



OBSERVER REPORT

HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

July 25, 2023 Hybrid Meeting Recorded

LWVM Observer – Bonnie Grenier

Members in Attendance – Erin Noonan, Thatcher Keezer, Kurt James, Dirk Isbrandsten, Louis Meyi, and Barton Hyte. Other attendees – Becky Cutting Curran

Becky Curran made a presentation on the MBTA Communities Act requirements as they relate to Marblehead.

- The purpose of this legislation is to create more housing near public transportation and ultimately lowering the price of housing in these areas.
- Marblehead is a “Bus Service Community and thus considered an “Adjacent Community” which has special rules.
- An MBTA Community is required to have a zoning bylaw that provides for at least one district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right.
- “As of right” means without the need to obtain any discretionary permit or approval.
- Reasonable size must have a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre and be located within a half mile of the bus route. In Marblehead that requirement is 27 acres with a minimum of 5 contiguous acres.
- Most of Marblehead is 4 units/acre. The business district is closer to 10 units/acre.
- Currently Marblehead allows multi-family housing in the unrestricted district by special permit and not as a matter of right.
- Non-compliance would make Marblehead ineligible for Housing Choice Grants, Local Capital Fund Projects and the MassWorks Infrastructure Program. At its discretion DHCD may take non-compliance into consideration when making other discretionary grants and may impose more severe penalties in the future
- Marblehead received a grant to do some analysis and that has been completed. This will be discussed at a meeting of the Planning Board in September.
- They are trying to get a second grant to assist with stakeholder engagement to help get buy-in from the community.

The timeline for compliance requires that the town submit a final plan to the State by December 31, 2024. To accomplish this, the plan must be developed by December 2023 so it will be ready to present for a vote at Town Meeting in spring 2024. Meetings and public forums will be held throughout the fall to help in the development of an overall

plan. Ideally, including an affordable component in the plan would be preferable to the committee.

In the meantime, committee members will reach out to communities similar to Marblehead in density that are a year ahead in the process to find out what their experience had been so far in complying with the MBTA Communities Act so. What are their take-aways? What did they do well and what would they do differently? Do they have an affordable component? Comparable communities to be contacted are Winchester, Reading, and Rockport.

There was a general discussion on identifying a Smart Growth Overlay District (40R) possibilities in Marblehead. (Chapter 40R encourages communities to create dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts, including a high percentage of affordable housing units, to be located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing city and town centers, and in other highly suitable locations.) Becky will check back to see what was done in the 2009 plan to review the process, plans and guidelines. The possibility of hiring a consultant to help with this was suggested.