

RE: Rezoning for Density

April 8, 2026

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

I want to thank the Chair for bringing forward a simple zoning suggestion that could add a lot of vitality to our downtown. That is the idea of allowing up to 10 ft of setbacks along our main streets downtown to accommodate outdoor seating and make our downtown more pedestrian friendly. While not pertaining to density, it's a great idea, one I hope the PB will pursue as a PB-initiated zoning change in the near future.

Changing the Focus Regarding Infill and Increased Density

I have also appreciated what I believe is a shift in discussion from *increasing the density across RA and RB by 8 times* to looking at other areas in our downtown to that would better accommodate our Master Plan's recommendations for infill. Please keep in mind that the Master Plan talks about the importance of preserving our family neighborhoods. Goals include:

"Encourage infill development within established neighborhoods that is compatible with our current land uses, compatible in scale with surrounding areas, and adequately supported by public utilities and the existing transportation system."

"Preserve and enhance the integrity and quality of existing residential neighborhoods in Durham."

Rather than disrupt our beloved family neighborhoods, I wanted echo a suggestion that Todd Selig had mentioned that I thought made good sense.

A More Targeted Approach

I urge the PB to consider creating an increased density overlay district in parts of our Commercial Core that are already exclusively rental units. For instance, consider the easterly side of Madbury Road from the corner of Garrison Ave. (which was recently redeveloped) moving north along Madbury Road to Woodside Drive. At that far corner sits the edge of the large white apartment complex that used to be owned by Robby Watson and has since been bought by Golden Goose. That complex and many of those houses along that section of Madbury Road are older and in need of repair or redevelopment. You can *see* the difference between the owner-occupied houses along Madbury Road and the rental units.

I imagine that the owners of that entire stretch of rental units would be happy to have increased density allowances for their properties, thus jacking up the value of their parcels. This would serve to incentivize redevelopment, or sale and redevelopment—without disrupting our family neighborhoods.

On page 3, I include two photos of a recent example of tasteful infill on Locust Street in Dover. Using their form-based code regulations, a 4 unit complex was built to fit in perfectly with the existing neighborhood. I can easily envision that stretch of Madbury Road, which serves as a gateway into town, lined with apartments—rentals or condos--that look like grand old homes like the Locust Street property. Think Middle Street in Portsmouth, Silver Street in Dover, or even the north end of Mill Road in Durham. By creating a circumscribed increased density overlay along that rental section of Madbury Road, we could easily upgrade one of our gateways while generating greater assessed value, and creating additional housing, whether rentals or condos. It seems like a win-win, and it won't negatively impact our family neighborhoods.

In contrast to the form-based design of 136 Locust Street, I also provide an example of an apartment complex recently built in Newmarket. You can see in the long distance photo (on the left, second down) that the apartment building does not “fit in with the neighborhood in architectural style nor scale. It is an eyesore. It also resembles the many flat-roofed apartment complexes Commercial Realtor David Choate warned against that are popping up all over and becoming “the bane of the Seacoast.” (Please remember that David Choate advocated for 50 ft buildings so we could have nicer looking buildings with pitched roofs.) The Newmarket building also serves as a good reminder of the importance of having Architectural Design Standards that have teeth.

As the PB considers where increased density could be an asset for the town (including our current residents), please consider the stretch of Madbury Road noted above. I believe this sort of “fine-toothed comb” approach to infill within our Commercial Core would be much more readily accepted by the community than the broad-brush approach discussed earlier.

Thank you.

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Comparison of 136 Locust Infill with Recent Apartment Complex in Newmarket

