

Becoming an Effective Housing Steward: How to Advocate for Zoning Reforms

WHAT IS ZONING?

Local zoning ordinances create different districts in your community and determine:

- how land can be used (e.g. residential, commercial, or industrial)
- what can be built (e.g. single family or multi-family housing, minimum lot sizes, height restrictions, or parking requirements)
- process for obtaining permits (e.g. by-right or special permission required)

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The consensus among housing experts is that strict zoning laws:

- reduce supply and diversity of available housing options
- increase cost of home ownership and rent burdens
- exacerbate racial and income segregation across communities

Relaxing zoning regulations is the key to more abundant, affordable, and inclusive housing on the North Shore.

WHAT ARE THE GOVERNMENT BODIES INVOLVED?

Under an **OPEN TOWN MEETING** form of government, all voters are eligible to directly debate and vote on proposed zoning changes.

TOWN MEETING acts as the legislative body of the town and occurs annually in the spring with the occasional special meeting in the fall.

An elected **SELECT BOARD**, which varies from 3 to 5 members, appoints the manager/administrator, sets policy, and makes some board appointments. The town manager/administrator acts as the chief administrative officer.

Each town also has a **PLANNING BOARD**, whose 5 to 9 members are responsible for reviewing and holding public hearings on proposed zoning changes and other matters related to land-use and development.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR CHANGING ZONING LAWS?

 SELECT BOARD, PLANNING BOARD, Regional Planning Agency, or Registered Voters Propose Zoning Amendments

 Submit to SELECT BOARD
(if initiated from outside body)

 Submit to PLANNING BOARD for Review

 PLANNING BOARD Holds Public Hearing

 PLANNING BOARD Submits Report to SELECT BOARD

 TOWN MEETING Debates and Votes on Amendments 

HOW CAN I VOICE MY SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES?

State law requires the **PLANNING BOARD** to hold a public hearing with a comment period after the amendments to zoning by-laws are initially proposed.

You have two opportunities to voice your support or opposition to proposed zoning changes.

You can *and* should speak at both meetings, if possible, to maximize your impact.



TOWN MEETING will also have a debate period where you can comment on the same amendments previously heard by the **PLANNING BOARD**.

HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE COMMENTS AT PLANNING BOARD HEARINGS AND TOWN MEETINGS:

The process looks similar in both cases. The chair or moderator will let you know when the comment or debate period opens up. Remember, your goal is to persuade. *How you speak is just as important as what you say.*

Plan...

Plan ahead. You may only have 1-2 minutes to speak, so write out your main message and talking points ahead of time. This will ensure you keep it **short, simple, and sweet** – the key to persuasion.

Introduce...

Introduce yourself. State your name, address, and whether you **support/oppose** the proposal.

Address...

Address the decisionmakers. **Direct your comments to the board or town meeting members in general.** They are your audience. Avoid getting into a debate with specific commenters.

Be...

Be polite, factual, and personal. After you have stated your position, explain it to your audience using facts and personal stories that illustrate why it matters to you. Always keep it positive. Never insult those skeptical or critical of your position. **The goal is to change hearts and minds.**

End with a thank you.



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