

## Sensible Business Growth In Warner

Dear Neighbor,

Recently there has been much debate in Warner regarding business development. While it would be wonderful for this debate to be about clearly defined black and white issues, that is not the case.

There are some aspects of the debate that we think both sides do agree on such as: Warner has an overall rural character, we all deeply love our town and our homes, we want Warner to be a sustainable place to live, and businesses help to spread out our tax burden which makes it possible to stay in Warner.

Warner has developed a Master Plan that outlines and separates the various land use needs. The Master Plan was last updated as a whole in 1999. This plan sensibly relegates commercial and industrial development to a few specific locations within town. The plan specifically states that *“Commercial development should remain concentrated generally in the same areas as it is today: off of I-89 at Exits 7 and 9 and in the downtown village business district.”* The plan goes on to say that the Rural Character of Warner is due to the *“large tracts of remaining undisturbed forest in town. These large tracts provide excellent opportunities for recreation, commercial and private forestry, and wildlife habitat protection.”* The plan also states *“One other important aspect of the rural character in Warner is the agricultural use of land in Town.”*

A topic of debate where there has been differences of opinion is in regards to a proposed hotel at Exit 9. The design aspect of the hotel is something that the Planning Board should be dealing with, not the Zoning Board. The purpose of the Zoning Board is to determine if the overall proposal fits into our Master Plan and meets the Zoning requirements we've developed. We believe this proposal does.

A hotel is a permitted use within both a Commercial Zone as well as the Intervale Overlay District. A hotel will draw people to Warner for its unique sense of place. A hotel will allow visitors to spend quality time in Warner, visiting our landmarks and village district. A hotel will make Warner a destination and not simply a “gas-and-go” blip on their travels.

The proposed hotel has a roof height of 43' which is 8' higher than the general regulation of 35'. This regulation however stipulates that an exception may be made if fire protection is adequately provided for. The hotel design currently has a faux façade to add a New England rural characteristic to the facility. This ornamental structure could be removed from the design without affecting the actual building. Whether this structure should be included in the height calculations or not is a topic of debate. We personally believe it shouldn't be included in the calculations and we welcome the forethought given to make the hotel fit our rural character instead of being just a plain rectangular box. This addition is much like the façade which was built on the Market Basket building.

Another topic of debate concerns whether wording in our zoning ordinance regarding the size of a building was properly worded. The current wording states that the maximum “*gross floor area*” shall be 20,000 square feet. Both sides of this debate have stated that the purpose of this restriction was to keep out “big box” stores which would not fit the character of Warner. By this definition, a building can be constructed with outside dimensions of 100’ wide x 200’ deep x 35’ high. The problem is that gross floor area is the sum of the footprint of every floor in the building. If a 100’x200’x35’ building were to have a second floor inside with approximately a 16’ ceiling, the total gross floor area would now be 40,000 square feet but the actual physical size of the building **would not change**. If a 3’rd and 4’th floor were designed in this building, the floors would be about 9’ high and would have a total gross floor area of 80,000 square feet. Again, the actual physical size of the building **has not changed**. The hotel proposal is for an outside dimension that is only slightly larger than the 35’ maximum. The hotel proposal has a design which is built into a hillside so that the height from the back is much less than 35’.

This building proposal is not for twice the maximum height (43’ is not close to 70’) and while the gross floor area is larger than the current regulation allows, the outside physical dimensions of the building are very nearly what the regulations were intended to impose.

We have ample zoning regulations to insure that buildings fit the character of the lot they are being built on. Due to lot line setback requirements and open space requirements, the potential physical size of a building can only be so large. A one acre lot for example has only 22,594 square feet of possible buildable footprint. Once Zoning Regulations are fully taking into account, the maximum footprint of a building and parking would be only 9,526 square feet. On a two acre lot, this maximum is 30,214 square feet.

In March, you will be asked to vote on a Zoning Regulation change which will replace “gross floor area” with “footprint” and will furthermore strengthen the ordinance to restrict individual buildings to have a footprint no larger than 20,000 square feet when additional buildings are on the same lot. The use of footprint is in line with the majority of our neighboring towns and is the commonly accepted usage.

Please spend some time to be well informed and come out to vote on March 13th and fully support these zoning changes and welcome this important new neighbor to town. And don’t forget that the annual Town Meeting is the following day on Wednesday March 14th.

Sincerely,

Dan and Mary Watts

Will Begin

Jean Grandy

Jere Henley

Kelly and Wayne Eigabroadt