

Facilitating workforce housing in Durham, N H Public comments for the Durham planning board Dennis Meadows; February 28, 2024

Good evening. I am Dennis Meadows. My home is at 34 Laurel Lane. I have worked, lived, and paid taxes in Durham as a full-time resident for 35 years.

I am here tonight with three goals:

First, to thank the Housing Task Force for all its efforts to help Durham permanently create housing in town that is affordable for our lower income residents. Many of us share that overall goal.

Second, to express my enthusiasm for the wonderful affordable housing proposal that has emerged through discussions among the Keefes, the Randolphs, and the Housing Task Force. If their idea can be implemented correctly, its benefits would certainly justify making the changes in our zoning code that are required to accommodate it.

My third goal tonight is to describe the two minor changes that need to be made in the Task Force's current list of proposed changes in order for the final proposal to receive much wider, therefore much quicker, support in the town. It is important to do everything possible to avoid the extended debate about unnecessary details that wastes your time, delays construction, thus raises the project's construction costs, and encourages disagreements among Durham residents.

The current list of zoning amendments proposes four major changes:

- (1) Add a definition of workforce housing to Article II of Durham's zoning code,
- (2) Change the goal descriptions for all four of Durham's research-industry zones to allow for workforce housing in each of them,
- (3) Add several new provisions under article XX. Standards for specific uses, and

(4) Rezone the entire 117 acre parcel, Lot 39, Map 209 from Residential Coastal to Office Research.

The proposal to build up to 250 structures on the Keefes' 117 acre parcel clearly poses many profound benefits and costs for the people of Durham.

It would be wonderful for more of those who work in Durham to have the realistic option of raising their families here. Durham's many small businesses would benefit, since workers are eager to work near their homes. Those in our younger generation would have less need to migrate. Senior citizens could downsize without moving away from their friends. There would be so many benefits!

However, it will be challenging to achieve our financial and environmental goals while accommodating the increased population's needs for schooling, infrastructure, and municipal services. But we have intelligent and experienced town leaders. I believe that the challenges will eventually be fully identified, seriously addressed, and appropriately dealt with. Thus I won't comment on them further now.

Tonight I am only suggesting that you remove two unnecessary provisions in your proposal, before they sidetrack debate over peripheral details. Two minor changes in your proposal [in (2) and (4) above] would eliminate those distractions while leaving you with everything required for accomplishing the Task Force's main goal.

First: Do not rezone the entire Keefe parcel. Instead move the boundary between the Office Research zone and the Residential Coastal zone eastward only to the Johnson Creek, which bisects Keefes' land.

This is important. The Residential Coastal zone was specifically created to "protect the water quality of the community's principal surface waters." The goals of the Office Research zone give no explicit protection for Johnson's Creek. Although the Randolph's proposal only envisions construction on one side of the creek, experience shows that all land in Durham will eventually be developed fully according to the provisions of its associated zoning code. I respect the goals and integrity of the Randolphs, but we must remember that the rezoned land can be sold to **any** one for **any** purpose allowed by its zoning.

I know you will only adopt zoning code changes on their own merits not because they facilitate a possibly desirable project by a hypothetical potential future owner. Shifting the zone boundary in this way would not only support the environmental objectives of the town, it would drastically reduce opposition to the proposal that you can expect from the dozens of households near the Shearwater Street subdivision immediately adjoining the Keefes' property to the east.

The second change I suggest in your proposed amendments is to revise the permitted use only in the Office Research zone. Leave the other three zones as they are. Focus only on what needs to be changed to facilitate this project. Workforce housing is clearly an inappropriate, probably even an infeasible, use for the other three zones. Keep the proposed changes as simple as possible. Focus the debate about approval on what really matters.

These two changes seem perfectly reasonable, easy, and painless to accomplish. I hope you will consider them and conclude that you share this view. If you do, please incorporate the changes now to forestall unnecessary debate.

Thank you for your consideration