



Dear Town Meeting Members,

**We urge you to vote no on article 16 of the October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Needham Special Town Meeting.**

As Needham residents, we recognize that the property covered by Article 16 includes special tracts of land. The Foster heirs will sell this land and development of some kind will happen; we appreciate the town's efforts to preserve approximately 34 acres of open space along the Charles River.

**Town Meeting is being asked to take an important vote without addressing critical questions that have significant impacts on Needham residents, Needham's waterways, and the town overall.** Rushing through a rezoning process for this property to seek a pre-determined outcome to allow for this particular development with an artificial deadline before the spring Annual Town Meeting **puts undue pressure on what should be a deliberate and careful process.**

**You are being asked to authorize overriding Rural Residence Conservation zoning designed specifically for this part of Needham.** We ask for an open public process with the involvement of all the necessary town departments, and landowners in the neighborhood, to achieve the conservation of this land in a responsible way. Needham will not be well-served by a blind, preemptive Town Meeting vote to authorize rezoning for dense, clustered housing in this ecologically sensitive part of town.

- **EXISTING ZONING WAS PUT INTO PLACE TO PROTECT THIS ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREA** and would support development on the Foster property in a responsible way.
- **ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF 70 CLUSTERED HOUSES ON 14 ACRES ALONG THE CHARLES RIVER IS NOT UNDERSTOOD.** It jeopardizes the good work that Needham has done for storm drainage management and to protect this ecologically sensitive area along the Charles River.
- **THIS VOTE WILL LIMIT THE TOWN'S OPTIONS** to work with other developers who may be interested in partnering with the Town to protect the Meadow while developing the Foster property in a responsible way and provide alternatives to do what is right for Needham. Signaling approval for this developer may drive up the price and make this possibility more difficult.

**VOTE IS UNNECESSARY, PLACING UNDUE PRESSURE ON THE PLANNING BOARD**

Town Meeting has already authorized the Select Board to acquire a portion of the property - a clear signal of the town's interest. Approving Article 16 at this time places improper and unnecessary pressure on the Planning Board to adopt a single plan -- for highly dense, clustered housing in a setting where town infrastructure was designed for low-density, rural residential housing, and conservation of unique land along the Charles River. ***To date, no one in town has produced the information necessary to determine if this is the optimal use of this property, or if it is even in Needham's best interests for the land to be rezoned in this way.***

**SIGNIFICANT UNANSWERED QUESTIONS REMAIN BEFORE AUTHORIZING A REZONING**

- **What is the impact on water, sewers, and drainage in this ecologically sensitive part of town along the banks of the Charles River?** The infrastructure built to support a part of town with rurally zoned 1-acre lots did not envision 70 large, clustered townhouses on 14 acres.

Needham's 2025 Commercial and Residential Growth Impact Study found that multi-unit developments, like that being proposed, stress Needham's drainage systems. Under its

Stormwater Management Plan, in collaboration with the EPA, the Town of Needham adopted Rural Residence zoning in 1989 as part of the Charles River Corridor Plan. ***This was written to protect the health of the Charles River, working with conservation organizations such as the Charles River Watershed Association.***

Previously agreed-to-by-Needham EPA restrictions for storm water management in ecologically sensitive areas may preclude a high-density development like that proposed by Northland Residential. This high-density development would immediately more than double the number of homes currently connected to the sewer system on all of Charles River Street.

- **What are the likely types and magnitude incremental costs that Needham residents will be required to pay associated with this development?** Last year’s warrant Article 11 noted “(ii) to appropriate \$2,500,000 to pay costs of such acquisition, *including the payment of all other costs incidental and related thereto*”.
  - **How will Needham residents access the meadow and what needs to be completed to ensure this?** Given the expected high costs of necessary school construction, how would the town pay for improvements to make this land accessible and usable? The Development Agreement executed by the town in March was silent as to public access.
  - **What traffic-driven expansions/improvements to some combination of Charles River Street and Pine Street will be required and what will the cost be?** In March 2021, during the pandemic, and before the recent approval of a childcare facility within a quarter mile of this property on Central Avenue, the Needham Traffic Management Committee recommended that the Department of Public Works place this intersection on the capital plan as an intersection **“with significant traffic safety concerns”**.

Regardless of the “non-binding” title of the warrant article, residents and Town Meeting Members deserve answers to these important questions before being asked to take any type of vote on a potential zoning change.

**On 10/24, we began circulating a petition to ‘Protect Needham Against Rushed Rezoning’. In less than 24 hours, almost 200 signatures were collected by residents from all over town who do NOT want Town Meeting to give a “pre-approval” for changing the zoning in the Rural Residence Conservation area.**

On behalf of the Foster Meadow Coalition and concerned residents across the town, we urge you - **Vote NO** on Article 16.

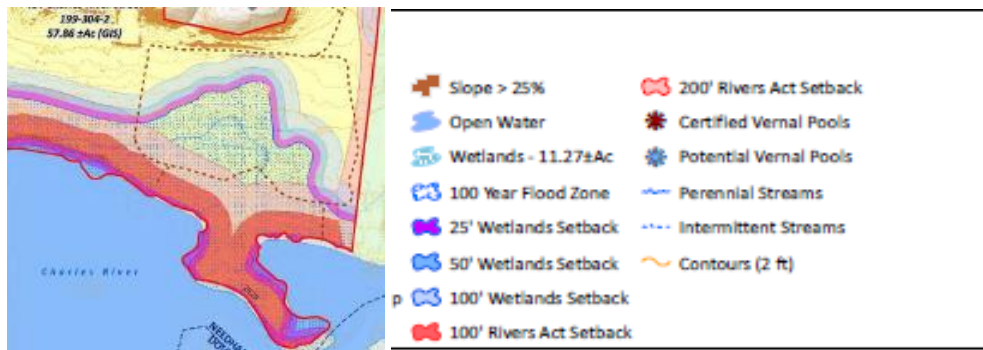
**Sincerely,**

Abby Alford, Andrea Dannenberg, Andrew Jeas, Angelene Simonello, Belle Von Der Goltz, David Eisenberg, David Segal, Dustin Pevear, Elizabeth Langford, Emil Iantchev, Fran Caplan, Fred Freketic, Gia Jeas, Heather Simmons, Jack Penny, Jim McGaugh, Joe Slyman, John Earle, Katherine McGaugh, Kathrine Freketic, Kevin Chan, Kiwon Chang, Krissie Chan, Lee Alford, Margo Palermo, Matt Sherman, Matthew Leibowitz, Michael Kenny, Patricia Connolly, Paul Aswad, Rosa Kim, Sally Gallagher, Snejana Lovtcheva, Tiffany Pevear, Todd Eyster, Tom Langford, Vicki Sherman.

## FOSTER PROPERTY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS "FAQs"

Below are answers to commonly asked questions regarding the Foster Property and Article 16:

- **Has Needham Town Meeting ever been asked to vote on a non-binding zoning authorization before the Planning Board has done their due diligence?** No.
- **Is a "yes" vote on Article 16 required to initiate a zoning change for the Foster property?** No. The Select Board or property owner can initiate a request for a zoning change at any time.
- **Didn't we already vote in favor of cluster housing with Article 11 at the October 2022 Special Town Meeting?** No. Article 11 authorized the appropriation of \$2,500,000 to acquire approximately 34 acres of land. Cluster Housing or alternative density levels were not addressed in Article 11. The article did not endorse the Northland proposal.
- **If Town Meeting votes against this article, can a developer clear cut the land and build single-family homes on the entire property, including the meadow?** An as-of-right single-family development would likely contemplate the construction of up to 14-16 single family homes on the main Foster parcel. The town of Needham limits dead end roads to 1,200 linear feet, which would mean a cul-de-sac ending near the grass area in front of the existing Foster Residence. The hypothetical single-family subdivision plan included in Northland's presentation to the Select Board in 2022, which showed 28 single family homes, was not in conformance with current zoning regulations. Also, over 11 acres of the meadow are considered Wetlands and floodplains and the 100' Wetland buffer extends across the meadow, thereby limiting development of that area.



- **Is there a way to see the type of cluster development proposed by Northland to get a sense of what would be built?** Yes. The proposed developer, Northland Residential, developed Fieldstone Way on 135 in Wellesley. Fieldstone Way consists of 44 townhouses with a similar density per developed acre. Northland is proposing 70 units on 14 acres at Castle Farm, which is 5 units per acre in an area currently zoned for 1 unit per acre. 5 units per acre is denser than any single residence zoning in Needham.
- **Do the existing Needham zoning bylaws have provisions to allow for alternative density levels?** Yes. Section 4.2.11 allows for Planned Residential Developments "PRDs" and Section 4.2.12 allows for Residential Compounds. Section 4.2.11 "provide(s) an alternative at density levels...(and) encourage(s) the preservation of significant open space for conservation and recreation."

- **Why isn't Northland/Select Board proceeding under the cluster zoning provisions that Needham already has?** The Northland proposal contemplates more units than PRD would allow. Based upon conservation principles and developed in partnership with conservation organizations, Needham's existing cluster approaches allow the residences to be built in a manner that creates open space with the aim of improving the health of our natural resources which is, in this case, the Charles River. The Northland Residential plan seeks to significantly increase the land burden to 70 houses in a condensed area along the banks of the Charles River, potentially posing a threat to the health of the Charles River and going against conservation principles.
- **In a Planned Residential Development "PRD" scenario, would the town still be able to own/access the open space land?** Yes. Section 4.2.11.2(C) lists the Town as one of several authorized entities to own open space.
- **Didn't the Needham Housing Plan propose adopting town wide inclusionary zoning requiring a minimum 12.5% affordable units on new construction greater than 6 units?** Yes, but our understanding is that the Town and developer are only considering having 5% of the units developed at this location reserved as affordable units.
- **Could Needham adopt a bylaw to prevent the clear cutting of this property?** Yes.
- **What does current zoning allow for in this area?** Rural Residence Conservation requires a minimum 1-acre lot with 150' of frontage area and a maximum of 15% lot coverage, adjusted down for unusable land (like Wetlands and floodplains) in the lot size calculations.

Still have questions? Please reach out to [fostermeadowcoalition@gmail.com](mailto:fostermeadowcoalition@gmail.com)