



Office of the Selectboard

7900 Williston Road
Williston VT 05495
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Ted Kenney, Chair
Town of Williston Selectboard
7900 Williston Road
Williston, VT 05495

March 20, 2024

Senator Christopher Bray
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources & Energy
115 State Street, Room 8
Montpelier, VT 05633

CC: Senator Ginny Lyons, Senator Thomas Chittenden, Senator Kesha Ram-Hinsdale,
Representative Erin Brady, Representative Angela Arsenault

Re: S. 311 and Designation Language that Excludes Williston from TIF District Access

Dear Chairman Bray,

On behalf of the Town of Williston Selectboard I'm writing about a concern Town has about language in [H.687](#) as passed out of the House Committee on March 14, and a remedy to address it as your Committee works through the companion bill in S.311.

The Selectboard's concern is with the transition and change to benefits for designated centers in H.687. As you may be aware, Williston contains two state-designated Centers, Williston Village and its Growth Center at Taft Corners. Language in H. 687 will repeal the existing Designated Centers program, process, and criteria, replacing it with a "stepped" designation system and recategorizing existing centers. Within this new language, Village Centers and Downtowns would continue to have the ability to establish Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts, but Growth Centers like Taft Corners, which today have that ability under 24 V.S.A. 76(a), slated for repeal, would no longer have access to this critical tool.

Growth Centers would become "Designated Neighborhoods," and it is in this section (5804) where the TIF benefit is omitted. Notably, the ability for Growth Centers to pursue TIF in the new designation system was retained in the draft of [H. 683](#), the original "Designations Reform" bill as introduced, whose language was otherwise mostly rolled into H.687.

Williston has spent the last few years and considerable resources [developing a Vision for its Growth Center](#) and reforming its zoning to better support its Comprehensive Plan goals, especially goals for meeting housing needs in the town and the region and for creating a walkable, mixed-use downtown at Taft Corners. This effort culminated in the single largest reform of zoning Williston has ever seen, the adoption of the [Taft Corners Form-Based Code](#) in October 2022. Among the significant reforms supportive of housing and general planning goals, that zoning:

- Is a form-based code with **no residential density limit** (up from 7.5/acre) and three stories added to height limit (up from 3 stories)



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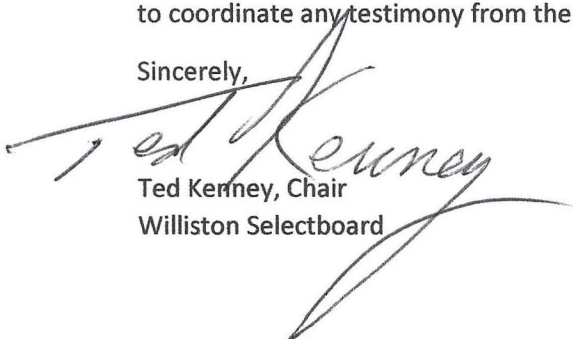
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- Includes an [Official Map](#) laying out future grid streets, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and future public parks and natural areas in the Growth Center (in an area where no public parks were ever planned for before)
- Reforms our "Growth Management" system and establishes [reasonable inclusionary zoning](#) provisions with a more rapid path to approval for projects that include cost-limited homes.

Since the approval of its Growth Center in 2006, Williston has made a significant and courageous effort to support the evolution of Taft Corners into a robust, economically diverse, walkable center that will meet housing needs through zoning reform. The results of those efforts may be greatly limited if the development and evolution of Taft Corners and the Town is not supported by critical public infrastructure including streets, water/sewer infrastructure and capacity, public parks, and stormwater treatment solutions. At this critical moment, Williston should continue to have as many "tools in the toolbox," including the ability to consider TIF in the future, to achieve these important and regionally-significant outcomes. The current language in H.687 would restrict Williston's growth center, an area that is positioned to support additional needed housing, from having access to consider TIF based on the designation change.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. Town staff are available to assist in answering any questions from the Committee. Please contact Town Manager Erik Wells at ewells@willistonvt.org to coordinate any testimony from the Town.

Sincerely,


Ted Kerney, Chair
Williston Selectboard