

Durham Housing Taskforce Proposal

Public Hearing

November 30, 2022

To: Durham Planning Board

From: Malcolm Sandberg

Langley Rd., Durham

Over the past 50 Years Durham's zoning ordinance has been evolving carefully to allow for growth while also protecting resources and community values of sustainability and natural beauty.

Our current zoning ordinance has protected and preserved our rural character, our waterways and shorelands, our woodlands and ecosystems. Absent any evidence of a need to make changes to the current zoning ordinance, the sweeping changes put forth in this draft amendment obliterate our existing zoning density controls that have protected the town from over-development.

Frankly, I am shocked that this zoning change proposal was advanced to a public hearing by the Planning Board without, first, a thorough discussion of the purpose of and the pros and cons of the sub-committee's draft. This proposal was prepared by a small group, appointed by the Town Council, made up of Durham residents and non-residents having "interests in Durham's housing future". Two members of the committee are non-residents of Durham. The committee was charged to, 1, "Conduct a housing needs assessment, including price point, type, and supply"; and, 2, "Develop long-term strategies regarding housing", among other assignments. The Council's charge did not include the drafting of broad revisions to the current zoning ordinance. I would like to know what the specific objectives of the Committee are and why the Planning Board feels this unsolicited draft is worthy of being advanced. I would like to know, specifically, which aspects of the proposal individual members of the Board support, or do not support, and why. It does not suffice to simply say "Yea" or "Nay" to the entire draft. After you deliberate and are prepared to justify your draft, then it will be time to hold a public hearing if the Board feels the amendments are justifiable.

The sub-committee's draft proposal (now apparently your proposal) allows for more and higher density housing in virtually every zone in Durham. It diminishes

lot sizes in all the residential zones, it permits more-dense sub-divisions and reduces preserved open space. It allows residential development in the industrial zones that were specifically established to broaden the tax base with minimal impact on our schools and infrastructure. All these changes are before us (and you) without data to justify any of the specific proposed changes.

What is missing is any kind of demographic analysis, housing needs assessment or any kind of impact analysis that relates specifically to Durham's unique situation as a university community and a member of a three-town school district. For example: How many new domiciles are needed in Durham? How will the proposed amendments impact the school system? How will increased development impact the police department, fire department and public works department? How will it affect the tax base and the tax rate? How will it affect the character of the town? There is no defined objective, no vision, no discernable plan, no justification, and no recognizable community benefit attached to this proposal. Opening the gates to wholesale development and increased residential density, absent compatibility with our Master Plan, will do us more harm than good.

We have recently allowed for 2000 or more additional beds in Durham. Trends for university matriculation are apparently heading lower. A detailed analysis may reveal that we already have adequate housing stock and that there is no need to modify the zoning regulations at all! If the goal is to ensure that Durham provides "affordable housing", let us first determine how (or if) you can guarantee housing affordability in a university community. Then determine what is "affordable housing" and then propose zoning changes to meet a specific objective.

Adoption of this draft ordinance will result in what one person referred to as a "Builders' and Realtors' Bonanza" that will result in major negative impacts, town wide.

Absent any hard Durham data to support your proposal, I suggest you set this entire proposal aside. It is a waste of time for all of us to even consider passing it on to the Town Council for action.