State of Zoning: Multi-family Housing

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Projected demand for housing: 
*Hundreds of thousands of units*
We do not have the zoning in place to meet demand for housing.
What is our current plan for adding multi-family housing?

What should our plan be for more multi-family housing?
Very little land is zoned for multi-family housing.

1 Concord
2 Lincoln
3 Newton
4 Milton
In theory, land area is not a critical constraint.
Municipalities highly restrict density.
Q: Is multi-family housing allowed anywhere in the municipality?

*Is there zoning on the books for it?
Land Zoned
Q: Is multi-family housing allowed at a density of 4 units per acre?

A: No

Bolton
Dover
Essex
Middleton
Nahant
Norwell
Q: Is multi-family housing allowed at a density of 12 units per acre?

A: No

Bellingham  |  Nahant
Bolton      |  Norfolk
Boxborough  |  Norwell
Carlisle    |  Pembroke
Dover       |  Sherborn
Duxbury     |  Southborough
Essex       |  Stow
Hanover     |  Topsfield
Holbrook    |  Wenham
Medfield    |  Weston
Middleton   |
Southborough’s zoning for multi-family housing for the elderly

“No development shall exceed ... three units per contiguous acre ... and six bedrooms per contiguous acre...”
Land Zone

Hanover
Gloucester’s 2017 Housing Production Plan explains:

“The zoning ordinance appears to encourage multi-family projects in the higher density residential zoning districts, the majority of which are located in the downtown area. [...] The dimensional requirements, however, are not consistent with historic multi-family development patterns within these districts and do not support future development.” [emphasis added]
We are moving to a system of project-by-project decision-making.
Away from mapped districts for multi-family housing
Survivor of Two Town Meetings
The current system is problematic for...

- Planning infrastructure and services
- Reducing the high cost of building
- Addressing an urgent housing crisis
The most widespread trend in zoning for multi-family housing has been to adopt *mixed use zoning*.
Mixed Use

Somerville

Medford
Mixed Use

83

Wakefield

Concord

Watertown

Braintree

Quincy
Housing is also going up in new lifestyle shopping centers.
Mixed Use
Municipalities are allowing incremental development in historic centers; and more on the municipal peripheries.

Bedford’s center: 7 units

Bedford’s edge: 188 units
Where to put multi-family housing?

- Residential areas?
- City/town/village centers?
- Commercial corridors?
- Office parks?
- Industrial districts?
Interpretation of local plans, in aggregate:

Where to put multi-family housing?

Residential areas?
No, but maybe with *extreme* caution, someday

City/town/village centers?
Let’s do this, carefully

Commercial corridors?
Maybe yes, but it’s hard to do well

Office parks?
Hmm, perhaps

Industrial districts?
Yes, we’re on it!
4 Centers/Edges

- Beverly
- Beverly
- Norwood
- Walpole
- Woburn
- Belmont
4
Centers/Edges

NEEDHAM
Ten dwelling units: Needham Center
Age-restricted, special permit

Friendly 40B

Centers/Edges

NEEDHAM
Edge City
Edges

Waltham

Somerville

4 Centers/Edges
4 Centers/Edges

Edges

Somerville
• ~3,000 new dwelling units
• Partners Healthcare Headquarters
• Puma Headquarters
• Office for Amazon Alexa
• Encore
• Retail
Medford’s River’s Edge:
Between river and tracks

Somerville’s Assembly Row:
Between 93, river, and tracks

Medford’s Station Landing:
Between highways, tracks, and river

Everett’s Batch Yard:
Between Broadway and tracks and casino
At the Mystic and Malden Rivers, and Route 128, and other edges, do we:

Isolate each new project

Make places where you can

- Walk from site to site
- Take a...
  - bike
  - train
  - boat
  - bus
  - Uber
  - your own car

OR
Zone more land for multi-family housing, up and out

Reform approval process, for flexibility and predictability

Allow multi-family housing next to mixed use hubs

Allow more housing in centers (and near transit), and plan connected growth nodes on the edges

Four Fab Findings:
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