

## Building plans for downtown Amherst

Ana Caicedo <ana@caicedo.us.org>

Wed 3/24/2021 9:12 AM

To: Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>; **Town Council Members** <towncouncil@amherstma.gov>; **Town Manager's Office** <townmanager@amherstma.gov>; Bockelman, Paul <bockelmanp@amherstma.gov>

I am writing to express my dismay at the plans underway for the construction of more hulking, overpriced student apartment buildings in downtown Amherst. I am a resident of Leverett and work at UMass and have been very saddened to see how the character of downtown Amherst has been eroding with the construction of Kendrick Place and One East Pleasant Street.

Downtown Amherst used to be the place where my husband I would take the kids for a good meal, store browsing, and a pleasant stroll. Now, we would much rather head to Northampton or Turners Falls, which have downtowns that are much more walkable and with more interesting and family friendly store offerings. The demise of the Carriage shops was a big loss for the family appeal of downtown Amherst, and the two new buildings (Kendrick Place and One East Pleasant Street) make the whole area unpleasant by crowding the sidewalk space and blocking the sun. Moreover, having the downtown area basically become an extended student dorm for UMass does not make downtown a pleasant place to visit. I am saddened that Amherst has decided to favor the interests of temporary students with no long-term interest in the town's well-being, at the expense of permanent residents of the area.

When I accepted my position at UMass 14 years ago, part of the appeal of the area was the charm and family friendly features of downtown Amherst. I hope the town will reconsider their continuous erosion of these features, which ultimately may have an impact on the University's ability to attract talented workers.

Best Wishes,

Ana Caicedo  
Leverett, MA

**The Gazette article "Petition seeks moratorium on large-scale building projects in Amherst" misconstrued a few points:**

Ira Bryck <ira@irabryck.com>

Wed 3/24/2021 12:49 PM

To: Bockelman, Paul <bockelmanp@amherstma.gov>; Town Council Members <towncouncil@amherstma.gov>; Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>; Brestrup, Christine <brestrupc@amherstma.gov>

**To the Amherst officials involved in the zoning and planning process:**

**The Gazette article "Petition seeks moratorium on large-scale building projects in Amherst" misconstrued a few points:**

- The term "slum-like" referred to the unwanted consequences of allowing many apartment buildings and triplexes in the neighborhoods around downtown. Planning board and town council members have derided "character of the neighborhood" as a "dog whistle" and we are pointing out that "multi-family dwelling" has been used as a euphemism for overcrowding in inner cities. Nobody doesn't want to live in a neighborhood that isn't overcrowded.
- There is a widespread and growing discontent with the 5 story apartments, designed for and marketed to students, and there's no end in sight to more of those. A moratorium would pause a moving train, to make urgent course corrections.
- Planners and landlords have said out loud that it's very difficult to attract the stores, service businesses, and restaurants that the public wants and needs; and that dense residential is a much more accessible target, so that's what's being designed. That is not good enough. Dense residential residents want nice things too.
- People against these kinds of projects and against "unlocking" neighborhoods for much densification are not against development; they just want it to be in scale with the town and downtown and needs of all.
- The current projects have displaced businesses. Which is why the new 5 story building overwrote empty buildings and a parking lot. They were emptied out for this project.

- There have been over 1000 “new beds” added since the aging housing production plan was made. Plus, UMass is building more dorms (finally) and college age demographics, plus remote learning trends, predict a drop in college populations. Do we have a housing shortage? Where is the data?
- Community members who are opposed to what is happening downtown, and the proposed zoning changes being simultaneously being “explored” and “promoted” would LOVE more public input, also a mainstay of Smart Growth and the town’s Master Plan
- There are several kinds of development that are not blocked by a moratorium, including the several methods of creating additional dwelling units already allowed, but rarely utilized, in the RN neighborhoods near downtown, characterized by small plots. Maybe better advertising by the town, of what is already possible?

I do not know anyone who supports a moratorium who does not want to move on, after the town officializes how affordability, design, diversity, setback, height, character, attracting appealing businesses will happen.

Sincerely

Ira Bryck

Amherst, Mass

please accept this updated version of my letter, sent earlier today - thank you -  
Ira Bryck

Ira Bryck <ira@irabryck.com>

Wed 3/24/2021 4:52 PM

To: Bockelman, Paul <bockelmanp@amherstma.gov>; Town Council Members <towncouncil@amherstma.gov>;  
Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>; Brestrup, Christine <brestrupc@amherstma.gov>

The article "Petition seeks moratorium on large-scale building projects in Amherst" misconstrued a few points (in the order the article listed them):

- The term "slum-like" referred to the unwanted possible consequences of allowing many apartment buildings and triplexes in the neighborhoods around downtown. Planning board and town council members have derided "character of the neighborhood" as a "dog whistle" and we are pointing out that "multi-family housing" has also been euphemistic for deliberate overcrowding in inner cities. Character of neighborhoods in Amherst will be preserved, including inclusion.
- There is a widespread and growing discontent with the 5 story apartments, designed for and marketed to students, and there's no end in sight to more of those. A moratorium would pause a moving train, to make urgent course corrections.
- Planners and landlords have said out loud that it's very difficult to attract the stores, service businesses, and restaurants that the public wants and needs; and that dense residential is a much more accessible target, so that's what's being designed. That is not good enough. Dense residential residents want nice things too.
- People against these kinds of projects and against "unlocking" neighborhoods for much densification are not against development; they just want it to be in scale with the town and downtown and needs of all.
- The current projects have displaced businesses. Which is why the new 5 story building replaced empty buildings and a parking lot. Several going businesses were displaced for this project.
- There have been hundreds of "new beds" added since the aging housing production plan was made. Also, UMass is

building more dorms (finally) and college age demographics, plus remote learning trends, predict a drop in college populations. Do we have a housing shortage? Where is the data?

- Community members who are opposed to what is happening downtown, and the proposed zoning changes being simultaneously being “explored” and “promoted” would LOVE more public input, also a mainstay of Smart Growth and the town’s Master Plan
- There are several kinds of development that are allowed during a moratorium, including the several methods of creating additional dwelling units already allowed, but rarely utilized, in the RN neighborhoods near downtown, characterized by small plots. Maybe better advertising by the town, of what is already possible, would accomplish the goal of owner occupied houses becoming a duplex, or tiny houses in yards, also allowed.

I do not know anyone who supports a moratorium who does not want to move on, after the town officializes how affordability, design, diversity, setback, height, character, attracting appealing businesses will happen.

Sincerely

Ira Bryck

Amherst, Mass

Pam Rooney  
42 Cottage Street

Mixed Use Building definitions and preliminary Design Guidelines - Comments

1. Our Mixed-use building zoning is the Golden Goose for developers. I appreciate that opportunity now exists to help it work hard for the benefit of Amherst in creating livable streets, stronger town center experiences, and affordable housing opportunities.
2. Design Guidelines – best to have the community consensus in hand but understand the urgency of establishing baseline guidelines now.
3. Facades and Entries – located along the *recommended* (not minimum) front setback line to reinforce the street/sidewalk edge. See rationale below on maintaining “Town space”.
4. Glazing - Glazing should be subdivided to reinforce the texture and scale of close-up, pedestrian-friendly, interactions with the building.
5. The planting of street trees is encouraged **required**.
6. Project Open Space” – suggest wording:
  - *Project open space to reflect façade setbacks and characteristics of neighboring buildings and rhythm of street furnishings. NOTE – cannot use One E. Pleasant and 22 E. Pleasant as “neighboring context” since they did not contribute appropriate project open space.*
  - Establish setbacks from *curb*, since property lines vary [in many areas of BG, a 20’ front setback from *property line* is not appropriate]
  - Maintain “Town Space” of 18’-20’ – the curb to back edge of sidewalk – as the minimum setback. See description of Town Space” below.

In the image below, a graphic from Aurora, CO’s design guidelines, four components of their streetscape are identified.



**Frontage|Throughway|Furnishing|Curb**  
**Fig. 4 Example of Roadside Zone**

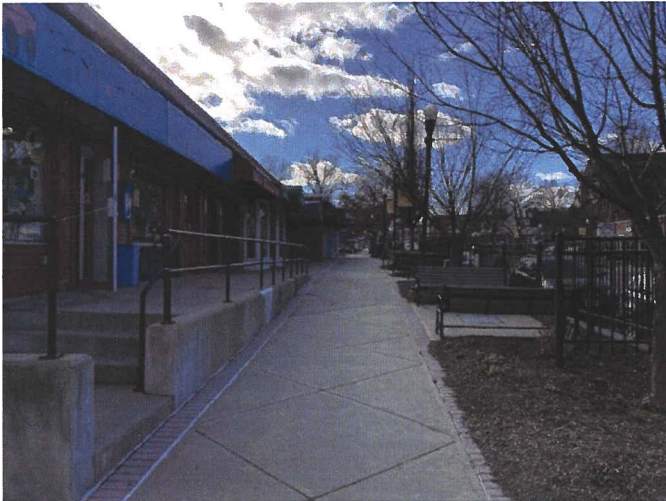
For Amherst, our “Town Space” would be the Curb + Furnishings + Thoroughfare. This distance from curb to back of sidewalk/thoroughfare, is typically ~18’-20’, and includes tree beds and seating plus the full 8’-10’ of sidewalk.

**Project Open Space** (called “Frontage” in this image) is the distance between the thoroughfare/“Town Space” and the façade. It is a bonus public use space; it could include seating plazas and landscaping. The remainder of Project Open Space is to be placed to benefit

primarily inhabitants of the building, and also patrons of the retail establishments. Project Open Space does not include required bicycle storage, utilities, trash & recycling areas.

Outdoor amenities in the project open space such as benches, sitting walls, and planters should be carefully located to not interfere with the continuity of the sidewalk and the visual connection to interior uses. Their use is encouraged to provide benefits to residents of the building as well as use by the public.

Along the ToyBox/Zanna's block, a strong existing pattern of "Town Space" is firmly established. The ~20' from curb to back of sidewalk (where the handrail is) offers an attractive pedestrian experience.



A minimum 20' Town Space should be reinstated north of Archipelago's One E. Pleasant, as a requirement for *any* new development. Sadly, the opportunity to continue the engaging street experience was completely missed at One E. Pleasant, instead allowing one of the poorest examples of urban site planning I've ever seen in over 40 years of professional experience.

However, another positive example of desirable public use space is the

Cowles Lane to Hallock Street block; the curb to façade distance there provides 20' of Town Space plus 13' of great outdoor activity zone – Breugger's patio, Henion bench and flower bed, and Share's outdoor seating.

## Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw

Anita Sarro <asarro05@gmail.com>

Tue 3/30/2021 9:53 PM

To: Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>

Dear Members of the Planning Board,

I want to express my strong support for the proposal before the Planning Board to expand the scope of the inclusionary zoning bylaw. The Planning Board recently heard the list of building projects that have already received permits, some as a matter of right. Only a few had any affordable units at all. The proposed change would begin to address this inequity. This is a small but important step to fulfill the purpose of inclusionary zoning and will start to address the need to increase Amherst housing stock that is affordable and accessible.

However, I would ask that the Planning Board reconsider retaining the provision that allows for Special Permit modification if four or more units are required. The provision allowing off-site units could lead to segregating low to moderate cost housing. Worse yet, the Special Permit process would allow a developer to opt out of providing half the units entirely by making the required payment. Neither of these options further the intent or the spirit of the inclusionary bylaw.

I urge the Planning Board to vote unanimously to expand the scope of the bylaw and to send it to the Town Council with a strong endorsement to approve it promptly.

Thank you,  
Anita Sarro  
39 Chapel Road, Amherst



## Affordable Housing

Ruth Levy <ruthlevy6@gmail.com>

Wed 3/31/2021 8:45 AM

To: Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>

Hello,

As an Amherst resident, I support action to provide affordable housing.

Thank you,

Ruth Levy

375 Pelham Rd

Amherst, Ma

**Please support the Planning Board's draft to require 20% of affordable housing on any new development**

Lissa Pierce Bonifaz <lpiercebonifaz@pvpa.org>

Wed 3/31/2021 2:52 PM

To: Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>; McGowan, Janet <janetmcgowan30@comcast.net>

Dear Planning Board,

I want to commend you for putting forth such a powerful bylaw amendment to require that anytime a developer or property owner build 10 housing units that 1 of them be affordable (80% of AMI).

For too long, Amherst has only required this under limited circumstances. The 10% requirement only applies when a special permit is involved that asks for greater building or lot coverage, another floor or height greater than 2 feet. It does not cover site plan review permit projects which are very common. This has led to many buildings going up without any affordable apartment units.

Fortunately, your Planning Board has just put together a draft zoning amendment that makes sure that anytime 10 more units are built there will be 1 affordable unit, no matter the kind of permit required.

I want to urge the passing of this amendment so that we can secure that there is enough affordable housing for those who need it living in Amherst.

Sincerely,

Lissa

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Lissa Pierce Bonifaz, Ph.D  
*She/her/hers*  
English Language Program Coordinator  
Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School (PVPA)

**\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\***

**All electronic messages sent from Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School are archived in conformance with Massachusetts and federal Public Records law.**

## Inclusionary Zoning proposal

David Sloviter <davidsloviter@aol.com>

Wed 3/31/2021 3:44 PM

To: Planning Department Email <planning@amherstma.gov>

Cc: bestrupc@amherstma.gov <bestrupc@amherstma.gov>; **Town Council Members**  
<towncouncil@amherstma.gov>

I am writing in support of the proposed Inclusionary Zoning amendment before the Planning Board. I urge you to adopt the amendment and help preserve some of the best of Amherst.

David Sloviter

194 Lincoln Ave.

Amherst, MA. 01002

[davidsloviter@aol.com](mailto:davidsloviter@aol.com)

215.796.0252 mobile