



To: Hopkinton Planning Board
From: Hopkinton Economic Development Committee
CC: Hopkinton Housing Committee, Hopkinton Select Board, Hopkinton Conservation Commission, Hopkinton Open Space Committee

Date: November 1, 2023

Re: Proposed Zoning Amendments

Hopkinton's 2022 Master Plan states that "an adequate and sufficient supply of housing options that meet a range of needs, from single adults, young families, to older residents, is important to ensure that Hopkinton remains a viable place to live in the years to come. Housing also plays a vital role in economic development, notably in the "live/work/play" concept of encouraging businesses to stay in and potentially relocate to Hopkinton" (*Hopkinton, NH Master Plan, 2022, p. 2.1*).

There is broad consensus that housing is a crisis in New Hampshire – locally, regionally, and statewide. This crisis impacts economic development. Most noticeably, in Hopkinton and surrounding communities, we do not have enough homes to house our workforce. The evidence is in the number of open positions and 'Help Wanted' signs, and businesses cutting back on hours. It is also evident in the scant number of available homes, particularly a lack of homes or housing starts that could reasonably be considered modest, entry level, or affordable.

The EDC's primary focus is to retain, expand, and attract local businesses. We agree with economic development professionals across the nation that workforce housing is one of, if not the most, important factor in supporting our businesses.

As the EDC looked to address our workforce housing constraint, we confronted Hopkinton's complex and often confusing zoning rules. History suggests that our zoning regulations, in their current form, may be an impediment to a "sufficient supply of housing options that meet a range of needs."

Recognizing the need for housing to support Hopkinton businesses, the EDC considered and proposed amendments to our zoning rules to encourage a wider array of housing development, in keeping with the Master Plan goals. We believe our amendments, if approved, would 1) help make housing more affordable to a wider array of townspeople, including local workers and seniors; 2) encourage highly desirable mixed-use and higher density construction, which is shown to generate more property tax revenue per acre than

single family homes; 3) preserve our rural landscape by concentrating housing and reducing pressure on wooded and agricultural land; and 4) create more straightforward and clear zoning permitting to enable housing types other than large, single-family homes on large (2.5+ acres) lots.

In short, the changes proposed by the EDC support the Town's Master Plan and its economic development goals. We know these changes are not a silver bullet to our housing and economic challenges, but we believe that they are a key piece of a complex puzzle.

As has been made clear at recent Planning Board and Housing Committee meetings and hearings, our residents have a lot of questions and concerns. Further, the relatively new Housing Committee needs more time to digest and formulate a response to the recently completed Housing Needs Assessment. While the EDC proposed an immediate solution to an immediate problem, we recognize that Townspeople are calling for a wider, more coordinated and comprehensive effort to understand the housing/economy problem, and to understand how our current zoning regulations encourage or prevent our community from reaching the vision and goals established in the Master Plan.

With this in mind, the EDC has voted to temporarily withdraw its zoning amendments in favor of working with the Planning Board, Housing Committee, and other residents and stakeholders on creating consensus around one or more zoning solutions. We took this vote with regret, knowing that our local workers need local homes *now*, and town businesses are hurting for staff *now*; knowing that continued low-density home construction cuts down more trees, consumes more agricultural and forest land, produces fewer homes, and creates less additional tax revenue than alternatives; and knowing that without meaningful amendments, our zoning codes are unlikely to support the Master Plan's objectives.

Furthermore, as part of the Economic Development Committee's established strategic objectives and goals, we will continue to undertake efforts and strategies to increase the availability of a variety of home types, including smaller, more reasonably-priced places to live for local workers, in support of Hopkinton's business community.

Rural character, a phrase frequently repeated in Hopkinton's Master Plan, is more than dispersed, set-back farm houses. Rural character is supporting our local businesses, ensuring that our seniors can age in the community, and finding homes for our young people who want to stay or return. Rural character is also the manner by which our town comes together to address shared challenges. With our vote to temporarily withdraw the zoning amendments, we believe we are preserving Hopkinton's local character – not by maintaining the status quo – but by creating time and space for the Town to reach greater consensus around our shared challenges and solutions we can agree on. We look forward to working with the Planning Board, Housing Committee, and others to do just that.