

# Body mulls affordable housing rules

By **PATRICK R. LINSEY**  
*Hour Staff Writer*

**NORWALK** — The Zoning Commission heard arguments for and against a proposed mandatory affordable housing regulation at a public hearing Wednesday night.

City developers and business leaders are in favor of the plan, which requires the building of affordable “work-force housing” units with some new multi-family properties.

Attorney David Waters repre-

sents two Norwalk developers and said his clients are in favor of the regulation.

“This type of regulation is a good idea,” Waters said. “I think developers are generally socially conscious people.”

Waters added that a uniform affordable-housing standard lets developers know what to expect when planning a project.

Also speaking in favor of the regulation was Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce President

Edward J. Musante.

“Affordable work-force housing is a critical issue for Norwalk — especially for the business community,” Musante said. “Even today, our region is at full employment ... Many more jobs are on the way. Just look at developments that are on the drawing board.”

But several speakers questioned what other communities are doing to address the problem. While city planners estimate 10.4 percent of

**See AFFORDABLE, A7**

## THE HOUR

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2006 ■ PAGE A7

# Affordable housing rules

## From A1

Norwalk’s housing meets the state’s definition of affordable, the surrounding towns of Darien, Westport and Greenwich all have less than 5 percent.

“Why is Norwalk a dumping ground for affordable housing?” asked city resident David Park.

Park said he chafes at the term “work-force housing” employed by the commission.

“I live in a market-rate unit. Does that mean I don’t work?” he asked.

As now written, the Work-force Housing Regulation would require developers building multi-family housing developments with 20 or more units to price at least 10 percent of those units within reach of persons, or families, earning up to 80 percent of the state median income.

That translates to an income of up to \$37,156 for a single person, or up to \$71,455 for a four-person family, based on 2006 data by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Developers would be given a density bonus if they placed an additional 5 percent of on-site units within reach of those earning up to 60 percent of the

state median income, and yet 5 percent more in reach of those making up to 100 percent of the state median incomes.

Waters called for language restricting bonuses to on-site units to be broadened to include units within several parcels that comprise a development zone.

Former Zoning Commission Chairwoman Dorothy Mobilia spoke in favor of the affordable housing regulation. Also speaking in support were representatives from several not-for-profit foundations, including Joan Carty, executive director of the Stamford-based Housing Development Fund.

“I think you have an excellent framework here for starting an implementation process,” Carty said. “There are always people who are priced-out if they don’t have this kind of opportunity.”

In the end, the commission sent the regulation back to committee to consider proposed modifications.

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