



## Peterborough Planning Board approves zoning amendments to appear on ballot

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Based on proposed zoning and code amendments they unanimously approved for residents to vote on at Town Meeting after a public hearing Monday night, Peterborough Planning Board members hope to rezone buildings whose function does not correlate with their current zones.

“Peterborough has permissive zoning,” Town Planner Danica Melone said. “If it’s not explicitly allowed, it needs a variance.”

Melone explained that Bowling Acres, Valley Automotive and the old IDG building, all on Elm Street, are “legal nonconforming.” The first 200 feet of the lots are in a Commercial zone, but the majority falls in the Family District, where businesses are not allowed. The Planning Board is proposing the lots be rezoned to Village Commercial.

“We decided to look at all three because these structures are commercial uses, but not in a commercial zone,” Melone said.

Rezoning the lots to Village Commercial would give the property owners more flexibility to expand or build housing and would likely make selling the lots easier.

“Village Commercial allows for more uses than the Commercial zone,” said Melone, and it requires a 30-foot buffer where it abuts the property line if a development were to be built, which commercial zoning doesn’t enforce.

Only light industrial use is allowed in the Village Commercial zone, which is strict about light, noise, smell and environmental pollution. Melone gave the example of MAXT Makerspace as light industrial, which uses some machinery indoors.

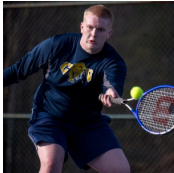
“There is really nothing that can be done outside that can disturb you,” she said.

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Melone said the town hopes to make Elm Street more walkable so people can walk to the farmers' market and "enhancements and expansion add to total tax value [for the town]." Rezoning the lots would not affect the property owners' tax rate.

A few abutters who attended the meeting discussed their reservations about rezoning the lots. Colleen Young said she is worried what could be developed on the lots if they were rezoned.

"People who live in these established neighborhoods need a little more trust," she said.

Another abutter, Pat Turcotte, said she was concerned that all three lots could sell and become "one enormous housing complex." She is worried about the number of cars this would bring to the street and additional traffic, and said she "moved to Peterborough for its small-town character with lots of open space. By doing this, it opens the door for something potentially huge."

Melone said the town has "phase development" that would kick in "if any property was going to be adding more than 1 percent of the population." If a big development were to be built in the town, only about 66 units could be built in one year.

Melone said Peterborough hasn't needed to use phase development since Southfield Village was built. She added that a healthy vacancy rate for a community is 5 to 6 percent. The current Peterborough vacancy rate is zero percent.

"I really understand the comments and concerns of the neighbors, but I do feel that it's important to give the owners of these properties the right to do something that is legal," Planning Board Chair

Stephanie Hurley said. “I encourage you to keep in touch with the Planning Board. We can require a buffer that’s vegetated, and put forward your feelings if and when there are developers.”

Lance Williams, owner of Valley Automotive, expressed his support for the zoning change. He said he has no current plans to sell his business or property.

“I find the comments here, while important to bring up, they would limit the usage of my property,” Williams said. He said not changing zoning would “limit the bowling alley with restrictions that would disincentive someone to buy.”

Melone said the owners of the IDG building lot have expressed that they feel unable to do anything to their abandoned building without zoning changes. With zoning changes, they may be interested in selling or developing the lot.

“Elm Street is a major outlet from downtown during rush hour,” Williams said in response to concerns about increased traffic, “The police are out there quite often.”

Also on the ballot is an amendment to rezone two legal nonconforming lots that are currently in the Office District, including Monadnock Congregational Church and a single-family home. Neither are offices.

The Planning Board is also proposing to amend the definition of “commercial uses” to include “food services such as restaurants,” which would ensure restaurants could continue to operate in the commercially zoned Ocean State Job Lot parking lot. They are also proposing an amendment regarding manufactured housing parks, which are only allowed in the Rural District, to allow them to provide community water and septic.

The Planning Board also approved a conditional use permit application to allow Nubanusit Neighborhood to install an electric-vehicle charging station.

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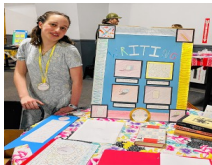
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