



PLANNING BOARD

Report to Town Meeting

**Article 15. Zoning - Fraternity Residence (R-F) District Dimensions (Planning Board)**

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To see if the Town will vote to amend the Standards and Conditions for Section 3.326, to delete the ~~lined-out~~ language and add the language in ***bold italics***:

~ SEE ATTACHMENT ~

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Recommendation

The Planning Board voted 5-0 (4 members absent) to recommend that Town Meeting adopt Article 15.

Background

On June 10, at the recommendation of the Planning Board, the 2013 Annual Town Meeting adopted changes to the dimensional regulations for buildings in the Fraternity Residence (R-F) District that would allow the permit granting body to modify three dimensions under a Special Permit—building coverage (the % of a lot covered by buildings), lot coverage (the % of a lot covered by buildings plus impermeable surfaces), and maximum height.

As the Planning Board's report to Town Meeting on that article indicated:

The Planning Board believes that reasonable and responsible efforts should be made to encourage new private student housing in appropriate areas. Development on the private properties in the R-F District would not require UMass participation. A "social dormitory, or similar use" is permitted under a Site Plan Review approval by the Planning Board in the R-F District. Given the strong demand generated by the student housing market and the numerous student housing developers exploring Amherst, new private student housing might occur relatively quickly on R-F District-zoned property, if the dimensional regulations for the R-F District were amended to allow such development to proceed in a manner appropriate to the setting.

In response to the June amendment, an application was filed for a new private student housing on

one of the two private properties in the Olympia Drive R-F District—the former fraternity property. After a public hearing on August 21, and extended deliberations on September 11 and Oct. 2, the Planning Board voted to grant Site Plan Review approval for the new building, with conditions. Under a Special Permit, the Planning Board approved significant modifications to several dimensional requirements after considering the context of the site, the character of existing buildings, the requirements of the type of use being proposed, and potential future development of the neighborhood, most of which is owned by the Commonwealth.

When constructed, Olympia Place will be a 4 and 5 story, 75 unit apartment-style dormitory of the kind most recently built by UMass itself as North Apartments and as part of the residential component of the Commonwealth College. The building will have the potential to accommodate as many as 250 residents.

The Olympia Place project was made possible because the 2013 Annual Town Meeting approved the use of footnote a. of Table 3, Dimensional Regulations, allowing modification of the three dimensional requirements previously mentioned. The Planning Board believes that the building and the modifications granted to make the new building possible are completely appropriate to the site, and represent a model for future development in the R-F District. However, the dimensional modifications needed were quite significant. The Planning Board believes that dimensional requirements which better match the buildings desired and most likely to be proposed in the R-F District should be available for future projects.

Accordingly, Article 15 proposes to amend the dimensional regulations for the R-F District to reflect the needs of likely and desired future development in that district, whether on the single remaining R-F private property on Olympia Drive or on one or more of the three R-F private properties on North Pleasant Street surrounded by the campus. To quote again from the Board's report to the 2013 Annual Town Meeting regarding that warrant's Article 34:

The dimensional regulations of the R-F District represent an obstacle to both the relocation of fraternities/sororities, and to the development of other forms of student housing. The regulations assume buildings of strictly "house-like" residential proportions. At one time, this might have been appropriate for the Olympia Drive area, but it has never reflected the appropriate scale and potential of the on-campus properties. The nearest residential buildings are at an entirely different scale, and include the older 5-6 story dormitories on Clark Hill Road or in the Northeast Residential Area.

Each of the proposed new dimensions are used in other zoning districts in Amherst, and they correspond closely to the scale of the Olympia Place building and those buildings on-campus whose design it emulates.

#### Public Hearing

The Planning Board held a public hearing for Article 15 on Wednesday, October 16. The Zoning Subcommittee presented the article and its unanimous recommendation that the Planning Board

support the amendment.

There was no public comment.

After further discussion, the Planning Board voted 5-0 (4 members absent) to recommend that Town Meeting adopt Article 15.