

Why a Deerfield Center Village District

Some background ...

The Town of Deerfield's 2009 Master Plan recommends that the Planning Board explore the feasibility of rezoning the historic village area to allow for higher density development and mixed uses. In addition, the plan specifically recommends: (1) that the Board evaluate the effectiveness of the town's existing Commercial/Industrial Flexible Overlay District (i.e. Section 212 of the DZO) in providing for orderly growth; and (2) that the town consider developing a Village District Overlay zone to promote mixed-use and small scale commercial, public and institutional uses in concentrated village centers. The proposed Deerfield Center Village District ordinance strives to implement these recommendations.

The reason for a Village District ...

At present, land use change and development is controlled through the Town of Deerfield Zoning Ordinance (DZO). The DZO provides for one zoning district for the entire Town, which is Agricultural-Residential with a 3-acre minimum lot size. Under the current zoning, it would be impossible to recreate the existing Deerfield Center village.

Many of the existing lots in the village are less than 3 acres. A Commercial-Industrial Overlay District allows business and industrial activities in Deerfield Center as well as throughout the Town if the project meets specific criteria. Much of what exists in the Center today—multi-family residential, business, religious, municipal and other uses is not permitted by right under the Town's current zoning. For example, in addition to the 3-acre minimum lot size, the current zoning requires a minimum frontage of 200 feet, front setbacks of 40 feet and side/rear setbacks of 37.5 feet. The Center area has lots ranging in size from 0.25 acres to over 22 acres with almost half being less than 3 acres. Frontages range from 73 feet to over 1,000 feet. Almost 35% of the lots have frontages of less than 100 feet. As noted above, it would be impossible to recreate the Village District under the existing Town's Zoning Ordinance.

As the Planning Board began to further consider this “new” village center zoning, it also felt that it would be easier for the citizens of Deerfield to “see” what such a district might look like in 20 to 30 years under a revised zoning approach, that would reinforce the existing uses, dimensions and historical character. After some discussion, the Planning Board received a grant in 2013 to undertake a design charrette to develop a graphic vision for Deerfield Center. The Town conducted a design charrette in late October of 2013. This vision helps citizens visualize how zoning changes could encourage greater opportunity for a mix of uses — residential, retail trade, professional offices, and small businesses—that would mirror a traditional New England village.

Desired Outcomes ...

It is the desire of the Deerfield Planning Board (DPB) that this new zoning amendment if adopted, have positive and measurable impacts (outcomes) on the sustainability and overall quality of life, “livability” and “attractiveness” of the Town of Deerfield as it grows and develops in the coming years. Some of the key outcomes include:

- Sustainability Measurement: The new zoning district will result in mixed-use and compact development within the community.

- Quality of Life, Livability and Mobility Measurement: The new zoning district will result in attractive and livable higher density mixed use development adding to the character of the community.
- Efficiency Measurement: The new zoning district will enable applicants to navigate through the zoning process in less time and with fewer problems as determined by feedback received from the public and planning board members.
- Prosperity Measurement: Help to increase the town's commercial tax base and result in balanced economic growth and development.

The DPB recognizes the need for additional housing opportunities for those individuals who have limited incomes and those who wish to “downsize” and still remain in Deerfield. The proposed amendment addresses that need.