



# TOWN OF LEXINGTON

**SPECIAL PERMIT RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT  
(SPRD) ZONING BYLAW AMENDMENT  
AD HOC COMMITTEE  
UPDATE AND PROGRESS REPORT TO  
2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**Submitted by SPRD Ad Hoc Committee:**

Jill I. Hai, Chair; Scott Cooper; Charles Hornig; Heather Hartshorn;  
Joyce Murphy; Richard Perry; Wendy Manz and Betsey Weiss

#### **4-7-22 Unanimously Voted Approval**

##### **Lexington SPRD Ad Hoc Committee - Update/Progress Report to Town Meeting**

Following action from the 2018 Annual Town Meeting, in September 2018 the Select Board established an Ad Hoc Committee to recommend changes to the portion of Lexington's zoning by-law that defines permitting processes and requirements for new residential development.

The impetus for this action was twofold; The Board acknowledged the need to create a unified statement of values that reflects the Town's current priorities for guiding and expanding Lexington's housing stock, including the desire to create a viable alternative to conventional subdivisions. And second, Town Meeting and the Select Board recognized that the current zoning regulations have not resulted in the increased diversity of housing types currently needed to serve both existing and future Town residents and yielded very little development of affordable housing. (NOTE: by "affordable" we are including both housing eligible for inclusion on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) and workforce/moderate income housing.

Committee members were chosen to include representatives who have backgrounds or experience in smart growth residential zoning; residential development or construction; residential real estate marketing or sales; affordable housing policy, housing development; and land use planning or engineering. The Committee was directed to reach out to the various interest and neighborhood groups within the Town to listen to both technical and quality of life thoughts, concerns, and priorities.

Our Work to Date:

In November 2019, the Committee presented the following Statement of Values to the Fall Special Town Meeting:

*Lexington seeks to encourage greater diversity of housing opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse population with respect to income, ability, accessibility needs, number of persons in a household and stage of life. Lexington seeks to fulfill this goal while preserving its cultural and historical values and promoting growth that is sustainable and sensitive to the natural environment.*

*Lexington is mindful of supporting development that preserves historically or architecturally significant buildings and landscape. The Town recognizes that not all of these values can be*

*applied to all sites but is committed to evaluating each site as an opportunity to contribute to serving and promoting these values Town wide.*

This Statement of Values was created based upon the outreach work of the committee over the course of 2018 and 2019. It has guided the subsequent work of the SPRD Committee.

Since then, the Committee has worked to understand the limitations and challenges of the current by-law and to explore possible changes to best serve the Statement of Values. We have looked at best practices locally and Statewide, accessed the wisdom of experts and consultants as well as the many housing related groups, boards and commissions within the Town.

We have weighed the pros and cons of single or multiple pathways for permitting and approvals, the provision of “Lexington friendly” design templates, and a variety of incentives for increasing affordability, supporting the development of smaller and one floor units, fully accessible, universal design, and encouraging eco-friendly buildings. These incentives have included density bonuses, expedited permitting, and possible changes to site dimensional requirements. Our goal is to balance the incentives needed to attract alternative housing types against the need to make positive contributions to quality of life for both current and new residents. In the process, we hope to encourage development of cluster housing that is architecturally sensitive to and compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods.

In all elements, however, we recognize that changes must be commercially feasible to achieve our goal of greater housing diversity. Otherwise, we will continue to experience the development of large single-family homes that ignore our goals of increased diversity, affordability, sustainability, and sensitivity to the preservation of natural resources.

To date, we have considered eliminating two of the three current alternatives to conventional subdivision (Balanced Housing and Public Benefit) but preserving the avenue for Site Sensitive Development (SSD) with modification to require affordable housing inclusion. In addition to SSD, we have discussed a single alternative path for residential development with a focus on cluster developments comprised of smaller, more affordable units (“Alternative Residential Development” or “ARD”). We have also discussed adding an inclusionary housing component with the goal of making Lexington more accessible to a diverse population, including our workforce, seniors, and first-time buyers. We believe this approach will complement the current proposal for Open Space Development which has been promoted by the Planning Board, giving Lexington three alternatives to conventional subdivision. We have also considered streamlining the approval process for developers by offering a “by

right” option with limited site plan review rather than the more cumbersome and less predictable special permit process required by the current by law. By doing so, we hope to make both SSD and ARD more attractive options for the development community.

Next Steps:

Prior to submitting specific recommendations for review and comment, the Committee will be holding a series of public forums to discuss proposals under consideration and the trade-offs that will be necessary to support the goals defined in our Statement of Values.

There is a quote attributed to multiple sources that states, “every system is perfectly designed to get what it gets.” If one wants a different result, the system needs to change.

Lexington’s Statement of Values speaks to preserving its cultural, environmental, and historic legacy while exploring alternative housing development models. We look forward to presenting several options for achieving this balance at our next round of public sessions. We will be listening closely to public comment before fine tuning our specific recommendations for the Fall Town Meeting.