



TOWN HALL
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

HOUSING & SHELTERING
COMMITTEE
(413) 259-3040
(413) 259-2410 [Fax]
planning@amherstma.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: Amherst Town Meeting
FROM: Housing and Sheltering Committee
RE: Article 21 (Affordable Housing Property Tax Incentives) and Article 22 (Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw)
DATE: April 27, 2015

The Housing and Sheltering Committee strongly supports Article 21 (Affordable Housing Property Tax Incentives) and Article 22 (Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw). The committee's support is founded in the numbers and data presented in the Housing Production Plan (2013) and the Amherst Housing Market Study (2015), as well as the belief that this is the right thing to do to help Amherst remain a vibrant, diverse community. The Housing Production Plan clearly states that Amherst is losing families and young professionals, and needs a significant amount of new housing to meet the demand for a range of income levels. The Housing Market Study indicates that Amherst has a strong non-student housing market, but that three major market segments—1) modest income renter households, 2) market rate rentals, and 3) market rate owners—will struggle to find adequate housing until there are regulatory changes to help increase the supply of housing to meet the demand. The Housing Market Study emphasizes that the Town needs more housing for non-students and students alike; these two market segments are critically important to health of the community.

Both the Housing Production Plan and Housing Market Study highly recommend revising the inclusionary zoning bylaw to help increase the supply of affordable units when market rate units are also constructed. The current inclusionary zoning bylaw is not effective at generating affordable units, missing an opportunity to integrate mixed income housing when new developments occur in Amherst, particularly in the town center and village centers. The Housing and Sheltering Committee supports the proposed inclusionary zoning bylaw and tax incentives because it would produce affordable housing alongside market rate units, whether that is in an apartment in a village center or a mixed use building downtown.

The committee views these two articles as one tool that the community can use to continue to increase its amount of affordable housing. There are other policies, incentives and regulations that the Town will continue to examine and implement, and when these are all used comprehensively, will encourage families, young professionals, individuals and others to remain in Amherst. If in the future the inclusionary zoning bylaw needs to be tweaked to account for shifts in the housing market, then it can be changed. The Planning Board and community has spent considerable time and resources developing a bylaw that is a significant improvement from the existing regulation. It may not be perfect and have unintended consequences, but this would be better than relying on the current bylaw.

For years Amherst has been a leader in affordable housing, creatively using local resources to leverage state and federal support for the creation and preservation of low and moderate income units. The Town has maintained 10 percent of its housing as affordable according to the State's 40B Comprehensive Permit Regulations. This percentage, however, is not a community goal stated in the Master Plan or housing studies; it is a statutory requirement. The housing studies clearly indicate that even while the town has maintained its 10 percent of affordable housing, it has lost families and individuals who are vital component of a community. Articles 21 and 22 will encourage the development of housing that is needed to sustain community.

In September 2014 the Housing and Sheltering Committee wrote a memorandum to the Planning Board and consultant Judi Barrett encouraging that they craft a revised inclusionary zoning bylaw that will actually generate affordable units without deterring development in the town center and village centers. The committee emphasized that the development of mixed-income housing is integral to a vibrant, economically secure community. It acknowledged that it is difficult to craft a perfect bylaw that can accommodate all sizes and types of development, and that inclusionary zoning has not generated many affordable units in Western Massachusetts. Nonetheless, it recommended a bylaw tailored to Amherst that is straightforward and able to be implemented and has a simple percentage requirement for affordable units. The committee also recommended a non-zoning incentive because the real estate market in this region is not strong as Boston or other areas that can develop affordable units through inclusionary zoning without subsidies. Articles 21 and 22 meet the committee's recommendations, offering the community an opportunity to continue to be a leader in housing.