

ARTICLE 12
Needham Fall 2021 Special Town Meeting

Citizens' Petition

*Re: A non-binding resolution concerning the amendment of the current
Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by-law*

NOTICE OF CHANGE: *TO REFER ARTICLE 12 TO THE PLANNING BOARD*

We want to thank everyone who joined in support of the recent citizens' petition to address our ADU by-law in Needham. The petition was created to seek the attention of, and garner support from, our town residents, governing boards, and officials, and to recognize the urgent need for creating more affordable housing choices in Needham. The petition urges an immediate focus on our current ADU by-law and advocates for the removal of the residency restriction to allow these small, but important, affordable rental units to be available to the general public, instead of being restricted to caregivers or family members. During the weeks of advocacy for this petition, we reconnected with informative and encouraging research prepared by our Needham Board of Health and the Council on Aging who were strong advocates for a less restrictive ADU by-law when the ADU issue first came up in 2018. There is definitely great support for this issue!

On behalf of the petitioners, I wanted to share with all of you an important new Town decision and explain its influence on how we determined the best way to proceed with this citizens' petition. The Needham Planning Director, Lee Newman, recently created a new Affordable Housing Study Committee that will be starting October 22. This committee has been charged with several objectives, including a thorough assessment of housing needs, the crafting of new housing policies, the creation of a Needham Housing Plan, and an action plan for the implementation of zoning reform measures that will enable the creation of more affordable housing choices across our town. The committee will be guided by the Planning Director, two Planning Board members, and the Housing Consultant; will have representation from several town boards; and will include two (2) citizens-at-large. I am honored to have been selected as one of these two citizens.

Considering this upcoming housing committee work, and my role in it, we have reviewed options for how best to handle the citizens' petition known as Article 12. We pursued input from Moderator Fee for the Town Meeting procedural options, and were also concerned that we respect the time commitment of all of you, the participants in Town Meeting. We ultimately concluded that we should make a public statement at Town Meeting to explain this new opportunity to pursue the ADU advocacy as part of comprehensive affordable housing planning with this Housing Study Committee. This is a major step forward for Needham and a

great opportunity to keep ADU reform on the front burner. The final procedural step will be to request a Town Meeting member to make a motion to refer Article 12 to the Planning Board and acknowledge that ADUs will be an integral part of the study and represent a good candidate for zoning reform. We remain grateful for all the support for this petition, and we are committed to finding multiple affordable housing alternatives to the spiraling costs of single-family homes in Needham. The trend in town for limited affordable housing options and higher housing costs present real challenges for the social and economic health of our town. The Needham community will be able to provide valuable input to the committee, and we are energized to begin this work to understand, comprehensively, the housing metrics of Needham, seek community engagement in fact-finding and visioning, and develop the appropriate zoning reforms that will enable the creation of more affordable housing choices across our town. Thank you for your time and involvement in guiding Needham forward as Town Meeting members. I look forward to speaking briefly at Town meeting when we complete the referral procedure for Article 12.

Thank you – Oscar Mertz