

Article 15 Bedford Business Zoning Appropriation

Bedford's General and Limited business zoning evolved between 1923 and 1979, with the bulk of the zoning bylaws being enacted in the late 1950's and early 1960's. While piecemeal changes have been made since, the basic underlying assumptions in the zoning remain those of another era and don't reflect what has evolved in modern retailing in the ensuing decades. Furthermore, the zoning districts were drawn with simplistic borders and without regard to lot lines, proximity to residential areas, or consideration of appropriate uses in differing areas. Obsolete and "one size fits all" zoning create significant barriers to establishing and/or relocating businesses, which in turn decreases demand for commercial land and buildings. Fewer potential tenants lead to little, if any, new development, lowered rents, empty storefronts, and eventually, deferred maintenance. Ultimately, commercial tax revenues stagnate due to weakening property values.

This article proposes to appropriate \$120,000 to contract specialized consulting services to analyze, write, and bring to Town Meeting an entire "soup to nuts" package of new business zoning for the voters' consideration. The scope of services will specify data gathering and a careful analysis of existing zoning; categorizing problems, inconsistencies, and opportunities; consideration of every alternative, whether modifications to existing districts, logical new districts, and/or overlay districts, all with customized bylaws crafted for each; and writing a complete and consistent package of new business zoning bylaws, ready to present to Town Meeting. A robust public participation process would inform every stage of the effort. The time frame is estimated at 18 months from the contract award.