

To: Freeport Town Council
From: Housing Committee
Date: July 25, 2023
RE: Top 5 Priority Actions to Support Construction of Housing

The Freeport Housing Committee applauds the Council for prioritizing and funding ordinance update work. We recognize that plans to commence this work are underway. In the meantime, we believe that near term solutions exist to ensure good development in Freeport, while also taking immediate steps to enable unique housing development opportunities in our village center. These opportunities arise from community outreach to developers during the Downtown Vision Plan process, combined with market forces stemming from Southern Maine’s acute housing crisis. We offer the following recommendations to support community housing goals stated in the Freeport’s Comprehensive Plan and reiterated in the more recent Downtown Vision Plan.

Recommended Priority #1

Primary Lead: Housing Committee (with Staff administrative support)

Short Term Fix: Make an emergency repair to the Design Review Ordinance to exclude new residential and residential mixed use construction.

We urge the Council to take *immediate action* on a simple zoning amendment to unlock development currently available to Freeport that advances the Downtown Vision but is on hold because of our unpredictable approval processes. Recent processes illustrate how the process is ineffective (it took 8 months to get to a decision on a rather simple project), costly for both the town, the developer and volunteers who serve on boards and committees, and divisive amongst neighbors.

This is intended to be a short term emergency action.

Recommended Expedited Process

We’re recommending the following steps to amend the ordinance:

- 1. Housing Committee submits a redline zoning text amendment to the Town Council;
- 2. Town Council submits the text amendment
- 3. A joint workshop and public hearing is held.

The Housing Committee will return at a later date to discuss Priorities #2 - 5. In total, our committee has ten priority actions.

Recommended Priority #2

Long Term Fix: Establish and adopt a form based set of standards and metrics to address building and site design and materials for downtown {and eventually other zones as well}. A new code would eliminate the subjectivity of design interpretations among review board members and allow for adherence to an agreed upon set of standards. “The project is either compliant with the standards and metrics or its not”.

In tandem, **draft amendments to accelerate the permitting process:**

- Draft amendments to ordinances to speed up permit approval process and shift more review/approval to professional staff.
- Per the recommendation of Principle Group (in the Design Week presentations), adopt the Subdivision law exemption allowing staff to review plans so that only site plan review is required for multi-units in a building. Currently proposals also need to submit a separate subdivision application (these are projects that do not divide land, but create, for example 10 apartments in one building)
- Condense/eliminate some meeting requirements to reduce redundant appearances at hearings. Consider no longer holding public hearings when and after the community has set the policy via the Pattern Book (and Vision Plan). (NOTE: Public hearings are not required by State law for the review of subdivisions or site plans. State law requirements kick in only IF a board decides to have a policy requiring applications be subject to public hearings.)

Recommended Priority #3

Primary Lead: Planning Staff (external contracting)

Update zoning to meet Downtown Vision Plan. Move forward for consideration and adoption of specific recommendations found in Principle Group report including: specifications and metrics relating to density, dimensional proportions, height limits, setback requirements initially within the VC1 and VC2 downtown zones.

Detailed presentation available to illustrate how this works

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Lm4QfCs2_DBtLMv2fTghl-J86ytOCjwYu1Xubfelf-k/edit?usp=sharing

Recommended Priority #4

Primary Lead: FEDC and Town Council

Allocate funding to the analysis and development of a TOD TIF for downtown extending to Rt 1 S at Maine Beer Company to focus high density residential development around single modes of transportation and related amenities. Use TIF district to guide/encourage/influence types and density of housing projects built.

Council to establish Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing District Policy to establish predictable guidelines for developing affordable housing.

Recommended Priority #5

Primary Lead: Housing Committee

Offer opportunities for Board Training, skills development, and public education opportunities to broaden the understanding of TIF, budgets, development math, and neighborhood design. Consider partnering with a non-profit entity or smart growth organization to host a local small developer's boot camp to train landowners how to do small development projects.