Norfolk Town Center B-1 Zoning Articles

Background and Summary

Introduction
The Town of Norfolk has studied the B-1 Zoning District in detail through the dedicated efforts of the B-1 Zoning Committee and the Planning Board. Together they have been analyzing and exploring changes to encourage a vibrant mixed-use Town Center since the beginning of 2019. The zoning changes are needed to increase the likelihood of additional financially viable mixed-use development on vacant private property in the Town Center. The changes make it more likely that additional small businesses could make contributions to a vibrant and active town center. The proposed changes integrate extensive feedback and discussion received from the public, neighbors of the district, property owners, and other town committees and boards. The process to get to these recommendations has included two community-wide public meetings, two public hearings, many committee and board meetings, and a town-wide online survey. Of 434 survey respondents, 79% are not satisfied with Town Center today. The challenge has been to define the details of zoning changes that most people would agree are necessary to move Town Center toward its vision. This work builds upon the vision established for the Town Center through the Town of Norfolk Master Plan and recommendations of a 2018 Town-wide Economic Development Plan. The vision for Town Center articulated through these previous plans states:

“Norfolk’s citizens would like its Town Center developed into a traditional, pedestrian oriented, New England village with retail, commercial services and mixed uses, including housing, that provides for social and cultural interaction for all age groups.”

Article 21 Discussion

Article Summary
Both of these changes are critical to increasing the potential financial feasibility for Town Center mixed-use development by increasing the maximum density to allow additional residential units to be built above the ground floor and increasing the flexibility of a site layout by allowing the shared parking reduction to not reserve land for parking that will not be built. These would both be options available to support development, but are not required. Both of these options increase the ability to create a financially feasible development.

Building Density - In addition to supporting financial feasibility, this change has the potential to increase the number of town center households to support local businesses and activity. While providing an increase, the change does define a maximum that keeps the scale consistent with town center today. Importantly, this change will bring the Town Center into compliance with recently passed Commonwealth Housing Choice requirements of at least one zoning district near transit that allows a minimum of 15 units per acre.

Shared Parking - The amount of required parking impacts the density of development that is achievable and the financial feasibility of the development. This change would allow more flexibility when the developer can justify reduction of parking through shared parking calculations. It brings the provision into alignment with how it is most commonly used in other towns to fully support the positive benefit of complementary mixed-uses and the associated reduction to parking demand. This change is particularly useful for smaller sized lots in Town Center.

Article 22 Discussion

Article Summary
The changes below are consistent with intention behind Article 21 and offer complementary zoning improvements.

Design Guidelines - The design guidelines help to guide new development to fit with the character and context of Norfolk Town Center. By listing the guidelines in the bylaw it strengthens the guidelines as a tool to help fit new development with the character of town center.
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**Affordable Housing** - The zoning changes may result in an increase in housing units in the town center. An additional affordable housing requirement will help the town to make better progress on state housing requirements for the town and place additional affordable housing units in Town Center where access to amenities and transit is a benefit to households.

**PMLD** - Planning Multi-Lot Development (PMLD) is an infrequently used portion of the current bylaw that adds unnecessary complexity to the bylaw and may lead to unintended consequences.

**Building Height** - This change would allow for six (6) additional feet of height to occur by right, instead of by special permit. These additional feet provide for more flexibility in the design of the ground floor and roof form and help to streamline the approval process.

**Consistent Setback** - The current zoning defines a build-to-line where a new building must be placed on a property between six (6) feet and nineteen (19) feet from the front of the property. The front yard setback currently contradicts this requirement and should be defined as six (6) feet to align these two characteristics.

**Bike Parking** - To encourage convenient access to Town Center by bicycle, safe and convenient places for bikes should be provided with each new development that is built.

**Uses** - Uses are being refined to better align with the vision for a vibrant Town Center. New uses that are inconsistent with the vision including “Limited used motor vehicle sales” and “Gasoline and diesel fuel filling stations” are changed to prohibited. Current uses already in the district would not be impacted. Wellness studios and shared work facilities should be added to allowed uses to add as many opportunities for viable ground floor commercial tenants as possible.

Article 23 Discussion

**Article Summary**

The changes below are consistent with intention behind Article 21 and offer complementary zoning improvements. By reducing the area of the B-1 “Business Core” subdistrict the changes summarized above will impact a smaller area and be more targeted to the vacant parcels in the district. This offers additional protection to the town to avoid any unintended consequences of the recommended zoning changes.

**Subdistrict Boundary** - The B-1 Zone District boundary is shown to the right (dark brown and light brown) and includes properties on Main Street, Rockwood Road, Liberty Lane, and Union Street. The dark brown is the “Business Core” and the light brown is “Outside the Business Core”, the two subdistricts in the existing zone. Proposed B-1 subdistrict boundaries, updated the boundary to reduce the “Business Core” subdistrict. All zoning changes will apply only to the “Business Core” subdistrict.

Additional Information

Additional background and context for the project, including many of the Town’s recent planning documents, can be found on the Town’s website at http://www.norfolk.ma.us/departments/land-use/