FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Critical Zoning Hearing in Open Communities Alliance Bid to Transform Woodbridge, CT’s Exclusionary Zoning

Woodbridge, CT (January 4, 2021) – Tonight at 6:00 pm before the Woodbridge, CT Plan and Zoning Commission, civil rights non-profit Open Communities Alliance (OCA) continues its effort to #OpenWoodbridge through its request for a change to the town’s long-standing exclusionary zoning policies. OCA anticipates public testimony and possibly a presentation from former gubernatorial candidate Timothy Herbst who is representing several neighbors opposed to more inclusive town zoning policies.

Information about joining the hearing is available here: https://www.woodbridgect.org/DocumentCenter/View/3578/Notice-of-Hearing-Continuation--November-30-2020-to-Special-Meeting-on-January-4-2021

“Modernizing outdated exclusionary zoning policies is the right thing to do – because it corrects decades of discriminatory and segregating policies – and the smart thing to do – because it will provide a critical boost to the state’s economy, in terms of job creation and increasing property tax revenue to towns across the state that desperately need it,” said Erin Boggs, Executive Director of the Open Communities Alliance. “Across the state, towns like Woodbridge have been hamstrung by a political paralysis that has prevented them from meaningfully following their state and federal obligations when it comes to zoning. The state has done nothing to enforce the law. We are working to change that.”

BACKGROUND

In November 2020, the Woodbridge Plan and Zoning Commission heard OCA’s presentation of its proposal to take a first step to bring Woodbridge’s zoning into compliance with state and federal laws by allowing small scale multifamily housing with affordable units in single family zones, as long as they conform to restrictions applied to single family homes (e.g. height, setback, and health and safety requirements).

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1 For more on the #OpenWoodbridge campaign, please visit, https://www.ctoca.org/openwoodbridge.
2 A recording of the hearing is available here: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=400031797906108&ref=watch_permalink.
This effort offers Woodbridge the opportunity to bring its policies into compliance while ending decades of housing segregation. To hold the town to account, Open Communities Trust, LLC has acquired property in Woodbridge and is seeking to build a small multi-family development with a mix of market rate and affordable rental units, a development model that is currently prohibited throughout the town. State law requires Woodbridge's zoning commission to respond to the proposed zoning amendment with a public hearing.

Under the town’s current zoning regime, only .2% of Woodbridge’s land area permits multifamily housing, and in such housing cannot be more than two units.

Filed by Open Communities Alliance and the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School, the application includes a detailed analysis of how the town’s zoning has illegally excluded low- and moderate-income families for decades.

As outlined in the application, Woodbridge’s multi-family ban creates a racially discriminatory impact that violates the federal and state Fair Housing Acts; perpetuates segregation in violation of the Connecticut Constitution; and falls far short of the Connecticut Zoning Enabling Act’s requirements to “encourage opportunities for multifamily dwellings,” ”promote housing for both low- and moderate-income households,” and to do so “for all residents of the municipality and the planning region.”

The impact of Woodbridge’s exclusionary zoning ripples out to the educational outcomes experienced by students enrolled in the Amity Regional School District and directly contributes to the opportunity gap. Woodbridge students experience extreme racial isolation, denying them the well-documented cognitive, cultural, and professional benefits of a diverse learning environment. Statewide, 25.8% of public school students are Hispanic and 12.8% are Black - but, in the Amity Regional School District, only 1.3% of students are Hispanic and 3% are Black.

With its large, single-family lots, Woodbridge pioneered the exclusionary zoning tactics in the 1930s that have helped make Connecticut one of the most segregated states in the country. Even as state and federal law has evolved, Woodbridge has repeatedly refused to expand housing opportunities for Black and Hispanic families who have disproportionately greater need for affordable, multi-family units. Not only has Woodbridge failed to meet the amended Zoning Enabling Act’s requirement for mixed housing, but the Town has increased its minimum lot size for single family homes, raising the barrier of entry for mixed housing. Year after year, Town officials have kept unlawful zoning restrictions in place.