor, Jack Davison:
First Church of Christ Congregational, Member, Robert Dakers:
Unitarian Society of New Haven, Member, Sally Connolly:
Hartford Monthly Meeting, Member, Teran Chapis:
St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Member, Maggie Casciato:
St. John's Episcopal Church, Member, Andrea Burr:
Temple Sinai, Member, Margaret Buchanan:
First Church of Christ, Member, Kevin Borla:
First Church Congregational, Member, Tanner Behboudi:
Triumphant Christian Church, Elder & Founding Member, John Battiste III:
St. Jerome Parish, Member, Barbara Bagnato:
Luann Barchie, Fairfield:
Marie Bravo, Hamden:
Nancy Brush, Granby:
Chuck Brush, Granby:
Gail Gagnon, East Hartford:
Judy Henry, Fairfield:
Maureen Lopes, Madison:
Ann Percival, Middletown:
Renee Tribert, Portland:
Nancy Urban, West Hartford:
Douglas Clark, Guilford:
Cass Shaw, Bridgeport:
Pamela Torsiello, West Hartford:
Ruth Hofstatter:
Wendy Kravitz:
David Liscinsky:
Jack O'Melia:
Margaret Teape:
Christine Graesser:
Nancy Kirchmyer:
Sheila Rietano:
Anonymous 992:

Support the bill and being "a part of the solution". They are proponents of the YIGBY (Yes! In God's Backyard) acronym, as it would advance efforts to help people make ends meet and utilize dormant land. They believe in the power of affordable housing and think it would benefit families with little to no income. It's said that this would uplift the areas particularly hit by instability, high rents, lackluster transportation, and hunger.

Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, Haley Stafford:

Supports the bill because the lack of available/attainable housing is a clear barrier to economic growth, workforce recruitment, and employee retention. The Chamber claims HB 5396 appears to offer an innovative approach to expanding housing opportunities.

Landmark Architect, President, Paul Pizo:

Speaks on behalf of his firm, which is in consultation with faith-based clients to develop excess land. He brings up a current project that is in its early stages, saying it would be reassuring to have a streamlined process for land use approvals.

Local Initiative Support Corporation Connecticut, Senior Executive Director, Jim Horan:

Note that religious organizations are experiencing lower attendance and that consolidating congregations has been on the rise. The group believes that summary review will also help to reduce bureaucratic delays to allow for a more expedient affordable housing solution, thus streamlining review. They conclude with a point on similar YIGBY legislation passing within recent history among other states.

George Mason University Mercatus Center, Senior Research Fellow, Charles Gardner:

Offers informational testimony on HB 5396. He explains how, in 2025, allowing religious educational and nonprofit organizations to build homes on their land was introduced in 14 other states. He believes the provisions in the bill to be clear and concise, adding that empowering religious organizations to build housing on owned land has received growing recognition.

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Chief Executive Officer, Sarah Fox:

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Director, Katie Jennings:

Journey Home, Coordinated Homeless Prevention Manager, Adriana Negron:

New Samaritan Corporation, President & CEO, Kelly McDermott:

References DataHaven's 2026 analysis, which revealed a 183% jump in unsheltered homelessness from 2022 to 2025. Another study looks at a 45% increase in just one year. They both say that affordability is the most common cause for entering shelter, noting reasons behind why communities of faith have come to help resolve the affordable housing shortage. They affirm HB 5396 doesn't eliminate review and find that it activates trusted community institutions and reduces delay.

Partnership for Strong Communities, Policy Director, Sean Ghio:

Supports the bill, stating YIGBY projects have the potential to produce hundreds of affordable homes. Mr. Ghio adds that faith communities have always been committed to service, and how they've identified housing as an extension of this mission.

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association, Government Relations Officer, John Guskowski:

Supports the intent of the bill, with suggested revisions like striking the broad language. He more closely aligns with a similar Massachusetts bill that provided "more certainty for municipalities and the development community."

Pro-Homes Connecticut, Program Director, Nick Kantor:

Supports the bill and applauds Connecticut's faith communities for being empowered to lift homelessness and stir change. He points to CA, MD, and FL as states that have seen successes through related bills.

Connecticut Apartment Association, Member & Volunteer, Lauren Tagliatela:

Recognizes a housing supply problem in-state, calling the bill a practical solution to zoning's traditionally lengthy, unpredictable, and costly ways.

Garden Homes Management Corporation, President, Richard Freedman:

Supports the bill and recommends the following modifications: certain exemptions from zoning restrictions on developments, standard of review in the event of denial/approval, and clearer language on adequate access to water/sewage infrastructure.

Stewardship Realty, Dan Panitz:

Supports HB 5396, which aims to advance the mission of religious organizations. Mr. Panitz notes that zoning designations in many municipalities have restricted affordable housing in low-density areas, resulting in shortages and unaffordable rentals.

Westminster Pres Church, GHIAA, Peter Benner:

Advocates for having faith communities turn their underutilized land into the foundation of a more equitable Connecticut. He favors the summary review, affordability, environmental safeguards, and historic preservation the bill promises.

Town of Stratford, Director of Economic Development, Jim Capra:

Supports the bill but believes there could be clearer provisions on monitoring.

Hammond Realty LLC, Leslie Hammond:

Considers the bill "possibly a good idea." He brings up an example of a nearby church that rents out property and believes the intention sounds great on paper.

Quaker Meetinghouse, Volunteer, Scott Albert:

Mary Schauer, Guilford:

Gary Vollinger:

Testifies in general support of the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Council of Small Towns, Executive Director, Betsy Gara:

Considers the legislation an override of local zoning. The Council makes clear that many properties owned by churches rest on small lots in historic districts – likely ill-suited for affordable housing development. Ms. Gara encourages compliance with PA 25-1, as sweeping housing reform has already passed.

Western Connecticut Council of Governments, Executive Director, Francis Pickering:

Provides general comments, although WestCOG concludes that the bill's structural tension, fiscal implications, and ownership-specific application warrant scrutiny and revision. They fear that, without an amendment, the bill risks litigation on safety review, infrastructure determinations, and constitutional neutrality.

Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, Executive Director, Samuel Gold:

Submit opposing testimony, noting that summary review steers religious organizations away from regulation. The Council believes this bill decreases the margins of benefit for secular organizations. Mr. Gold reiterates that the focus should be placed on general public housing.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Advocacy Manager, Zachary McKeown:

Has concerns with the language, finding it to circumvent local zoning. The organization believes in municipal summary review, but would prefer for such developments to go through normal zoning processes. He states that municipalities would be unable to prioritize public health and safety when the proposed restrictions deny consideration of density/building height.

CT Realtors, General Counsel, Jim Heckman:

Opposes the bill since summary review would bypass otherwise required community input and planning processes. The group questions why religious organizations would be given preference over non-profit, charitable, and privately owned land development.

First Congregational Church of Woodbury, Pastor, Jacob Dell:

Echoes the need for balanced review and preserved municipal authority, adding that local congregational involvement should be safeguarded.

Jerry Cincotta:

Saverio DeGiorgio:

Opposes the bill and its language. They find it to be vague, which could result in uncertainty and structural concerns. They hope for clarification that would preserve municipal authority, like reviewing applications and having oversight over safety, emergency response, and infrastructure capacity.

Robert Nyilas:

Opposes the bill because its affordable housing solutions create runoff problems at the local level. He adds that, as a result, HB 5396 would erode local zoning control, rush approval timelines, strain infrastructure, and threaten historic preservation.

Raul de Brigard, Higganum:

Opposes the bill and its context surrounding select terms. He underscores that “religious organizations” is absent from the statutory references and how, on one occasion, it’s loosely referred to.

Selina Rifkin:

Opposes the bill as it would open the door for abuse by real estate developers.

Mona Colwell:

Marilina Imperati:

State their opposition without any clarifying remarks.

Reported by: Zachary Robinson

Date: 3/20/26

