

WHY ARE WE TALKING ZONING AND THE UPCOMING LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

Changes are coming to your neighborhood and to Osterville Village.

First, your home and neighborhood. The Planning Department considers single-family residential zoning - where most of you live - a “burden” to the community (that’s a quote). It wants to “push back” on its “legacy” (that’s a quote, too). Expect zoning proposals to have the effect of moving away from single-family zoning, and in “baby-steps” (also a quote) to reduce your alarm.

The Planning Department’s public messaging won’t be that direct. It may be a fair conversation to have, but you won’t be asked if you want to get rid of the zoning where you bought your home.

Second, your Village center. The Planning Department has a goal to change zoning in your Village center, too. It wants to ease development by moving away from traditional use-based zoning. It wants to max out density, add height, square footage, by-right duplexes, top-of-shop housing and more. It wants to do all that while reducing the amount of parking developers provide; parking spaces limit density, after all. The Planning Department will claim your support for zoning that adds density by showing you pictures of homes to compare: ugly sterile single-family homes and warmly lit multi-families with charming porches. When you predictably say the prettier pictures are prettier, the Planning Department will then say the community prefers increased density, more height, by-right duplexes and less parking.

The Planning Department’s public messaging around zoning to increase density uses happy buzz words - “vibrant, livable, mixed-use, walkable regional center” that encourages “healthier and more sustainable lifestyles” - not leaving density up to the developer and exacerbating parking problems. You’ll hear talks only about downtown Hyannis, not the goal to “move it” here.

Third, the Plan for the future. The Planning Department says it will abandon Village Plans in the 2021 Local Comprehensive Planning process. The 2010 process started with Village visioning, had Village Plans, and the first goal of the 2010 Plan was to sustain diverse Villages. Now, before any community or Town Council conversation – before anything at all – the Planning Department says Village Plans are out. Because the Planning Department already has a plan for you. Your Village Plan would disrupt it.

The Planning Department’s public messaging will not say this. You’ll hear that this is a Town Plan (so was 2010...) and about committees and forums and lots of comment opportunities.

Last, the housing crisis. It’s real. And there is work to be done – to help locals. The Planning Department will invoke the housing crisis as priority for zoning changes when it’s about easing development and increasing density (that increases tax base). But don’t assume increased density will serve locals’ needs: even in the village center density zoning change portrayed as about housing, the Planning Department proposal would let investors use new homes as Airbnb businesses. As we all know, housing was irrelevant when the Town chose to look away as non-resident investors converted (unlimited!) existing housing stock to Airbnb businesses (because that generates tax revenue, too). In Barnstable, housing matters, sometimes. We can do better, and without wiping out single-family zoning, or turning density decisions over to developers.

YOUR HOME. YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD. YOUR VILLAGE. YOUR TOWN.

Please speak up in the 2021 planning process.