

Senate Bill Proposes Planning, Zoning Changes

By RYAN BRAY 22 hrs ago

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A bill that was scheduled for a vote in the Massachusetts State Senate this week could have long-term implications for the future of zoning and planning in Falmouth if approved.

The bill, S. 2311, was scheduled to be voted on in the senate Friday, June 10. If passed, the bill would then need to go before the House of Representatives for a vote.

Updates to existing state zoning and planning laws are proposed through the bill, including a requirement that towns put together comprehensive master plans for their communities.

A master plan would require local planning officials to look at areas of town in which they do and do not want to allow additional density. If the bill passes, town officials would also be required to establish by-right zoning districts for multifamily housing.

Anne E. Connolly, executive director of the Falmouth Housing Trust, said the creation of a comprehensive master plan would be “refreshing” for the town.

“Having a master plan requires a significant amount of work, but it would give us a framework for growth,” she said.

With or without passage of the bill, planning officials in Falmouth are currently in the early stages of working on a master plan for the town, planning board chairman James E. Fox said yesterday.

“We’re going to be moving in that direction,” he said.

The bill would also mandate approval of by-right accessory apartments proposed in residential areas. Accessory apartments are secondary units that are added on to an existing single-family dwelling. Planning board members are currently in the process of preparing an accessory apartment bylaw that they hope to bring before Town Meeting for a vote in November.

Language in the bill would also make it legal for towns to charge developers development impact fees. The planning board would also be able to adopt a subdivision review process in place of its existing “approval not required” process.

Procedural planning and zoning changes are also included in the bill. Zoning amendments could be passed by a simple majority vote at Town Meeting instead of a two-thirds vote. Local zoning boards would also be given 120 days for site plan review on projects under state statute if the bill passes.