

Lexington Center Committee

Members: T. Eric Ballard, Jr., Richard Brown, Upasna Chhabra, Katherine Huang, Frederic Johnson, Jeffery Lyon, Pamela Lyons, Innessa Manning, Jerold Michelson (Chair), Pamela Shadley, Jon Wakelin

MEMORANDUM to Town Meeting Members & the Lexington community as a whole

Re: Center Committee's unanimous support for Article 34

The Lexington Center Committee is a Select Board-appointed committee with representatives from Lexington Center retailers, property owners, architects, and neighborhood residents. Our committee frequently invites other Lexington Center business owners, landlords, and commercial real estate brokers to our meetings to share their perspectives and insights. Our thinking is also informed by past studies and reports, most recently a 2019 report on recommendations for improving Lexington Center's economic vitality, the Town's 2022 Vision Committee report, and Lexington's 2022 Comprehensive Plan. The Lexington Center Committee's charge is to provide advice on "managing change in Lexington Center to ensure its long-term viability while preserving its historical significance and the integrity of adjacent neighborhoods" and we believe that Article 34 accomplishes this goal.

Although the Planning Board originally intended to bring forward Article 36 during the 2022 Annual (remote) Town Meeting to permit mixed use and multi-family development in Lexington Center, they ultimately decided to refer the article back to the Planning Board for further consideration. At that time the community feedback was that the Planning Board needed to take an overall look at Lexington as a whole to determine where multi-family density is most appropriate for Lexington. Since that time, the Planning Board has instituted an open and inclusive process with multiple public meetings spanning many months. The result is Article 34 which is the comprehensive plan that our community sought.

Although Lexington Center is a logical starting place with relevant amenities, transit, and the successful example of Lexington Place, the Planning Board identified– with input from the community– other areas of Lexington that can handle more density. We recognize that each area comes with its own constraints and challenges but feel that they are all possible areas to improve our housing stock beyond large single-family houses which is what our residential zoning code has encouraged to date.

Because the MBTA Multi-Family Zoning Requirement forbids mandating first floor commercial use, the Lexington Center Committee fully supports the Planning Board's decision to exclude Lexington Center acreage in meeting the MBTA requirement so that first floor retail and

services use can be maintained. This decision helps to preserve Lexington Center as the pedestrian, retail hub of our community. However, for retailers to remain and flourish in our center business district, we need to support them by encouraging more foot traffic and vitality / buzz that will come by adding new multi-family housing development in the Center. Therefore, we also fully support the Planning Board's decision to include Lexington Center in Article 34.

With 50 different property owners in Lexington Center– and the fact that the Town owns Emery Park and the municipal parking lots plus two lots that are owned by major utilities companies with their infrastructure on site– we do not fear that the entire area acreage will be built-out. In fact, we believe that any change will take place slowly and incrementally over time. In addition, all development will be subject to the Planning Board's Major Site Plan review process which includes public meeting hearings on any proposed development and the opportunity for the Planning Board and the public to share input and concerns. Moreover, the exterior of any development will need to meet the Historic Districts Commission (HDC) guidelines which restricts new development from "overpowering the existing structures" and states that new development must, "match or harmonize with the existing building and the neighborhood". Our committee discussed and considered the building height allowable under Article 34 to assess the potential risk for shadow creation. Based on the HDC review standards to examine proposed development within the "setting" in which they are located, and specifically including notes about roof configurations and setbacks, we support the height allowance that Article 34 proposes.

We encourage Town Meeting Members to vote to approve Article 34 as written. There is no need to amend or exclude or delay Lexington Center in the inclusion of this article. Article 34 has been created and revised through an open process and demonstrates a vision for the future of a more inclusive Lexington. This end result is one that we believe will benefit not only Lexington Center, but also our community as a whole.