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Hadley seeking study of special district for congregate housing



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Part of Route 9 in Hadley, possibly including Hampshire Mall, could end up with congregate housing allowed by right. CONTRIBUTED

HADLEY — A zoning district that could promote housing and apartment development, likely on already developed parcels along Route 9, could be studied and eventually brought to voters at Town Meeting.

After months of discussing establishing such a district under Chapter 40R, the state smart growth zoning and housing production program, the Planning Board voted 4-0 on Tuesday, with member Joseph Zgrodnik abstaining, to pursue a District Local Technical Assistance grant to pay a consultant, possibly from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, to explore creating one.

Such a district, if approved by voters, would likely allow multiple units of housing on a parcel by right, with some portion of those units deemed affordable. Most zoning districts in Hadley prohibit more than one dwelling on a property, with some exceptions, such as for accessory units.



Planning Board member Mark Dunn said it would be a shame to not seek the grant, even if such a 40R district is not supported by residents.

“We’re investigating it, we’re looking at if it fits us well,” Dunn said.

“Start with something, and see what we get,” said Planning Board Chairman James Maksimoski.

Maksimoski said if a concept is brought to Town Meeting and rejected, then planners will know they have done their due diligence.

Applying for the grant only commits the town to a study. Planning Board Clerk William Dwyer said he was careful to use the word “explore” in the application, which also confines the study to Route 9.

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The narrative, written by Dwyer, notes that PVPC worked with town officials on the 2017 update of the 2005 master plan and the recent housing production plan, and that planners regularly consult with Ken Comia, PVPC's deputy director of land use and development.

"Our current thinking is that such a district would enable adaptive reuse of certain already developed commercial sites along the Route 9 corridor, with easy access to transit and retail and

food-service amenities,” the narrative reads.

The impetus for the discussions had been the Zoning Board of Appeals rejection of Valley Community Development’s application, under a Chapter 40B comprehensive zoning permit, to turn the Econo Lodge on Route 9 into affordable housing. That decision has since been overturned by the state’s Housing Appeals Committee after the Select Board opted against paying legal fees to defend the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Planning Board has also had conversations with developers about potential projects, including the Parmar family, which is interested in 55-and-over apartments at the Village Barn Shops site near the Coolidge Bridge; and Pyramid Companies, which has suggested some housing would likely be the future for portions of the Hampshire Mall property.

Zgrodnik said his concern is that the impetus for using Chapter 40R was to make the Econo Lodge a by-right project. With that impetus gone, and with the town over the 10% threshold in the state’s Subsidized Housing Inventory, looking at a 40R district may not be necessary.

Board member Michael Sarsynski also wondered why the board was proceeding.

“What we haven’t done is gotten to the point of what a 40R bylaw would look like,” Dwyer said, adding that, at the earliest, it wouldn’t be ready for voters until May 2025.

PVPC Land Use Planner Kyle Finnell said even if adopted by the town, a project may be a long ways off. “This work, if you were to apply for the grant and go through the process, it might not really materialize in dramatic change for years, if at all,” Finnell said.

Though Sarsynski voted in favor, he cautioned that the town may be forced into having a 40R zone, noting the state’s decision on the Econo Lodge.

“Once you get in bed with the state, and they start giving you money, all bets are off,” Sarsynski said.

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