

**Testimony for New York Housing Conference
Kingston Common Council**

February 17, 2023

On behalf of the New York Housing Conference (NYHC), we would like to thank the Kingston Common Council for the opportunity to comment in support of the citywide rezoning proposed as part of the Kingston Forward Initiative. NYHC is a statewide, nonprofit, affordable housing policy and advocacy organization. As a broad-based coalition, our mission is to advance City, State and Federal policies and funding to support the development and preservation of decent and affordable housing for *all* New Yorkers.

We are also a founding member of a new statewide pro-homes coalition – [New York Neighbors](#) – with other organizations such as Enterprise Community Partners, New York State Association for Affordable Housing, Open New York, Regional Plan Association, and Up for Growth. 40 additional organizations have joined in support of addressing land use barriers to increase housing supply, including housing organizations active in Kingston like RUPCO.

New York is suffering from a long-standing housing shortage that is impacting every corner of our state. In the past decade, New York has created jobs at 3 times the rate of housing units. Over that same time Ulster County has permitted just [16.6 units per 1,000 residents](#). According to the Regional Plan Association, New York needs to build [over 800,000](#) housing units in the next decade to meet current needs and keep up with population growth.

This shortage is the driving force behind our affordability crisis causing rising rents, escalating homelessness, and a lack of homeownership opportunities for many working- and middle-class New Yorkers. In Kingston – which has seen significant population growth since COVID – the situation has gotten dire. The most recent rental vacancy study by the City of showed a vacancy rate of just [1.57%](#) - a result of the high demand for housing. Half of renters are [cost burdened](#) and average rent prices have [increased 26%](#) over the past 2 years. Further, according to the National Association of Realtors, home prices in Kingston have increased [over 55%](#) in the past 3 years – effectively locking out first time buyers.

Much of our housing shortage can be attributed to overly restrictive local zoning including minimum lot size and parking requirements and single-family zoning. These restrictions are meant to exclude renters, low-income households and people of color from having access to communities with the amenities, schools and proximity to high quality jobs that all of us need. They also negatively impact our economy by preventing localities from creating the diverse housing stock needed to respond to job growth and serve residents at many different stages of life.

Unfortunately, as a state, New York has fallen behind on this issue. We have seen statewide efforts to tackle exclusionary zoning across the [country](#) in California, Utah and Oregon and from our neighbors in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Connecticut. In her Executive budget, Governor Kathy Hochul proposed her Housing Compact – a three-pronged approach to build 800,000 units over the next decade and ensure participation from every community. The Compact would set growth targets for every locality with incentives for affordable housing, establishes a set of alternative preferred zoning actions, requires transit-oriented development along MTA rail stations and create enforcement mechanisms to encourage compliance. Importantly, localities that have already taken action would be exempt from these requirements.

We commend the Kingston Department of Housing Initiatives for spearheading this initiative and proposing bold updates to the zoning code that remove major exclusionary barriers. The proposed changes will address the housing supply shortage, put in place strong affordability requirements, expand homeownership opportunities, and incentivize sustainable, walkable neighborhoods. The proposal is already aligned with the Housing Compact and exactly the kind of planning our state needs to see to move forward. Kingston’s proposal is a model for equitable zoning that will enhance affordability, sustainability and a built environment that benefits residents and the community at large. This is a replicable model that other localities in NY should follow.

Kingston became a leader in tenant protections when you moved aggressively during Covid to protect renters from rising costs and became the first upstate municipality to adopt rent stabilization. Now is the time to address the underlying cause of the affordability crisis by making sure there are enough homes for existing and future residents. You can set an example for communities across the state again by showing smart, local growth is possible and beneficial to everyone.

Again, we write in strong support of the proposed citywide rezoning.