

**Planning Board Report to Town Meeting
Route 202/33 Corridor Proposed Zoning Amendments
November 5, 2025 Special Fall Town Meeting
Articles 8 and 9**

ARTICLE 8: Zoning Bylaw Amendment

To see if the Town will vote to amend the Zoning Bylaw Chapter 255 in regards to the creation of two new districts, Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use, by amending: Section 255-10 Terms defined to insert various new terms and their definitions and modify existing definitions; Section 255-11 Establishment of districts by adding Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use; Section 255 Attachment 1 Use Regulations Schedule by inserting new uses related to Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use; Section 255 Attachment 2 Dimensional Regulations Schedule by adding dimensional standards with footnotes for Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use; 255-15 Overlay districts by adding the Route 202/33 Corridor Design Guidelines Overlay District; Article VII Supplemental District Regulations by adding 255-XX Route 202/33 Corridor Design Guidelines Overlay District; 255-31 Flexible Development to create standards for certain developments in the Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use Districts; 255-34 Professional business uses to create standards for certain developments in the Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use Districts; and, 255-47 Multifamily and multiple dwellings to create standards for certain developments in the Residential Core and Residential Mixed Use Districts, as further articulated in the Planning Board’s Report to Town Meeting (Appendix ___), or take any other action relative thereto.

ARTICLE 9: Zoning Map Amendment

To see if the Town will vote to amend the Zoning Map, as incorporated into the Zoning Bylaw by Section 255-12, by changing parcels from the Granby town line in the north along Routes 202/Granby Road and Route 33/Willimansett Street to the Chicopee city line in the south, from Residence A-1 and Business A to the Residential Core district, and from Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Business A, Business A-1, and Business C to the Residential Mixed Use district as further articulated in the Planning Board’s Report to Town Meeting, or take any other action relative there to

PUBLIC HEARING: The Planning Board opened and conducted a public hearing on September 8, 2025, and continued it to September 15, 2025, for the subject zoning amendment, as articulated in the Warrant Articles.

AREA PROPOSED FOR RE-ZONING:

The area subject to the proposed re-zoning is an approximately 2.25-mile corridor, generally one parcel deep, on the north and south sides of Route 202/Granby Road from the town line to the intersection with Route 33/Willimansett Street, continuing south along Route 33 to the Chicopee city line. Refer to Attachment A Zoning Map Amendment and Attachment C Parcels Proposed for Zoning Map Amendment for the specific parcels subject to this zoning map amendment.

SUMMARY:

The proposed re-zoning will eliminate the existing five (5) different zoning districts in the subject area and create two (2) new zoning districts along the subject corridor – Residential Core & Residential Mixed Use – to enable appropriate types of business development and new housing at different scales, to establish a vibrant downtown corridor. The purpose of each district is as follows:

- **Residential Core** – To reserve and prioritize the existing residential identity of the neighborhood while introducing a wider variety of housing options.
- **Residential Mixed Use** – To integrate housing with businesses to promote economic development and support a vibrant and walkable neighborhood.

The Route 202 and 33 corridor has a mix of land uses with no consistent neighborhood identity, perceived as a place to drive through rather than a place to stop and visit or a neighborhood where people live, work, and play. The proposed rezoning will create a consistent set of allowed residential and business uses, dimensional standards developable parcels, and design standards for new development. The intent is to support compact development along a vibrant mixed use corridor that offers a range of housing opportunities and a location for some commercial growth and expansion in South Hadley that supports residents in the surrounding neighborhoods and across the community.

The proposed parcel dimensional standards reflect the frontage and size of existing parcels in the neighborhood rather than impose standards from larger lot zoning in more rural parts of South Hadley. The proposed design standards seek to ensure that new development and redevelopment support Town goals for sustainable growth and community character, reduce negative impacts on the environment, and encourage a new built environment that is welcoming and safe for all, and supports a friendly pedestrian experience. The proposed zoning amendments that would enable mixed use development, infill housing and business growth, along the corridor would allow for the creation of new jobs, new housing units, and new commercial spaces for restaurants, stores and professional offices.

BACKGROUND

The proposed re-zoning was developed through the work of an appointed project advisory committee consisting of five residents, the Director of Planning and Conservation, and a professional planning consulting firm, Innes Associates. This one-year process, begun in May 2024, included four community forums, multiple advisory committee meetings, and virtual opportunities for public comment. Prior to this effort, the community completed a multi-year assessment of the Route 202/33 corridor (*Route 202/33 Corridor Study Final Report, January 2022*), which resulted in a plan with numerous recommendations for achieving the communities' desired vision for the corridor, including rezoning the corridor to enable more housing opportunities and economic growth along the most traveled roadway in South Hadley.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Selectboard voted unanimously to support the proposed zoning amendments for Routes 202 and 33 at their meeting on September 16, 2025.

Prior to the public hearings on September 8th and 9th, 2025, the Planning Board held several meetings to discuss the rezoning proposal developed by the advisory committee, and held a public listening session on July 28, 2025. Following is a summary of the written and verbal comments submitted at the public hearing and listening session, and minutes of these meetings are included in Attachment D.

Traffic

Many comments expressed significant concerns about the high volume of traffic, particularly during the morning and evening commute hours, along Route 202 especially. Traffic volume data available from MassDOT and PVPC show traffic counts on Granby Road near the East Street intersection at 16,103 daily vehicle trips in 2020, and 14,225 in 2017. It appears that much of this traffic is from adjacent communities that utilize Route 202 to pass through South Hadley to access employment and shopping centers, major universities, and Interstate highways (I91/I90) in the surrounding communities. Many residents spoke against new developments, commercial or residential, that could increase traffic along the corridor. Other residents expressed a desire to capture a portion of the pass-through vehicle trips as new customers for South Hadley businesses, which could add commercial tax revenue, broaden the tax base, and lessen the tax burden on local households. The Town has applied to a MassDOT grant program for a traffic mitigation study along the corridor, and to PVPC for updated traffic counts for use in assessing the potential for a new traffic signal and/or other traffic control measures.

Community Character

Comments in opposition to the zoning amendment proposal typically cited concerns that it would change the character of the corridor, and of South Hadley in general. Fear of a loss of quality of life was expressed due to the construction of buildings that may be taller than those abutting them, increased traffic that new residential housing and commercial businesses may bring, and a loss of currently undeveloped land. Some stated that South Hadley was a “bedroom community” and preferred for it to stay that way. Others stated that change is needed and that the proposed rezoning supported development that would support the character of the community, increasingly over time, as the corridor developed into more of a “Main Street” than a local highway.

Housing Needs

Generally, comments recognized the need for more housing for middle- and low-income households, and the limited availability of such in South Hadley. Some shared their experience of knowing both young families and older households that have had to relocate outside of South Hadley because they could not find housing that was within their price range or of a smaller unit size. Some experienced in real estate and/or construction, presented arguments about how the cost of land was a significant factor in new housing

costs and that through increasing unit density, the cost per unit could be brought down, making a project more financially feasible for the developer and buyer. Others felt this argument was a justification for profiteering and rejected it, preferring the current RA1 zoning that covers much of the corridor which allows 2 single-family housing units per acre by right. There were also comments expressing concerns about multifamily housing and/or rental housing potentially decreasing property values.

Proposed Building Heights

There was much discussion about the proposed allowances for building heights in both the RMU and RC districts. Based on this discussion, the Planning Board reduced the maximum allowable height in the RMU from 45' for multifamily buildings and 55' for mixed use buildings to 40' and 3 stories for both. And to address comments made that the proposed zoning doesn't encourage or mandate deed restricted Affordable Housing, the Board added a provision that for projects with 50% or greater deed restricted Affordable Housing units, the maximum height allowed shall be 4 stories and 50'.

Proposed Building Setbacks

Some expressed concerns about the proposed minimum front building setbacks: 10' in the RMU, and 20' in the RC. There was a general misperception that this setback was off of the road edge of pavement, which it is not. The front building setback is measured from the outer edge of the *road right-of-way*, which is approximately 60' wide along Granby Road and Willimansett Street. The road right-of-way includes the paved travel lanes, road shoulder, sidewalk, and possibly a grassed buffer outside of that, depending on the layout. Thus, the front setback would generally begin at the outer edge of the sidewalk. Allowed uses within the front 20' or 10' setback would include pedestrian entrances to buildings, outdoor seating, and landscaping with trees, shrubs, etc. The proposed zoning requires parking to be at the rear of new buildings. The Board also added a required landscaped buffer along side and rear parking lots no less than 6' in width, and solid wood fencing may be incorporated.

Extent of Residential Core District

After the July 28th public listening session, the Board proposed to add a "Residential Core Expanded" zoning district that included neighborhoods south of Granby Road that were currently zoned RA1 but consisted entirely of dimensionally nonconforming lots, meaning they did not meet the minimum lot size (22,500 SF) or frontage (125') for that district. The intent was to "right-size" the zoning and correct a codified prejudice imposed upon smaller lots and these neighborhoods specifically. However, many residents of these neighborhoods expressed opposition to the proposed zoning change, and the Board withdrew the "Residential Core Expanded" from the proposal.

Preexisting Nonconforming Residential and Business Uses

Several property owners expressed a desire to have the existing use of their property become conforming with the zoning code. These property owners expressed concerns about their ability to sell either their business or their property in the future. They felt that

the corridor had changed over the past decades and that the mix of business uses and multifamily residential should be explicitly enabled by zoning. They recognized a patchwork of development along the corridor that didn't have a consistent identity. Some acknowledged that their business was abutting residential properties, without any conflicts that they were aware of. They expressed a desire to expand their current businesses and a concern about doing so when the current zoning required them to either get a Special Permit or prohibited it outright. Others expressed that a Special Permit process was a "simple process and finding" and should be of no concern to these property owners.

New Cottage Cluster Development

Some asked questions about the design of the new "cottage cluster development" housing typology allowed by Site Plan Review in both the RC and RMU. This is a group of small, detached houses, often called cottages, close together on a parcel of land, organized around shared common open space and parking. There can be no more than 30% building coverage within such a development, and the housing may be no taller than 1.5 stories or 20'. Some property owners along the corridor expressed an interest in developing this type of housing if the zoning amendments were adopted.

RELATIONSHIP TO MASTER PLAN AN OTHER COMMUNITY PLANS:

South Hadley Master Plan (2020)

The 2020 Master Plan identifies the Route 202 and 33 corridor as an area suitable to increase commercial activity and a variety of housing options, while also protecting the existing clusters of residential development. The plan further recognizes the need to address community-wide housing needs as among the top three priorities. The Master Plan establishes a vision for South Hadley that involves implementation of policies, programming and physical improvements that support a healthy and sustainable natural, physical and economic environment in which the entire community can prosper. Zoning reform is critical to achievement of this vision.

The Master Plan specifically recognizes both housing and economic development needs within the community as follows:

Objective 1-1: Create the physical and regulatory conditions that support job retention and growth and encourage new retail, services, and professional telecommuting.

Objective 1-3: Support the development of housing at different scales and price ranges, to address the needs of people at all life stages and incomes.

Objective 3-2: Diversify the tax base to support jobs, manufacturing, goods, and services for residents, and strengthen the municipal budget in order to increase capacity and services.

South Hadley Housing Production Plan (2023)

This plan is an assessment of the town's existing housing needs, opportunities and challenges, with a focus on the affordable housing, both market rate and deed restricted. The plan recognizes that the current zoning allows for development opportunities however for Affordable Housing, mixed-income developments, and even multifamily at multiple scales, these opportunities are not allowed by-right under zoning.

Goals from this plan that address the proposed zoning changes include:

- Create more housing options that meet a wider range of needs, including housing for people of varied ages, household structures, and physical abilities;
- Ensure new and existing housing adds to the town's safety, sustainability, public health, and economic development; and,
- Encourage housing that is more likely to be affordable to the typical household without subsidies.

Other relevant objectives and strategies from this plan include:

Objective B – Create more opportunities for village style development through zoning.

South Hadley residents have expressed a desire for housing opportunities that offer a variety of housing types and easy access to small businesses, parks and playgrounds, and other community amenities. Fulfilling that vision requires directing development into South Hadley's existing village center areas (South Hadley Falls and the Village Commons) and developing new nodes of housing, retail, and civic activity (e.g. the Woodlawn area and the 33/202 Corridor). Rather than encouraging sprawl-style and resource intensive greenfield development, this approach would encourage compact, mixed-use, sustainable village-style development consistent with the desires expressed in past planning processes. (p.108)

Strategy 7: Enable Low- and mid-density mixed use development through zoning in strategic locations.

Objective C – Encourage incremental and contextually sensitive “gentle density”.

Strategy 8: Allow more “missing middle” housing types by right in more zoning districts.

Missing middle home types include duplexes and triplexes, townhomes, small apartment buildings in a variety of shapes and sizes. While detached single-family homes and large apartment buildings will be perfect for some households, they do not meet everyone's needs. They are an especially poor fit for new families and lower-income families who may desire access to private outdoor space but cannot afford the high land costs mandated by low-density housing. The lack of these homes makes it materially more difficult for people seeking to downsize, who want to form their own household, who want to live near amenities. (p.118)

Objective D – Use zoning and permitting to encourage deed-restricted Affordable Housing production.

Strategy 12: Adopt zoning-based incentives for deed-restricted Affordable Housing (e.g. density bonuses, dimensional relief, parking relief).

The plan describes how the housing market in South Hadley is likely not able to support mandated deed restricted Affordable Housing, however, the production of Affordable units could be incentivized by offering a developer the ability to build more market rate units to cover the expenses associated with the non-market rate units. (p.127-128)

Age Friendly – Community Assessment and Recommendations Report (2021)

Priority Action #1 – Support Town efforts to adopt inclusionary zoning policies and to allow for conversion of single-family homes to multiple units and/or add accessory apartments to properties with single family homes.

RECOMMENDATION:

At their meeting on September 15, 2025, the Planning Board voted Four (4) out of Four (4) members present in favor (D. Mulvaney, N. Therien, B. Hutchison, R. Szklarz) to recommend to the Selectboard the inclusion of the herein proposed Zoning Bylaw and Zoning Map amendments on the November 5, 2025 Special Fall Town Meeting Warrant for adoption. At their meeting on October 6, 2025, the Planning Board voted four out of four members present (D. Supczak-Mulvaney; N. Therien; B. Hutchison; R. Szklarz) to approve this Report to Town Meeting.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Proposed Zoning Map Amendment

Attachment B: Proposed Bylaw Amendments by section

Attachment C: Parcels Proposed for Zoning Map Amendment

Attachment D: Public Hearing Minutes for September 8 and 15, 2025