

**STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE TWO MOTIONS TO AMEND THE MAIN  
MOTION UNDER ARTICLE 5 AMEND ZONING BY-LAW – HIGHWAY  
COMMERCIAL 1 ZONING DISTRICT**

offered by Mr. Ed Scheideler

Dear Town Meeting Members,

In light of the affordable housing crisis in the Greater Boston area, we feel Needham should do its part for the region and provide more quality affordable housing, so we can share the great advantages our town offers and move toward greater economic and racial equity. Needham is facing its own housing crisis as teardowns are replaced by larger homes, leading to rising housing values and a reduction in options for young families and seniors who wish to downsize. We can reverse this trend if we approach the challenge and look for solutions. It is the responsibility of the town's governing bodies to seek opportunities for affordable housing where it is appropriate and is balanced with other needs of our community. Do we also not feel it is also our community's responsibility to begin to make amends for the historic racial exclusion that took place in suburban communities including Needham?

Mr. Ed Scheideler, Town Meeting Member, is presenting for consideration two amendments to the Article 5 - Commercial Highway -1 (MUZI) rezoning effort that is now before Town Meeting. The first amendment proposes to remove the 240 residential unit cap and the second amendment proposes to lower the affordable housing qualifying income threshold from 80% AMI (average median income in the region), to an average of 65% AMI for the required 12.5% of all units developed on the site. The 240 unit cap and the 80% AMI present in the current rezoning proposal represent unnecessary restrictions on the quantity of potential affordable housing before a developer can even make a proposal. We believe it is in Needham and the region's interest, for our town to pursue more affordable housing!

Multi-family housing does mean there is an increase in density, but being able to build densely is one way to provide more housing choice at more affordable prices. The town's increasing housing costs are directly connected to the overwhelming proportion of single-family zoning across Needham, and across many other suburban communities. Our single-family housing stock has been part of a decades-long regional trend of skyrocketing housing costs. When smaller single-family homes are replaced with larger homes, this drives the average home price higher at a rate far outpacing the economic capacity of potential buyers.

Discussions about affordable and multi-family housing often include concerns about the impact of more school-age children on our schools and the increase in traffic generated by a site's development potential. We agree that the impacts on schools and traffic should be addressed, and solutions found, in a proactive way by the town and the developer. The amendments we

are proposing do not change the fact that developers will still need to present their proposals to the town and address citizens' concerns through careful analysis and compromise.

It is not only our responsibility, but in our community's best interest to undo the historic inequity of suburban single-family zoning. One of Needham's values is being welcoming to all, but our current zoning policy limits us from fulfilling this. By thoughtfully reforming our current zoning and affordable housing policy we can reverse the trend and find solutions so Needham does not become increasingly less affordable with diminishing economic and racial diversity. We are a desirable community and can become even more accessible if we address the challenges of housing and density as an engaged and welcoming community. This is an opportunity to shift town consciousness to racial equity where it has historically been ignored in mostly white suburbs, and we urge you to focus on this critical issue. Equal Justice Needham's Housing Working Group hopes to present you with this incentive to prioritize affordable housing. We believe these two amendments present an opportunity to live up to the higher standard of being a regional trailblazer in affordable housing and addressing crises of housing and equity, and hope you will also support these amendments with that wider goal in mind.

Issues these amendments will address or benefits of the amendments:

- Allow for as many affordable units as possible.
- Meet needs of people with income lower than 80% AMI.
- Open communication with developers and signal that we are a town open to as much affordable housing as possible instead of dictating our reservations and signaling to developers that we will not compromise with them.
- Make progress toward addressing the larger housing crisis in the region and in our town.
- Stem the tide of rising housing values that shrink the economic diversity of those who can afford to live in Needham, and that force other residents to leave, take advantage of our well-equipped and capable school system to accommodate and welcome children from more racially and economically diverse households Open up the narrative to the whole town that racial justice and housing reform are a priority
- Use the opportunity of MUZI to begin a larger shift in town consciousness towards racial equity.



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Signature of Town Meeting Member, Mr. Ed Scheideler