

Planning Board

A new state law will soon mandate towns to make their zoning amenable to affordable housing in a “majority” of the residential areas in town. The “Workforce Housing Law” takes effect statewide on January 1st.

The Canterbury Planning Board is moving forward to develop zoning amendments that will manage the requirements of the state law within the terms of our own Canterbury zoning ordinances. You, the voter, will have a chance to approve these zoning amendments by ballot and town meeting in March. The purpose of the town taking action is to preserve the spirit of our own Canterbury way of managing growth while meeting the requirements of the state law.

Communities have a vested interest in making sure their police officers, firefighters and teachers can find affordable homes. It is unfortunate that many of the young people who grow up in Canterbury and upon whom the community depends as volunteers and creative energy must move elsewhere to find affordable housing.

Towns across the state have been scrambling to write their own ordinances to meet the state mandate. Our Board of Selectmen, Agricultural and Conservation Commissions were consulted in our ordinance design process. The Central NH Regional Planning Commission provided professional planning expertise, audited our existing regulations and drew on the examples of many other towns’ Workforce Housing Regulations to help design ours.

How will things change? Not much really, except that we hope that some of the roadblocks to affordable homes will be eased or removed. Workforce Housing is not what one thinks of as “Section 8, low income” housing. The upper price limit of a qualifying WFH residence is approximately \$215,000. A family of four making less than \$74,000 would qualify. A builder of qualifying housing would get a “bonus” of one additional house for every 10 allowed under current zoning. In addition, some relaxation of subdivision rules could be applied to help make construction affordable. An “overlay map” has been created to cover approximately 51% of the town to meet state law. The areas with higher residential density and proximity to roads were overlaid first with the Agricultural/Conservation areas last, until the state mandated “majority” of land area was included. All underlying zoning protections still apply. Property owners are not “forced” to do anything and lose no rights. A Housing Commission may be created to help provide advice on our housing trends.

What if we vote no? “Builders remedy”... The whole town, except the Industrial and Commercial zones would be subject to WFH construction on January 1st. Without these changes approved, a case could be made that our town has illegal exclusionary zoning under the new state law and a builder could ask a judge for

remedy, eventually leaving town oversight out of the picture. Local control would be lost over where and how development occurs. This is why our town attorney advises us to take action.

The proposed ordinance and overlay map and will be available on the town web site and at the store. There will be a public hearing during the Planning Board meeting on January 12th. There will be much more information available following that meeting and prior to voting day.

Tyson Miller, CPB

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