



News from **Assemblywoman Watson Coleman**

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WATSON COLEMAN, NEW JERSEY FUTURE ANNOUNCE BILL TO ‘BUILD NOT JUST HOMES, BUT NEIGHBORHOODS’

*Measure Would Incentivize Local Planning Decisions that Create
Affordable, Walkable, Environmentally Sound Development*

(TRENTON) – Assembly Majority Leader Bonnie Watson Coleman has introduced legislation to promote and incentivize local zoning initiatives that encourage the development of environmentally sound, economically diverse and easily accessible neighborhoods.

The measure – the Smart Housing Incentives Act (A-3632) – would provide planning grants to municipalities that create “Smart Housing Zones” that feature compact, energy-efficient residential developments near job centers, schools and transportation hubs. It stems from the work of the Smart Housing for Economic Prosperity Task Force, which New Jersey Future convened in 2007 to explore ways to increase the supply and variety of housing available to working and young families, professionals and the elderly.

“New Jersey needs to move away from past zoning decisions that have moved families further apart and farther away,” said Watson Coleman (D-Mercer). “Our state has historically been a patchwork quilt of close-knit, walkable and accessible communities. It’s time we return to the ideal of not just building houses, but building neighborhoods.”

“Groups came together from across many sectors to work on this initiative because they recognized the importance of developing housing opportunities for people with a range of incomes in locations that are good for the environment and the economy,” said New Jersey Future Executive Director Peter Kasabach. “New Jersey Future spearheaded the smart housing initiative because now is the time to lay the groundwork by planning for housing that is not only affordable but positions New Jersey for a green future, with lower carbon emissions and more efficient energy use.”

The measure is patterned after popular voluntary programs in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Municipalities would receive \$1,000 for each new zoned unit and \$4,000 for each new unit that is constructed. Also, towns would receive priority for state open-space preservation and road improvement programs that help address the impacts of growth.

“At no other time has New Jersey so badly needed a practical approach to help municipalities plan for housing that is affordable to a range of incomes and designed and located to be environmentally friendly,” said Chris Sturm, New Jersey Future’s Senior Director of State Policy.

(MORE)

Specifically, the bill aims to promote zoning decisions that create housing:

- Where state and regional plans support significant growth and where residents have easy access to transportation alternatives such as mass transit, among other considerations;
- In walkable, compact developments with public sidewalks and roads that connect to surrounding neighborhoods;
- That meets or exceeds Energy Star and water conservation standards;
- That allows towns to meet COAH requirements and address local housing needs by providing options for families in all income brackets.

Municipalities would be able to spend up to half of their grant on any capital or operating improvements related to providing services to new residents. The remainder would have to be spent on “green investments,” such as land preservation, park and public space improvements and energy-efficiency measures. The program also would authorize municipalities to adopt design standards and reduced or shared parking requirements.

Planning grants would be funded from existing programs and incentive grants would be paid for through a new state revolving fund replenished by developer fees and grants from the New Jersey Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The program would be administered by the state Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

The “Smart Housing Incentives Act” already has garnered endorsements from DCA Commissioner Joseph Doria and a coalition of business and nonprofit organizations, including: the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, the New Jersey Conference of Mayors, Homes for NJ and the New Jersey Apartment Association.

“This initiative offers towns practical tools and financial resources to address their housing needs,” said Diane Sterner, executive director of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey. “Every community has elderly residents who want to downsize, adult children who want to stay in the community they grew up in, and local employees like teachers and firefighters who should be able to live in the community they serve.”

“New Jersey’s economy depends upon a strong workforce, and the workforce needs housing it can afford,” said Michael Egenton, vice president for Environment and Transportation at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. “The Chamber supports the Smart Housing Incentives Act because it will create more opportunities to build homes in good locations near jobs and transportation alternatives.”

The bipartisan measure also is sponsored by Assembly members Mila M. Jasey (D-Essex) and David W. Wolfe (R-Ocean/Monmouth).

Further details are available on the New Jersey Future website: www.njfuture.org.

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