

# Warrant Article Questionnaire Citizen Petitions Articles

## Section III – Questions with Response Boxes – To Be Completed By Petition Sponsor

Article # 33	Date Form Completed: 9/15/21
Article Title: Rezone the Natick Highway Overlay District	
Sponsor Name: Peter Golden	Email:

Question	Question
1	Provide the article motion exactly as it is intended to be voted on by the Finance Committee.
Response	<p>Move to establish a committee appointed by the Moderator to study the feasibility of re-zoning the Highway Overlay District (Rt. 9 from the Wellesley border in East Natick to Speen Street in West Natick).</p> <p>The Moderator shall appoint committee members consisting of Town Meeting Members and designees of the Select Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, Equity Task Force, Open Space Committee and a representative of the real estate industry. The committee will consist of an odd number of members charged with considering the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best uses of the Highway Overlay District</li> <li>• Impacts and benefits of rezoning the district based on input from interested parties</li> <li>• Recommendations regarding district futures, including further study, retention of advisory and planning professionals and proposals for future action</li> </ul> <p>Said committee to serve at the discretion and direction of the Moderator and shall report to the 2022 Annual Fall Town Meeting.</p>
2	At a summary level and very clearly, what is proposed purpose and objective of this Warrant Article and the required Motion?
Response	<p>The article calls for the formation of a study committee to examine the rational and feasibility of rezoning the “Highway Overlay District,” and area of the town currently given over to diverse commercial uses. Stretching along Route 9 largely in the form of “Commercial Development Clusters” from the Wellesley border in the east to the west of Route 27, the district may represent an opportunity to: 1) rationalize the yield to the town of enhanced tax revenues; 2) erect a variety of multi-family residences designed to serve diverse income groups; 3) enhance the look and “curb appeal of Natick’s “gateway” area; 4) enhance the commercial uses of the district; 5) accommodate improved pedestrian and bicycle uses; and 6) expand and improve accessibility to “green” areas abutting the district.</p>
3	What does the sponsor gain from a positive action by Town Meeting on the motion?

## Warrant Article Questionnaire Citizen Petitions Articles

Response	The maker of the article has communicated with the following representative groups whose interests might potentially be served in a progressive rezoning of the district: 1) the town's director of community development; 2) the moderator of town meeting; 3) abutters to the district; 4) a residential property developer with long experience in the town; and a member of the planning board. A presentation of the substance of the article was also made to the town's planning board during a "public speech" session, eliciting an unsolicited positive response from a senior member of the board.
4	Describe with some specificity how the sponsor envisions how: the benefits will be realized; the problem will be solved; the community at large will gain value in the outcome through the accompanied motion?
Response	<p>Other than calling for the formation of a study committee drawn from a diversity of interest groups (and without a budgetary request), the intention of the article is to begin to explore rationalized rezoning options designed to: enhance the town's property tax base; 2) improve and expand the town's housing stock through the construction of multi-family housing serving diverse income groups; 3) improve the overall townscape within the district through best practices associated with mixed-use commercial/multi-family zoning; 4) assure equitable outcomes for current residential and commercial occupants of the district; 5) rationalize pedestrian, bike and automotive traffic patterns; and 6) improve "green" aspects of the district.</p> <p>Once the study committee reports to Natick Town Meeting in the fall of 2022, it is anticipated that: 1) a general schematic in the form of a broad vision for district improvement will have been formed; 2) a schedule of community benefits meeting the needs of the diverse interests of the constituencies associated with the district be formulated; 4) an oversight group be identified to implement a revised zoning plan and project oversight for the district be appointed; 3) a rational and budgetary recommendation be formed sufficient to allow for the retention of a professional consultant to undertake an actionable rezoning plan.</p>
5	How does the proposed motion (and implementation) fit with the relevant Town Bylaws, financial and capital plan, comprehensive plan, and community values as well as relevant state laws and regulations
Response	Self-evidently, part of the work of the committee will be to identify and reconcile various local and state laws, abutter, commercial and organizational/departmental interests pertaining to current and proposed uses of the district. Without a comprehensive vision integrating a diversity of regulatory regimes, current and future uses, regulatory issues and

## Warrant Article Questionnaire Citizen Petitions Articles

	"best practices" as reflected in urban planning and community development the work of a study committee with be moot.
6	<p>Have you considered and assessed, qualified and quantified the various impacts to the community such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town infrastructure (traffic, parking, etc.)</li> <li>• Neighbors (noise, traffic, etc.);</li> <li>• Environment and green issues (energy conservation, pollution, trash, encouraging walking and biking, etc.);</li> </ul>
Response	<p>A variety of issues relating to infrastructure, traffic flow, environmental pollution, pedestrian and biking, green area access and so on will need to be addressed by a variety of interests as indicated in the proposed make-up of the study committee. Community engagement and outreach, both formal and informal, should be part of the work of the committee.</p> <p>Identifying and quantifying the current form and value of the district will require careful attention on the part of the committee, including economic benefits, environmental impacts, general community benefits and prospective improvements. To the best of our current knowledge the Highway Overlay District is largely absent for detailed consideration in town planning documents. At the same time a variety of district uses (marijuana retailing, drug ephemera, erotic goods and other prospective uses such as dog kennels, gas stations, fast food, etc.) are all permitted uses within the district.</p>
7	<p>Who are the critical participants in executing the effort envisioned by the article motion?</p> <p>To this point what efforts have been made to involve those participants who may be accountable, responsible, consulted or just advised/informed on the impacts of executing the motion?</p>
Response	<p>In part, this question has been previously addressed in Question 3. To the extent the various appointing authorities to the study committee are able to identify, knowledgeable individuals representative of interested constituencies or members of elected/appointed town boards with expertise in zoning, housing, community development, open space planning, highways and transportation the work of the committee will be expedited.</p>
8	What steps and communication has the sponsor attempted to assure that:

## Warrant Article Questionnaire Citizen Petitions Articles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interested parties were notified in a timely way and had a chance to participate in the process, that</li> <li>Appropriate town Boards &amp; Committees were consulted</li> <li>Required public hearings were held</li> </ul>
Response	<p>The petition supporting a motion to form a committee was based on direct conversation with individuals already referenced in previous questions posed in this document. Conversations were also held with advocates for low-income housing. By its very nature a study committee's work lies in outreach to relevant government bodies and interested parties.</p>
9	Why is it required for the Town of Natick AND for the sponsor(s)?
Response	<p>Based on noise and atmospheric pollution, overwhelming traffic flows, the less than attractive townscape of the district, the limited property tax yield, the challenges to pedestrians and a host of other issues it would seem a positive vote on the part of the InaCom, Select Board and Town Meeting with regard to the motion would be a positive, timely step toward rationalizing what can be reasonably construed as and outdated, somewhat degraded area of the town.</p>
10	Since submitting the article petition have you identified issues that weren't initially considered in the development of the proposal?
Response	<p>In part the call for the formation of a study committee is a response to the relentless pace of urban growth. In the recent past, for instance, a brick tenement now occupies the area between the CVS pharmacy and Morse's Pond directly abutting the south side of the Natick Highway Overlay District. Enormous pressure from the state to create inclusionary housing, federal programs offering billions of dollars in incentives to overcome single-family zoning in order to increase housing density and other initiatives to make easy revisions to zoning bylaws in town meeting all point in the same direction: Natick, like a substantial increment of the thousands of suburban communities in the United States faces a potentially transformative moment in its long history.</p> <p>How best to accommodate growth and change in the "build-out" of a community which has gone from a rural farming community to a manufacturing hub and horticultural center to a center of technology innovation? As more and more development, skyrocketing property value, calls for improved public services (schools) and enlarged municipal payrolls and related costs place and ever-growing burden on residents and commercial interests alike, how best to reconcile the needs of the moment with future opportunities.</p>

## Warrant Article Questionnaire Citizen Petitions Articles

	In the larger world, any numbers of Massachusetts's communities and those in other states have met similar challenges through the adaptive reuse of formerly underutilized or even derelict areas. At the pleasure of the FinCom and in future public discussion and reports the sponsor of this petition will be pleased to discuss zoning options and long-term development outcomes with this and other interested parties.
<b>11</b>	What are other towns and communities in the Metro West area, or the Commonwealth of MA doing similar to what your motion seeks to accomplish
Response	"Multi-Family – Mixed Use" has been the rallying cry of municipalities in urban and suburban areas across the US. Examples too numerous to cite here have been implemented in communities such as Boston, Brookline, Quincy and across such widely-separated areas as Long Island, New York, Des Moines, Iowa and Houston Texas. In light of rapidly shifting property usage patterns associated with the COVID pandemic and recent challenges to the Natick Mall (which is now the subject of its own study/planning process) it would seem a preliminary, no-cost assessment of the future use of the Highway Overlay District would be in order.
<b>12</b>	If this Warrant Article is not approved by Town Meeting what are the consequences to the Town and to the sponsor(s)? Please be specific on both financial and other consequences.
Response	In a community which like most is faced by ever-growing needs for development, tax revenues and enhanced residential and commercial amenities, a rationalized, carefully planned and managed set of improvements to the Highway Overlay District is to miss any number of opportunities while leaving a somewhat degraded, outdated and underutilized area of the town to the vagaries of random use and ever-increasing traffic impacts.