

Dear Members of the Finance Committee:

I am writing today in support of Article 33, which would create a committee to study potential zoning changes to the area of Route 9 between the eastern border of town and Speen Street. This article is a sensible approach to studying the issue, has the potential to bring great benefits to the town, and will give residents of that area an important platform for their concerns.

This article would create a well-balanced committee with representatives from several bodies that would have important roles in any zoning changes. Importantly, the committee also includes a representative from the real estate industry who could help the committee better understand the economic impact of potential changes. The committee could also be staffed either on a permanent or occasional basis by town staff from relevant departments such as the Department of Public Works, the Department of Community and Economic Development, and/or the Sustainability Director. Between the committee's composition, help from town staff, and public input, the committee would be well positioned to gather the necessary information to make an informed recommendation to Town Meeting.

One potential objection to this article is that it usurps a role that should be filled by the Planning Board or other town bodies. However, I think this issue is so complex that it would benefit from the focused attention of a dedicated committee. Of course, the Planning Board and other relevant boards and committees would have the opportunity to weigh in both during the process through their representatives and on the committee's report itself through the review process prior to Fall 2023 Town Meeting.

The potential benefits of a re-zoning are discussed in detail in the questionnaire response, but one aspect of the proposal worth highlighting is the potential for multi-family housing development. Many agree that Natick needs more multi-family housing development, but when actual proposals for multi-family development come up, they often face fierce opposition from neighbors. This is a rare situation in which you would likely see the opposite. The residents who live near Rt. 9 may welcome a switch to multi-family mixed use given the current business uses that are allowed by the highway overlay district that many residents dislike. As the lead sponsor has put it (who lives near Rt. 9 himself), multi-family development along Rt. 9 could act as "buffer" that would improve the quality of life for residents of single-family homes abutting Rt. 9. Thus, this may be an opportunity for a win-win for Natick as a whole and this neighborhood specifically.

Another benefit worth highlighting—a committee like this would allow residents of that area to be heard. Many residents of that area were involved in the effort at Spring Town Meeting to create a residential buffer zone for recreational marijuana businesses. Although I opposed the substance of that idea, in talking to proponents, a common theme was a perception that town government does not give as much attention to that area as it does to other parts of town. This resonated with me because I've heard similar sentiments from North Natick residents in other discussions as well. This committee would be an opportunity to focus on that area's specific needs and come up with a long-term plan for its future.

I hope that the Finance Committee will recommend positive action on the subject matter of this article.

Sincerely,

Cody Jacobs
16 Tamarack Road