



**PLANNING BOARD**

**Report to Town Meeting**

**Article 35.           Zoning – Apartment Bedroom Mix  
(Planning Board)**

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To see if the Town will amend the Standards and Conditions of Section 3.323, Apartments, by adding the language in bold italics as follows:

~ SEE WARRANT ~

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Recommendation

The Planning Board voted 6-0 with one abstention and two members absent to recommend Town Meeting adopt this article.

Background & Purpose

In early 2017, Valley Community Development Corporation notified the Zoning Subcommittee that it was seeking a site in Amherst for an “enhanced SRO (single room occupancy)” facility to serve low- and extremely low-income individuals. SROs are facilities with one-room living units, which have shared kitchens and bathrooms. “Enhanced SROs” feature bathrooms and kitchenettes in the individual units.

One of the challenges Valley CDC faces is an existing zoning restriction on bedroom counts in apartment buildings. Under the current regulation, no more than 50% of units in a given apartment building may be of any one size (studio, one bedroom, two bedroom, etc). This restriction essentially disallows SROs/E-SROs, which by definition consist of one room.

In order to facilitate this project and other similar projects providing affordable housing in the Town, the Zoning Subcommittee considered several approaches and ultimately recommended the language contained in Article 35.

Mechanics

This article would give the Permit Granting Board or Special Permit Granting Authority the option to waive the bedroom count requirement in cases where 100% of units, excepting those occupied by resident managers, are affordable. Affordability is as defined in Article 12 of the Zoning Bylaw, and currently is defined as being affordable to individuals earning 80% or below of Area Median Income.

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Benefits

This article would allow greater flexibility to developers seeking to provide affordable housing in Amherst, including a project currently under consideration by Valley CDC. Such housing furthers the Town's goal of providing housing that is affordable to the broadest possible spectrum of the community.

Risks

Requiring 100% of units (except those occupied by resident managers) is a very high standard. By contrast, Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Laws requires only 20% of units be affordable in order to qualify for a Comprehensive Permit process. Though the Valley CDC project would meet the 100% requirement, many projects would not. The Town may wish in the future to consider lowering this threshold and more broadly promote production of affordable housing.

Process

The Planning Board has been working on this article since January 2017, and it was discussed at several meetings of the Zoning Subcommittee. A public hearing was held on Wednesday, March 15, 2017. The Planning Board voted 6-0 with one abstention and two members absent to recommend Town Meeting adopt this article.