

## Expanding Housing Choice in Concord

*Matt Johnson, Concord Planning Board*

The median sale price of a single family home in Concord has exceeded a million dollars over the past two years. While rising property values may give existing homeowners a reason to celebrate, they also create barriers to Concord's future potential. As the recent [Envision Concord](#) Comprehensive Long Range Plan points out, the large single-family homes that dominate new construction are not the best match for our future demographics (older on average, with fewer people per household), nor for the kind of sustainable, vibrant, walkable communities where residents can live, work and age in place.

Concord has expanded its stock of subsidized affordable housing over the past decade, and has recently voted in Town Meeting to fund more affordable units through new fees and taxes. These efforts help those on the lower end of the income spectrum, but what about moderate income households? This "missing middle" of young families, single people and retirees is vital to the balance of a community, but is currently "priced out" of Concord.

It doesn't make sense to subsidize housing costs for people who would be considered well-off almost anywhere else in America. Instead, we need to motivate developers and homeowners to create more of the type of housing that Concord needs in the first place. Updating our residential zoning bylaws is one important lever in that process.

The Planning Board recently reviewed the [Envision Concord](#) plan's ideas for improving housing choice through zoning changes, and prioritized four initiatives to work on this coming year:

- ***Allow 2-family houses "by right" near village centers.*** 2-families were common in Concord before zoning outlawed them in 1928. Many still stand, and contribute to the character of the Town. New 2-families could preserve neighborhood scale, while providing more housing units in the same space.
- ***Better align future planned residential development (PRD) proposals with long range planning goals.*** PRDs that are close to village centers should include smaller-scale, pedestrian-friendly unit designs with fewer garages. Those further out should preserve publically usable open space whenever possible. All PRDs should achieve high levels of energy efficiency.
- ***Make it easier to create accessory dwelling units.*** Concord's zoning bylaws heavily regulate the creation of an accessory dwelling ("in-law" apartment) within a new or existing home. Simplifying the process could encourage residents to "age in place" or accommodate extended family, potentially reducing per-unit housing costs without having a major impact on neighborhood character.

- ***Promote “smart growth” mixed use development in the Thoreau Depot district.*** Though it’s already an important transit center and shopping district for the town, the Thoreau Depot district has greater potential. Dense mixed-use development is well-suited to an area like this, which has many outdated, but not historic structures and excellent connectivity.

Each of these initiatives has opportunities and impacts that the Planning Board will need to address before we decide how (and whether) to proceed with zoning bylaw changes. We will be reaching out to other Town boards, committees, property stakeholders and the public over the coming months to gather input. We look forward to hearing your ideas about how to improve housing choice in Concord: please email us at [planningboardhousing2019@concordma.gov](mailto:planningboardhousing2019@concordma.gov).