

Frequently Asked Questions



What is zoning?

Zoning is the regulatory framework that guides development in a community. Local zoning bylaws are dictated by a community's preferences for where residential, commercial, and industrial buildings should go. Zoning regulations can include specific requirements about the types of businesses or housing allowed in a certain area. Community visioning meetings give community members the opportunity to craft a zoning framework to guide future growth.

Why is Norwell pursuing zoning changes at Queen Anne's Plaza and Accord Park?

Zoning changes at Queen Anne's Plaza and Accord Park are being proposed to address two distinct challenges that the town faces:

- 1. Norwell's tax base is overly reliant on residential sources.** As the value of Norwell's homes continues to appreciate, the tax burden on residents will also increase. This is especially problematic for individuals on a fixed income, such as older adults. Rezoning Accord Park to allow for more commercial and industrial uses will increase the non-residential tax base within Norwell, which will help offset increases in the municipal budget.
- 2. Norwell has a shortage of housing options for seniors looking to downsize or young professionals working on the South Shore.** The South Shore is expected to face a significant labor shortage in the coming years, and housing has been identified as a key factor for ensuring the long-term viability of the regional economy. Constructing new multifamily housing at Queen Anne's Plaza will help close a critical gap in the local housing market.

Where will the new zoning be implemented? What will it include?

The town is proposing new zoning at:

- **Queen Anne's Plaza** to allow for mixed use commercial and residential development.
- **Accord Park** to allow for additional commercial and industrial building density, as well as new business uses. Housing is not proposed in the industrial park.

Assinippi Park will not be included in the rezoning.

How were Queen Anne's Plaza and Accord Park selected as locations to implement new zoning?

Both of the town's industrial parks were identified as locations for expanded development in the 2005 Master Plan. A 2018 study by MAPC found that Accord Park was best positioned for redevelopment because of its higher vacancy rates, lack of recent private investment, and removal from abutting residential districts.

Queen Anne's Plaza is an ideal site for compact mixed use development because of its large lot size, location near access points to Route 3, and existing wastewater infrastructure. Redevelopment on the site is financially feasible and the owners of Queen Anne's Plaza have expressed interest in developing housing on the site.

How will MAPC evaluate the fiscal, traffic, and environmental impacts of new zoning?

- **Fiscal:** MAPC will conduct a fiscal impact analysis for potential zoning scenarios to evaluate the net contribution of new tax revenue.
- **Traffic:** The Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) is undertaking a traffic study of Pond Street and Washington Street to evaluate current traffic conditions and the added trip generation and direction from new zoning. CTPS will also evaluate opportunities for traffic mitigation and suggest best practices for a redesign of the Pond Street/Washington Street intersection.
- **Environmental:** MAPC will evaluate the potential for point and non-point source pollutants to impact water quality in Accord Pond and adjacent wetlands as a result of the new zoning. Net improvements in environmental quality are a goal for this project.

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Once the zoning is written, how is it approved?

Once developed, the new zoning language will be submitted to the Board of Selectmen to review. The Board of Selectmen is required to refer a zoning article to the Planning Board within 14 days.

The Planning Board then has up to 65 days to hold a public hearing and make a report to the Town Meeting.

Once reviewed by the planning board, the new zoning will be added to the Town Meeting “Warrant” (aka the agenda). The May 2020 Town Meeting will vote whether to adopt the new zoning: it will require a two-thirds majority vote to be adopted.

This sounds familiar. Didn't the Town try this a few years ago?

Yes and no. There were two previous efforts to pass zoning changes in the two industrial parks, which failed to secure the needed two-thirds vote at Town Meeting. New zoning to allow housing at Queen Anne's Plaza has not been proposed in the past.

Concerns related to the previous zoning resolutions centered primarily on the impacts of light and traffic from an expanded Assinippi Park on residential abutters along High Street. Focusing efforts on Accord Park and Queen Anne's Plaza, which have no residential abutters, will hopefully mitigate this concern.

What steps will be included to ensure public input?

MAPC will host three community workshops to receive public input and feedback on the vision and technical elements of the new zoning. All meeting materials will be made available through this website. Individuals not able to attend the public meetings will be able to participate through the project website: www.mapc.org/norwell-zoning.

How can I get involved and stay updated on the process?

How can you get involved? Come to the meetings! We'll be hosting community workshops in September, November, and December. In between, we'll be crafting and refining zoning language based on what we hear from the public. In the spring, go to planning board meetings for more opportunities to give feedback.

If you can't make a meeting, we'll use the project webpage (www.mapc.org/norwell-zoning) to provide meeting materials and ways to give feedback.

The community's role isn't over once the zoning is written—it still needs to be approved by a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting in May 2020. Talk to your neighbors about the process and proposal, and come to Town Meeting to lend your voice to the final vote.