

From: Grant Cook

To: Claire Ricker, MBTA-WG, and the ARB

Subject: MBTACA Articles for Fall STM

I am writing to express my strong support for the MBTCAWG-crafted plan before you. And my strong opposition to an approach that works – sets as a primary goal – to do as little as possible, perhaps in a way that leads to doing absolutely nothing in terms of real housing creation.

Society doesn't take bad actions because they view them as bad, instead mistaking those actions for happiness, the good they seek. Perhaps the decisions of the 70's, that zoned off existing apartment zones like we were cauterizing a wound, that eliminated by-right construction of any multi-family, were done with a positive mindset. Perhaps they were viewed as temporary, as tapping the brakes instead of slamming them on. But the outcome, combined with similar actions from towns and cities all across the region, has sown a distinctly harmful situation.

Lack of housing is hurting people – the average renter in Boston is cost burdened. Lack of housing is hurting our region's firms, in the inability to lure workers to their companies due to high housing costs. Lack of housing is trapping many, especially seniors, in their current homes, providing no options to downsize or relocate based on life's demands.

We can talk about analysis of future what-ifs of new housing – a difficult reality to predict, but that analysis should not be demanded right next to a denial or waving off of the data right in front of us of the harm our housing shortage is causing.

This WG plan provides pathways for housing growth, because we can't predict which parcels would ever turn over or how the owners might decide to manage them. To try to constrain our efforts, we would be in effect taking a plant and root-binding it in too small a pot, preventing it from ever growing.

I've heard commentary from some that we can't build our way out of this housing crisis. What a statement that is – both grandiose, and empty. It is akin to saying we can't recycle or conserve our way out of global climate change. Tools work together, each reinforcing the gains of its compatriots.

How can we look at a shortage of housing and say the last thing we want to do is build any new units? Now, we can't build blindly, we can't just build as our only effort, but new housing is a necessary and key enabler of dealing with the multiple housing crises we face.

We have sat on our duffs for 50 years, taking some measures like mixed use, but not revisiting the core recognition ignored in the 70's – that apartments are a "keystone species" in our housing environment. It is unfortunate that most of our growth in this area has been done at the forced behest of the state – 40B, and now MBTA Communities. I hope this plan begins to recognize that housing is a good thing, and doing beyond the bare minimum is a virtuous act for the character of our town.

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