



Town of Ashland, *Planning Office*

From: Ashland Planning Office

Re: Ashland Downtown Zoning District Proposed Amendment

In 2018, Ashland received a \$25,700.00 dollar Planning Assistance Grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development in an effort to assess and recommend amendments in an effort to update Ashland's Downtown Zoning District (ADD). Ashland's regional planning agency, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) was selected to work with the Town for the past twelve months to update the zoning for the downtown area. The basis for the modifications summarized below was developed from a community-wide survey taken in the spring of 2020, which received approximately 300 responses. From that, the modifications and updates were drafted through a comprehensive process with the Planning Board. The ADD is currently divided into three subsections and are all designed to provide a framework for a successful downtown that promotes a village-style, walkable, mixed-use environment. The focus of the zoning review and updates propose the following changes to improve and clarify the ADD zoning districts.

The proposed changes include reformatting the bylaw, most significantly by combining and simplifying the Dimensional Standards table. In addition, unclear provisions are now clarified and modified. The ADD is an early example of a form-based code approach, which puts a greater emphasis on design than typical zoning bylaws. While being an innovator in this approach, it had become clear that there were a number of issues where provisions were unclear or did not match the bylaw's intent and the community's vision for the downtown area. To fix these issues, the following changes were made:

- Section 8.5.6: Previously, the dimensional table was split into three tables, one for each sub-district. The proposed zoning combines the three tables into one, and moves the building graphics that were previously embedded in the table into their own section. Changes to the dimensional regulations include:
 - Requiring 10'-15' side yard setback depending on the sub-district, unless there is a common wall
 - Requiring an 8'-15' front yard setback depending on the sub-district, removing the option to have a 0' front yard setback.
 - Requiring a 30' rear yard when a property abuts a residential district, with the ability to reduce to 12' with the Planning Board's approval.
 - Changing the maximum height for mixed-use, commercial and residential to a maximum of 3 stories and 38 feet, and including an option to add a 10' architectural feature. With a Special Permit Section 8.5.6.10 allows for a fourth story to be added with a maximum height of 38' feet.

- Section 8.5.12: Previously a part of Section 8.5.11, the Building Standards section is now its own section, and has been updated to include new building graphics, as well as requirements for vertical and horizontal modulation, facades, massing components and roofs. Special permit requirements for certain styles of roof, such as mansard or flat roofs, and for roof pitches less than 7/12 have been added as well.

In conclusion, the modifications described above are intended to be brought forth to spring 2021 Town Meeting. The goal for the zoning review was to create clarity within the ADD using the 300 survey responses from Ashland residents. This project started in August of 2020 included not only the survey but five working session with the Planning Board and MAPC during posted Planning Board meeting, a public meeting walking tour of the downtown area and culminated with the Planning Board public hearing on May 13th, 2021. The Planning Board voted unanimously 5-0 to support the proposed changes. The full text is available on the Planning Department webpage.