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Good evening, members of the Board of Finance and Fiscal Committee of the Board of Representatives.

My first comment is in support of the dedicated housing staff positions in the Land Use Bureau, Operating Budget, pages 158-164.

The issues concerning housing in Stamford are well documented in the recently approved Housing Plan, which also documented the need for a centralized housing staff function in the Land Use Bureau. There are important housing programs in the city, including the BMR program, Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and the Commercial Linkage for housing program. In addition, there is the increasing need to effectively work with non-profit housing providers. Unfortunately, over the years, no City department has been tasked with coordinating these programs and potential resources, despite sporadic and partial efforts by Community development, and individuals such as Ben Barnes and more recently Ellen Bromley. While a few of these housing activities may be farmed out to another entity, for example, the maintenance of a centralized list of available below market rate housing, most of these planning, coordination, implementation, and monitoring functions should be housed in the Land Use Bureau with dedicated staff as proposed in the Mayor's Operating Budget, pages 158-164.

Separately, I wish to support the City's urban forestry activities, specifically, increased staff for the Forestry Division, Operating Budget, page 180. The Board of Representatives Resolution 4159, addresses the need to allocate increased funding to better "manage and care for trees on city property." On March 20, 2021, the Parks and Recreation Commission wrote to the Board of Finance, highlighting the value of trees. As noted in the letter, over the past three years, Stamford has removed three times more trees than were planted, despite the best efforts of Ron Markey and his limited staff. For comparison purposes, New Haven, hardly a wealthy city, has an urban forestry staff of double Stamford's, and an ambitious tree planting program. Both New Haven and Hartford have a dedicated urban forester position, while Stamford does not. So, at the very least, funding the Tree maintenance Specialist would be a modest but important addition to the Forestry Division.

To develop a proactive tree management program, the GIS related tools proposed in the Land Use Capital Budget request, page 51, should also be supported.

Thank you, Robin Stein