

Town of Falmouth
Growth-Density Evaluation Forum
Highlights Report
Thursday, November 15, 2018
Lunt Auditorium, Oceanview, 74 Lunt Road, Falmouth

About the Forum

The primary purpose of the Forum was to hear residents' concerns relative to growth, density, and residential zoning as requested by Falmouth Town Council in April, 2018.

After brief introductory remarks by Council Chair Caleb Hemphill, participants were asked to respond to a very broad question: "What's on your mind regarding residential development in Falmouth?" All ideas were put on the wall and organically organized into general categories. Then there was a facilitated discussion, category by category, in which participants had a chance to share praises, concerns, and hopes.

Unlike a public hearing where one comment is heard after another, often disconnected and in somewhat random order, this was more of a discussion on one topic at a time. We intended to give the facilitator some leeway in managing the discussion and focus our attention on one topic at a time. The initial brainstorming gave us a good indication of what topics were most popular and we started with those.

So that the meeting was inclusive, efficient, and productive, it was professionally facilitated by Craig Freshley of Good Group Decisions. Craig identified themes as we went and those were included in a report of the meeting prepared by town staff and made available to the public.

Attendance

The Forum was attended by about 80 people in total, including several members of the LPAC Committee and the Town Council.

Ground Rules

- This is the first step
- We are here to share, not conclude
- LPAC and Town Councilors are listening
- All views heard
- Let Craig manage the discussion and call on people
- Neutral facilitation and reporting

Planned Agenda

- 7:00 **Opening**
Town Council Chair Caleb Hemphill will briefly explain what led up to this forum and what next steps will likely happen after the forum. Facilitator Craig Freshley will explain the meeting format and a few simple ground rules.
- 7:15 **All Ideas in Brief**
Craig will ask: “What’s on your mind regarding residential development in Falmouth?” Participants will paraphrase answers on papers with markers and we will put them all up on the wall. We will organize them into categories.
- 7:45 **Topic-by-Topic Discussions**
Beginning with the most popular topics, Craig will ask additional questions and draw out what’s really bugging people about growth and density, and what people like. In some cases, he will actually “interview people” to make sure we really understand the points being made.
- 8:45 **Themes and Thanks**
Craig will offer a quick summary of the major themes heard throughout the evening and Chairman Hemphill will thank participants and organizers.
- 9:00 **Adjourn**

All Comments in Brief

Methodology

Craig asked: “What’s on your mind regarding residential development in Falmouth?” Participants paraphrased answers on papers with markers. They were then put up on the wall and organized into categories.

- Each person wrote 1-3 things
- Each person wrote one thing per paper
- Each person wrote clearly and legibly

- Each person used the colored paper and markers provided
- The fewer words the better
- When done, the papers were brought to the front

Comments

- Rural and Open Space
 - Hope to preserve open field / farmland
 - Too much development leads to too much loss of natural areas and wildlife habitat
 - High density housing will be occupied by people who inherently do not give a hoot about rural character. They will change the town.
 - There is too much suburban sprawl
 - Losing rural character
 - Creating recreations space
 - Keeping rural character in certain areas
 - Loss of environmental habitat and unfragmented spaces
 - More waterfront access
 - Preserving open space
 - Taking the beauty of our Falmouth Woods Association away!
 - Loss of habitat and environment
 - Carbon footprint
 - Cluster septic systems are a bad idea. Should be banned in Falmouth.
- Pedestrian Friendly
 - Our neighborhood got better when zoning changed
 - The character of Falmouth be kept as is
 - Loss of semi-rural character
 - Keep the character of the town. Do not allow high density development.
 - Changes the nature of the neighborhood
 - We are losing Falmouth charm
 - We need more sidewalks, neighborhood parks
 - Walk-able destinations
- Neighborhood Character
 - Enforce site standards
 - Growth areas make sense – how to make it work?
 - Pedestrian friendly
 - Changing our neighborhood
 - Adverse impact of development on existing neighborhoods
 - Sidewalks

- Thankful for the zoning changes
- Changes in zoning will drastically impact quality of life
- Increase setbacks – no sidewalks or tiny houses
- Appreciate new neighbors
- No town notice given when postage stamp “tiny” houses are built in my neighborhood
- Increase setbacks and min. size of houses
- Loss of Falmouth’s character

- Misc.
 - Make all home extraordinary (eg. Net Zero)
 - Commercial development adjacent to residential neighborhoods

- Traffic
 - Traffic pressures
 - Traffic
 - Development = Traffic
 - Traffic implications Rte. 1 development plan for small town
 - Congestion
 - I’m concerned about traffic congestion
 - Traffic on roads to/from schools
 - Too much traffic and concerns with speeding
 - Traffic
 - Too much traffic
 - Growth in dense areas will cause traffic probs

- Affordable Housing
 - Need affordable housing
 - Elderly, (some), New Mainers, Service Providers can’t afford to live here!
 - What about affordable housing
 - Affordable housing stock needed
 - Affordable?

- Schools
 - Schools are already at capacity
 - School capacity
 - Protect schools
 - Over populated schools
 - Overcrowded school
 - Schools
 - Population growth vs. school capacity

- School over-crowding
- Growth is necessary
- Nowhere in the zoning documents created since 2013 was any priority given to the effects of the changes on tax rate and school capacity
- Falmouth schools' ability to handle growth
- Our schools! Too many students
- Is there a mathematical model that explains the expense to the town of each new resident?
- Schools are crowded now
- Can the school system handle the increase in population?

- Taxes and Property Values
 - Property value decline
 - Appropriate development for existing neighborhoods
 - Property values (down arrow)
 - Decreasing residential lot size can negatively affect neighboring property values
 - Tax increase
 - How about a cap on taxes for older residents?
 - Age in place tax too high
 - Is there infrastructure to support denser residential
 - Strained emergency services
 - Appreciate the increase in my property values
 - Property value going down
 - Not protecting homeowners – taxpayers' property!
 - Property values
 - Scale to large
 - Property values preserved
 - Property values going down (down arrow)!
 - Impact fee – pay as you go

- Density
 - Neighborhoods with functioning through roads are over-burdened by development of cul-de-sacs and infill
 - 2013 Changes incentivized unnatural accelerated res. growth rather than managing growth that would naturally occur
 - Build denser housing along Rt 1
 - Too much growth, too quickly
 - We have growth and density now we don't need more
 - Consider no new homes
 - Stop sprawl
 - Thoughtful, tasteful, sustainable, renewable growth
 - New levels of density will greatly impact services

- How much growth can our infrastructure support?
 - Fear of becoming too congested
 - Infrastructure costs with growth in rural areas
 - What is the justification for increasing density at all?
 - Zoning lot sizes too small
 - Density is better than sprawl
 - Neighbors need breathing room
 - Too many homes developed on small lots
 - Restrict home permits / year to a reasonable number
 - Developments are too dense
 - How many is too many?
 - Cost, Infrastructure, School Cost - Who bears burden, Traffic
 - E. Falmouth too dense
 - Put existing residents first over new development ie: infrastructure
 - Lot size mins are too small
 - ?? off private road without consulting Homeowners Association
 - Increase setbacks to 30' from property line
 - Falmouth Woods Association paid \$20,000 for a lawyer!
 - Everything my husband & I have worked so hard for taken away!
 - Rt 1 another Wash or Forest or Brighten Ave
 - Excessive greed
 - High density housing shouldn't have a place in Falmouth
 - Where should higher density occur
 - Approvals for smaller projects
 - Density relative to existing character
 - Hope we fix RA district – wider lots
 - In favor of development to scale current zoning
 - Not enough time to react to potential change
 - Infrastructure
 - Schools
 - Roads
 - Wastewater
 - Slow down development
- Falmouth Center
 - Proper location of athletic fields
 - Falmouth Center development (all aspects including residential)
 - Concerned about zoning change to accommodate “massive” development. Like the development with current zoning of 2013 plan
 - Worried about sports complex as “economic driver” (?) This was not part of the Falmouth vision-small commercial area

- Process
 - Sleazy developers hit & run
 - Current regs benefit developers/real estate agents/builders/landowners who sell/leave town
 - Respect the plan
 - Do residential zoning amendments have the desired results?
 - Location of athletic fields
 - People do not fully understand how the changes in zoning will impact them.
 - There is no need for ?? development
 - Town must make sure that every area of town affected by proposed changes in zoning is notified with written notices that are clearly written
 - Due diligence
 - No transparency
 - Extreme concern for Cohen/Soley development project (Non-Abutter)
 - Stick with the plan

Summary

Near the end of the workshop Craig offered a brief summary of the major themes heard throughout the evening, as follows:

- There are concerns about the process, both from the past and going forward.
 - You wish that the public was better informed of changes being made
 - You wish public opinion was better considered in making decisions going forward
 - You wish there was a more detailed impact analysis of the likely consequences of changes being considered
- Much of what you love about this town is here already, and a lot of love for this town was expressed in the meeting.
 - Many of you are content with Falmouth the way it is, or the way it has been in recent years
 - If the town is going to change, at least let it change slowly, incrementally, and thoughtfully
 - For many of you in this room, the changes that have happened in the last two or three years have simply been too fast
- Concern was expressed about the changing character of the town.
 - Many of you like it just the way it is.
 - You don't really understand or see the need to have deliberate town policies to change the character of the population

- Or change the character of the way it looks
- Many would like the character changed in the following ways:
 - More pedestrian activity
 - More sidewalks connecting residential areas and commercial areas
 - Improved traffic congestion
 - There are things many people spoke up about changing
- There have been concerns expressed about large scale development.
 - By in large, people are more open to a small subdivision than a large-scale development
 - People expressed concerns about developers profiting at the expense of the town's character
 - It's the pace and scale of change that has people concerned
- Before inviting the Town Council Chair to say a few words and close the meeting, Craig made the following last points:
 - He thanked everyone
 - It was a very civil conversation
 - Craig appreciated everyone being with him, following his directions, and contributing to a good conversation

Ending

Chairman Hemphill thanked participants and organizers.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.