

Thank you Luc,

My name is Sam Naylor, I was one of the primary authors of the Report Luc mentioned, and I am a licensed architect and published housing researcher. I have worked on designing and building housing in New England and, like many advocates, am constantly frustrated by the lack of affordable, available, and delightful homes in our cities.

Legalizing mid-rise single-stair housing is fundamentally about modernizing our building code to allow for a type of multifamily building that is best suited to family sized apartments, small urban lots, and incremental missing middle development. Distinct from zoning reforms, this change looks at the state building code itself, an important aspect of building regulation that receives little attention, but has an outsized impact on limiting what kind of housing can be built.

Without looking at this change seriously we risk perpetuating a lagging pipeline of homes that are mostly delivered to us in bulky double-loaded corridor buildings. These types of buildings can be efficient machines for stacking small units, but they are ill-suited to our New England urban fabric. Meaning they both do not financially pencil on small lots, of which our cities are mostly made of — and, they do not fit into our urban character, which is historically more human scaled.

Single-stair buildings on the other hand, offer significant cost savings for construction on small and medium sized lots. They also allow for more flexibility in home layouts, encouraging apartments with windows on multiple sides, cross ventilation, and more natural daylight. These types of buildings are well-suited to smaller parcels, and they can be built incrementally by local developers without the need to consolidate multiple lots or wade through more onerous local zoning and permitting challenges that stall and slow larger projects. In our report we estimated that this could produce up to 130,000 new homes in Greater Boston alone.

And while the requirement for two stairs in most apartment buildings stems from precedent over 100 years ago, it is unnecessary for modern mid-sized buildings, which have been studied to be just as safe with one or two stairs. Mid-rise single-stair buildings are already legal in many parts of the US, and the vast majority of the world.

As opposed to other efforts which might circumnavigate the established methods by which the building code gets updated, this bill provides a measured and robust framework to study the issue of single-stair code change within the appropriate channels. It allows for a transparent process by which the issue can be evaluated against the Massachusetts specific building environment, and a process where a diverse set of stakeholders and experts can inform the change.

Finally, this issue is one of the top recommendations from the “Building for Tomorrow” report issued by the Governors commission on Unlocking Housing Production. I implore you to pass this bill so that we can begin the work of seriously studying this change in a collaborative and consensus driven process.

Thank you.