

In our 2018 Town Plan, there are a number of goals that relate to improvements in our Zoning Regulation (RZR) that are to be carried out by the Planning Commission. For example, in the Economic Development section we find:

- *Economic Development 1.1 – create clear guidelines and information resources for permit applicants, clarifying requirements and steps for permitting and approval*
- *Economic Development 1.2 – streamline the business permitting process and reduce permitting costs for small businesses or entrepreneurs*

Similar goals relating to housing and natural resource protection can be found elsewhere in the Plan. Lengthy permitting procedures with their additional costs are felt to have contributed to our extreme housing shortage.

Part of the “streamlining” and “clarifying” process involves disentangling the **development standards** from the **permitting process**. Having a clear and concise statements of the standards that we expect all development to adhere to is the first step in enabling more permits to be issued by our Zoning Administrative Officer (ZA) rather than having all reviewed in a lengthier and more costly Development Review Board (DRB) process. Currently, these standards are intermixed with the steps of the permitting process resulting from the long evolution of the document over time.

To achieve this goal, we are proposing to re-arrange the RZR in 5 sections as follows:

1. Authorization/applicability
2. Base Zoning Districts and Overlay Districts
3. **Development standards**
4. **Administrative Procedures**
5. Definitions and Maps

So far, in our zoning update process, we have been working on the specific zoning districts. It would be helpful at this point, if we could think about the uses and standards that we are proposing to alter in these districts, in the context of a clear set of standards and permitting processes. Most of the information contained in the current document would be retained, just arranged differently. There would be a small number of substantive changes, as alluded to above in allowing the ZA more discretion in the permitting process.

One area of proposed change is the **site plan review**. Currently, the DRB must review all site plans except for a very small number of uses (single and two-family homes, home occupations, group and childcare homes, farming, and public service board uses). If we have a clear and complete set of development standards, there is no reason that many of our other **permitted uses**, including the site plan, cannot be adequately reviewed by the ZA.

What this would mean for our Zoning Districts (section 2) is that the current system of having essentially three use categories: 1) permitted (with basic site plan review); 2) uses with “site plan review”, and 3) uses with conditional review (+/- site plan review) would be changed to a simpler set of two categories: 1) **ZA permitting** (with review of site plan) and 2) **DRB reviewed** (with site plan and/or use considered, as determined by the ZA, with additional application requirements when needed and possible additional conditions imposed).

There are two requirements that must be in place for us to trust that having ZA review of development will meet our needs: a full-time professionally-trained individual in the ZA role and a complete and carefully-thought out zoning document to guide the decisions that are made. We have moved into the era of being willing to fund a trained planning and zoning staff, and with a clear, complete and well-organized zoning document we can streamline the process, while retaining the additional scrutiny of the DRB when it is actually needed.

Two additional reasons for doing this reorganizing work now are 1) the fact that we have just hired a new ZA who is not set in the ways of our current zoning, and would, perhaps, be easier to train in a new system; and 2) we are about to review the report from our housing consultant, Brandy Saxton, who has identified a cumbersome DRB process as a barrier to creating much needed additional housing. Doing this work now will also reduce the number of amendments that we need to propose later to make the updated districts compatible with the final document.