

Comprehensive Housing Plan Needed - Editorial

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The zoning board of appeals approved Megansett Crossing, a 10-unit subdivision, two weeks ago that was filed under Chapter 40B, but it might be that it was effectively denied because the developer, The Resource Inc., cannot complete the project if there are fewer than 12 units. Michael Galasso, representative of TRI, said \$255,000 in subsidies would be needed in order to build the project with 10 units.

Mr. Galasso could apply to the Community Preservation Committee for funding from the housing trust fund. It is an option he should explore.

Mr. Galasso was understandably not happy with the board's decision, but the board was right to draw the line at 10 units. Neighborhood residents had a number of concerns about the development, which would be built on Route 28A in North Falmouth, but they boil down to an objection to density.

Chapter 40B is the provision in the state law that allows for development at higher than allowed density if at least 25 percent of the units are affordable. It is, in the big picture, a useful tool for creating affordable housing. But there is an associated cost, not in immediate dollars but in density of development. A cost in dollars follows later when the community must pay for additional infrastructure and services.

So while Mr. Galasso was disappointed that the appeals board did not acquiesce to his request for 12 units, the appeals board was right to consider the bigger picture and the long view.

The board's action points once again to what consultant Judi Barrett pointed out in her extensive report on housing needs in Falmouth, that a comprehensive plan that can engage community support is necessary to make substantial progress in generating affordable housing.

Mr. Galasso's commitment and efforts to create affordable housing are commendable. He's had some successes; TRI recently purchased the Clipper Ship Landing development in East Falmouth and built three high-quality apartments on Shore Street. The appeals board's decision was a setback, but the fault is not with the appeals board; it's with the lack of a community-wide comprehensive plan.