

Georgia has a housing crisis. Recent economic development wins like the Hyundai plant only amplify the need for quality workforce housing. Unfortunately, the state has teamed up with developers to undermine our communities' ability to choose for ourselves the quality of life we want.

House Bill 517 prohibits local governments from adopting -or enforcing- a broad range of standards in the design and construction of single and two-family homes. Everything from roofs to foundation structures would be reduced to a one-size fits all state standard. Bare minimum standards allow developers to cut corners - and support the growing trend of cheap corporate build-to-rent subdivisions.

Bill sponsors argue that local standards increase the cost of housing unnecessarily. Here's the thing: Affordable housing should be high quality and protect owners and renters from poor quality construction and predatory landlords. Standards promote a lower lifetime ownership cost through reduced repair, maintenance, and utility bills.

Housing is a complex issue. A variety of tools are needed to address the housing challenges Georgia communities face. Solutions for both homeowners and renters should respond to local context and community needs.

Across the state, our communities are not the same. Tybee Island, Americus, Greenville, Woodstock, and rural areas all have different needs. We have different wind speeds, soils, and flooding patterns. Local codes need to ensure buildings are built to be safe for residents and first responders. This bill undermines local governments' ability to protect the health and safety of their citizens.

Let's be clear, there are areas where zoning limits the construction of affordable housing. Those ordinances should be reformed to allow workforce housing - where it makes sense to the community. We need zoning that is right-sized for each community to preserve our neighborhoods while growing to accommodate more homes. But broadly preempting local control is counterproductive.

Missing middle housing - duplexes and triplexes, carriage houses and garage apartments - fit within Savannah's single family neighborhoods like Ardsley Park and Parkside because standards ensure that the building character is consistent with the homes next door. Those standards protect their neighbor's investment in their home. They bolster neighborhood stability.

Rather than address the corporate investors that are snatching up available housing, inflating markets, abandoning tenants, and earning profits at the expense of families, this bill muffles the voices of citizens in the local development process. There's a better way.

The Georgia Planning Association supports home rule and the rights of citizens to enact and administer local governance. Local residents and local leaders know how to solve local problems—because they see them up close. Especially when it comes to our homes, we should be listening to communities - not corporations.

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