

Correspondence received by the Concord Select Board

Week Ending – August 5, 2024

1. Ann Clifford - Historical Commission
2. Mark Martines – 66 Alford Circle



TOWN OF CONCORD
CONCORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Concord Select Board
MCI Concord Advisory Board
22 Monument Square
Concord, MA 01742

July 18, 2024

Dear Select Board and MCI Concord Advisory Board,

The Concord Historical Commission (CHC) is writing to express our interest in the future planning for MCI Concord.

In their most recent presentation, DCAMM addressed the need to coordinate with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), particularly related to two historic buildings – the former Warden’s House now Administrative Building, 1878 and the White Row House, 1884. Additionally, MCI Concord was identified as a priority heritage landscape in the Concord/Freedom’s Way Heritage Landscape Inventory prepared for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in 2007. The CHC regularly serves as a consulting party to MHC on Federal (Section 106) and State (MEPA) undertakings that potentially affect historic/cultural resources.

The CHC has discussed the MCI Concord reuse effort, which will present various challenges and opportunities for the town and we would like to contribute to the town’s efforts working with you, DCAMM and MHC on the future of this important site. With that in mind, we would like to make the following recommendations.

First, as part of their efforts to complete various studies for MCI-Concord, we recommend DCAMM undertake a cultural resources inventory for the facility. This should include a Determination of Eligibility for the aforementioned buildings as well as the identification of any additional resources (buildings, structures, sites or objects). This will greatly help in the future planning and development of the site and could make financial incentives available.

Second, we believe the Select Board should consider appointing to the Advisory Board a CHC member either as a full member or alternatively as an at-large appointee (non-voting) as defined in the Advisory Board’s charge.

Finally, we note that DCAMM stated they are working with a number of “consulted parties” on this effort. As the Town’s appointed historical commission, the CHC members have a wealth of historic preservation expertise and local knowledge and would like to work directly with MHC and DCAMM on the scope for evaluating historic resources at MCI-Concord to aid in future planning.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alan Bogosian, Chair

I hereby request the Select Board, at its next meeting, (1) discuss the process to review the Residential Tax Exemption (RTE) this year and (2) form a study committee to assess the RTE's future impacts and goals. Under the current RTE, there appear to be many adverse consequences, including:

(1) The RTE Provides Huge Tax Savings/Rebates to Many Residents Without Any Documented Need or Means Test. This year, the RTE provided a tax rebate (savings/reduction) to many Concord residents, including those with homes assessed at over \$1.5M and up to a break-even of approximately \$2.2M. The RTE was lauded to transfer a portion of the Town's residential real estate tax burden to higher-assessed homes. However, large tax breaks to certain residents were never previewed or discussed. Using the Select Board as an example, a resident with a home assessed at over \$1.5M received a \$500+ savings/rebate in 2024, and some residents received savings/rebates well over \$1,200.

Select Board Member	2024 Home Assessment (\$)	2024 RTE exemption (\$)	2024 Home Assessment after RTE exemption (\$)	2024 Taxes Paid (\$13.13/\$1,000) (\$)	2024 Taxes Otherwise Due Without the RTE (\$12.24/\$1,000)(\$)	Tax Savings/Rebate Provided by the RTE (\$)	Tax Savings/Rebate Provided by the RTE (%)
Hartman	\$675,500	\$142,971	\$532,529	\$6,992	\$8,268	\$1,276	15%
Howell	\$1,231,600	\$142,971	\$1,088,629	\$14,294	\$15,075	\$781	5%
Rovelli	\$1,521,500	\$142,971	\$1,378,529	\$18,100	\$18,623	\$523	3%
Ackerman	\$1,543,000	\$142,971	\$1,400,029	\$18,382	\$18,886	\$504	3%
McKennitt	\$2,540,500	\$142,971	\$2,397,529	\$31,480	\$31,096	(\$384)	-1%

I and many other residents support the idea of not increasing real estate taxes on those who cannot afford increases. However, I and many other residents are puzzled and offended that some residents are receiving 15% tax breaks, including numerous former executive residents who down-sized in Concord and bought a second, more expensive home on the Cape or in Florida.

Please consider comments from two residents who spoke during public comment at the Select Board's last meeting on July 22nd. The first speaker, a member of the Town's Finance Committee, noted (a) his real estate taxes increased by over 40% in 2024; (b) the Select Board has refused to assess or study the RTE; and (c) the Select Board is supposed to represent all Concordians, not just a segment of the Town. The second resident, a physician at Emerson Hospital, noted (a) the RTE is shifting population dynamics and (b) has caused him to decide not to make capital improvements to his home. The Doctor also stated that he and many of his neighbors and friends anticipate that "once their kids get older, they plan to leave Concord". A policy that forces community volunteers and leaders, and professionals such as the Doctor to leave Concord seems wrong and, at a minimum, warrants assessment and creation of a town committee to study it.

(2) The RTE Has Reduced Charitable Donations in Our Town. Households in the "tiers" below the very wealthy families have stopped or reduced their donations to charitable organization and churches in town. Dollars previously earmarked and donated to charities now are being used to pay incremental real estate taxes caused by the RTE.

(3) The RTE Has Made Concord Less Affordable. Commercial landlords in Concord who are not eligible for the RTE have passed along and can be expected to pass along the cost of the incremental RTE taxes in the form of increased rents.

(4) Values of Higher-Assessed Homes Are Dropping. Sale prices of higher-assessed homes are now starting to drop including due to the high and escalating cost of real estate taxes in Concord compared with neighboring peer towns.

(5) Values of Lower-Assessed Homes Are Rising. Sale prices of lower-assessed homes will rise as the RTE provides an artificial tax subsidiary. The market will continue to adjust. Because RTE savings are built into buyer budgets, buyers will agree to pay relatively more for a home in Concord and prices of such more modest homes will increase, thereby increasing the values of lower-assessed homes in Concord and making them less affordable.

(6) The RTE Divides and Misaligns Voter Attitudes at Town Meeting. The RTE divides Town residents based on the assessment of their homes. Rather than supporting divisive and negative policy, the Select Board should create ways to unify and harmonize voters at Town Meeting. Under the RTE, town spending is not being shared proportionately by voters but distorted by the RTE. This voter division and misalignment at Town Meeting are not healthy or in any way positive. Towns on the Cape and on the Vineyard, for example, that have adopted the RTE have a large percentage of wealthy, non-resident taxpayers. That is not the case in Concord. The RTE is shifting disproportionately and unfairly the residential real estate tax burden to our neighbors and friends who live in, and with whom we share, our town.

(7) Concord Real Estate Assessments and Taxes Are Hugely Progressive Without the RTE. Real estate taxes are by definition progressive. 2022 sales data in Concord showed the sales price of a “condo” (homes between \$600,000-\$1M) increased 5% from the prior year; the “colonial” (homes between \$1M-\$2M) increased 11%; and the “custom” (homes over \$2M) increased 22%. Therefore, in 2024 (which assessments used 2022 sales as a reference), assessments on homes assessed over \$2M increased more than 400% more than assessment increases on homes between \$600,000-\$1M.

None of Concord’s peer communities have adopted the RTE. Above are a number of adverse consequences of the RTE. I am sure there are more. My primary point is the Select Board needs to study the data, trends and impacts of the RTE and make future decisions that are best for the entire Town rather than continuing to justify and perpetuate the RTE as “good policy” for a segment of the Town. I am requesting the creation of a study committee as the Select Board does not have the bandwidth or apparently the expertise to study the RTE as needed.

Thank you.

Mark Martines
Alford Circle