

MEMO

TO: Finance Committee

FROM: Jamie Errickson, Town Administrator

CC: Members of the Select Board
Randy Johnson, Chair, Affordable Housing Trust

RE: Town Meeting Warrant Article - 246 North Main Street

DATE: September 18, 2022

Town Administration is aware of a request to consider the transfer of 246 North Main Street from the care, custody and control of the Select Board to the Natick Affordable Housing Trust (AHT). Though there was an awareness of this past interest, the recent request came to the attention of the Town Administrator in mid-August, just a few days prior to the closure of the Town Meeting Warrant. At that time, Town Administration expressed the desire for a more in-depth conversation prior to advancing an article to Town Meeting to make sure all parties are understanding of the various complexities and variables of such a request and potential project at this property. In addition, multiple concerns and considerations were provided to the Chair of the AHT, which, in the opinion of Town Administration, should be further discussed prior to any transfer of property. To date, Town Administration has not met with the Chair of the AHT and advancement of this conversation has yet to commence.

Please note that Town Administration fully supports thoughtful policies and collaborative initiatives that make meaning advances for the creation of affordable housing, improves access to housing (and housing options) for residents, and/or provides housing security for the members of the community. In this case, 246 North Main Street may be an opportune site for the creation of a single affordable housing unit. Though a single unit will not make a meaning impact on the Town Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), it is symbolic of the Town's commitment to affordable housing creation. This memorandum is intended to express concern regarding advancing this initiative at this time and with the AHT prior to fully understanding the various components, impacts, and other considerations of such a project.

As noted in mid-August to the Chair of the Affordable Housing Trust, there are several items and questions to discuss prior to the advancement of an article to Town Meeting regarding a land transfer of 246 North Main Street. These include, but are not limited to:

- Verification of title/ownership (this may have been completed by the Trust – current Town Administration has yet to receive such confirmation, nor has Town Counsel reviewed such documents)

- Review of the property by Town Administration, staff, and/or departments to ensure it is a viable property for disposition. For example, is the property needed to support other Town initiatives (current or future)?

Note: This property is currently being utilized to support the Route 27 North Main Street improvement project for staging, which is ongoing for several more months. It may also be needed to support the Rt. 9/27 Interchange project (to be completed by MassDOT), which is advancing towards full design and will take several years to complete.

- Review of this project/process by Town Counsel to ensure compliance with local, state, or other applicable laws/regulations/processes
- Review of zoning and other bylaws with regards to this project
- Discussion and review of the various components of the initiative to ensure there is a clear understanding of the intended project, the role of the Town and Town staff, any desired/intended support from the Town, and other considerations for this project. For example:
 - How will the project be managed?
 - What are the expected/anticipated Town resources needed/desired to support the project?
 - Is the intent to transfer the land for free or for fair market value?
 - What other financial, technical, or other administrative support may be expected from the Town?
 - How will utility hook ups be handled? *NOTE: with the reconstruction of Route 27, there is likely to be a 5-year moratorium on any cuts in the road for utility connections.*
 - Is this the most appropriate approach to completing this project or is a more streamlined approach more appropriate for this project? For example, should the Town consider authorizing the Select Board to dispose of the property directly for affordable housing?

NOTE: A housing trust is a municipal body and is subject to the same procurement, designer selection and public construction laws as the Town/Select Board. See link below for more information:

https://www.mhp.net/writable/resources/documents/municipal_affordable_housing_trust_guidebook.pdf

In addition to the questions above, Town Administration has review a draft Request for Proposals prepared by the AHT for this project, which raised many concerns and questions. Given this RFP is not the subject of the article, these questions/concerns are not outlined here. It is important to note, however, that upon transfer of the property to the Trust, "the Town" is no longer a part of the project, including for purposes of procurement and compliance with state laws and regulations. This responsibility falls to the AHT.

As noted, Town Administration continues to be a strong advocate for the advancement of thoughtful policies and collaborative initiatives that make meaning advances for the creation of affordable housing, improves access to housing (and housing options) for residents, and/or provides housing security for the members of the community. In the case of 246 Main Street, there are still many questions that have yet to be discussed with Town Administration to ensure the project is a collaborative success.