

December 5, 2023

Sam Kapala  
Chair, Freeport Planning Board  
30 Main Street  
Freeport, ME 04032



Dear Sam:

On behalf of the Freeport Economic Development Corporation's (FEDC) Board of Directors, I am writing to express gratitude for the work of Freeport's Town Council, Planning Board, and Council-appointed Central Core Working Group (CCWG) to support much-needed housing development in Freeport. Freeport's current design review standards are subjective and ambiguous and are a broadly recognized barrier to the housing development goals established by the Freeport community.

As a champion of Freeport's Downtown Vision, FEDC has been a vocal proponent for appropriately sited and designed housing projects in Freeport's downtown district. The Plan calls for significant infill residential development to revitalize Freeport's village and commercial center.

FEDC has focused on increased housing in Freeport's downtown district for the following reasons:

- *Freeport is experiencing negative impacts from the regional housing crisis.* The inventory of available housing of all types is extremely limited, the average purchase price for a single-family home exceeds \$500,000, and new development projects have not been brought forward in no small part due to Freeport's unpredictable approval processes.
- *Limited housing options reduce opportunities for local elders and young people to stay in Freeport.* Starter homes and downtown apartments are not available, driving residents to look outside town.
- *More downtown residents will result in more "regular customers" who will visit and sustain locally owned businesses.* Downtown residents will support diverse, locally owned enterprises and cultural offerings.
- *The housing shortage undermines local employers' ability to attract and retain workers.* Lack of attainable housing is exacerbating local workforce shortages that have caused local businesses to reduce hours and have stressed the Town human resources, including first responders.
- *New housing projects Downtown will boost the Town's commercial tax revenues on existing infrastructure.*

- *Downtown housing on existing infrastructure is the most financially and environmentally sustainable* because sewer, water, and public safety services are expensive to deliver, and more users in compact areas result in lower capital needs, more ratepayers to share in the costs of existing infrastructure, and fewer vehicle miles traveled.

To overcome these challenges, on behalf of the FEDC Board, I encourage the Planning Board to endorse the CCWG's recommendations, with one important adjustment.

**Please consider reducing the Design Review District 1 boundaries proposed in Exhibit A to include only buildings immediately adjacent to Main Street.** For example, the Depot Street area is the perfect location in Downtown Freeport for dense, multi-family housing that will boost tax revenues and further Downtown's evolution into a thriving "live, work, play" village center. But, currently, the proposed revisions to District 1 continue to include single-family Mallet houses on Depot Street. Retaining these single-family homes in the District will result in continued ambiguity for the Project Review Board and potential multi-family developers related to visually compatible scale and appearance with the larger multi-family projects desired by the Town. This ambiguity will continue to dampen developer interest in bringing projects to Freeport. Main Street is an important cultural and economic asset for Freeport, and Main Street's architectural integrity can be maintained, while enabling dense infill development on surrounding parcels if the District 1 boundaries are reduced to include only buildings on Main Street. Shrinking the District 1 boundaries to Main Street represents a win-win compromise that will protect Freeport's character, while moving the community's Downtown Vision forward by sending a clear message to developers that multi-family projects are welcome in Downtown.

Furthermore, I encourage the Planning Board to move forward expeditiously to retain a qualified consultant with funding already appropriated by the Town Council and to undertake a more thorough, comprehensive overhaul of Freeport's Design Review standards and process to increase predictability and reduce subjectivity for the volunteer Project Review Board and developers.

Thank you again for the Planning Board's leadership on this essential topic for the community. We at FEDC look forward to working together to move Freeport towards a sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive future.

Sincerely,



Mary Davis  
President, Board of Directors