

Chair Wollschlager and members of the Finance Committee:

I write to make you and other Finance Committee members aware of my opposition to Article 32 which endeavors to change the zoning on parts of East Central, Wilson, Grant, and Union Streets from the current Residential General (RG) to Downtown Mixed-Use (DM). which is on your agenda for September 28, 2021.

The stated purpose and intent of the Downtown Mixed Use District (DM) zoning is: “To establish a compact business center which does not include noxious or land-expansive uses, is centrally located, and is designed primarily for pedestrian shoppers. Some multi-family dwellings may be included to prove economic viability to such center while adding to the housing stock of the community. The DM District is intended to apply only to the central business area in the vicinity of the intersection of Routes 135 and 27” (ZBL III-E ( 1) – Emphasis added)

The proposal in Article 32 of the 2021 FATM flies in the face of these stated objectives.

- It would nearly double the length of the DM on the south side of East Central (and go even further than the district goes on the north side.
- Some of the implications include:
  - o Maximum building height of 50’ unless within 20’ of a residential district boundary where that part of the building could not exceed 40’. However, it might be allowed to be 60’ in height if it meets certain criteria!
  - o There are no side yard setbacks required in the DM so an owner could build to their property line EVEN IF there is a house next door because the house would no longer be residentially zoned, it would be in the DM.
  - o Thus, a home could find itself with 50’ high buildings on either side of it with the only buffer being the current homeowner’s side yard setback!
- Because mixed use buildings constructed in this expanded area would involve new construction, the downtown as we know it may suffer significantly as new merchants desire the ease and lower cost associated with remodeling new construction as compared to 100+ year old buildings and the intersection of routes 135 and 27 (the supposed center of the DM) may start to empty out.
- It is really bad planning practice to expand districts a little at a time but frequently as the result most often bears little if any resemblance to the intended purpose.

The Planning Board has said it intends to review ALL zoning districts in town. Any change to the DM should wait for that review and any resulting proposal.

Finally, the proponent indicated that all of the owners he had heard from expressed support but the key question is how many owners did he actually hear from?

Thank you for taking my input.

Cathi Collins  
Town Meeting Member, Precinct 9