JOHN KINHAN

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March 17, 2024

Chair and Members of the Planning Board

Town Hall

Topsfield, MA 01983

**RE: Opposition to Zoning Amendment for Affordable Housing Overlay District**

Dear Chair and Members of the Board:

I strongly oppose the enactment of a state-mandated overlay zoning district, purportedly to create so-called affordable housing, which per the determination of this Board may create about 118 new housing units.

This is an unfunded, unfair, and obnoxious state mandate that will result in an increasing housing *unaffordability* for the current taxpayers of Topsfield. It is a fair to conclude that 118 new housing units may result in the influx of 1.3 children per unit, or a total of 40 children requiring schooling. That’s at least 2 new classrooms and possible expansion of our elementary school buildings.

With the overlay zone along Route 1, we can expect an increase in our automobile insurance premiums due to the anticipated and foreseeable increase in vehicle accidents along that densely traveled highway corridor.

At the current cost of new construction, estimated at $300/square foot, the so-called “affordable” housing units will be selling for over $700,000. This is not affordable housing – it is housing for housing’s sake. It really is an outgrowth of a little-known initiative during the Obama administration to compel housing density and override local zoning bylaws. It is, nonetheless, an unfunded state mandate and must be opposed to preserve the right to self-govern our affairs.

The Town of Milton has already voted to oppose this policy and is being sued by the state’s Attorney General. The Governor is now withholding state funds to force compliance. The rancor from state officials is disturbing. State Senator Lydia Edwards of Boston, Chair of the Senate Committee on Housing, recently said to the *Boston Globe:* “The state has to crush Milton.”

The state promises to withhold state funds from communities that do not comply with its mandate. This may be a hollow threat since our state lawmakers are considering a supplemental budget that taps $873 million in surplus pandemic dollars to plug a $225 million dollar shelter budget shortfall *this fiscal year.* Indeed, the state’s stubborn hold on the “right to shelter” law is looking at spending about *$1 billion dollars* in FY2026 to meet the costs of housing for non-citizen migrants.

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**March 17, 2024**

**Planning Board of Topsfield**

Your Board’s efforts to comply with this mandate, and to reduce its overall impact on the welfare of the Town, is sincerely appreciated. Your task is never easy and I am sure you wrestled with this conundrum. But we cannot overlook the adverse effect such a mandate will have on our town.

As I see it, the negatives are:

1. An increase in school-age children and concurrent need to hire staff and expand school building infrastructure, both locally and at the regional level;
2. An increase in automobile insurance premiums due to foreseeable increase in vehicle accidents at/within such a highly traveled corridor;
3. An increase in both the Fire and Police Departments due to influx of an additional 5-7% of current population;
4. An added strain on our domestic water supply systems; and
5. A loss of local control over our zoning laws with possible ramifications as to other areas of governance not yet contemplated.

Please accept this letter into the record of the Public Hearing. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

*John Kinhan*

JK:abm