

Hingham Affordable Housing Trust  
210 Central St.  
Hingham, MA 02043

October 11, 2022

Hingham Planning Board  
210 Central St.  
Hingham, MA 02043

**Re: Report of the Accessory Dwelling Unit Study Committee**

Members of the Planning Board:

The Hingham Affordable Housing Trust strongly supports the September 2022 Report prepared by the Accessory Dwelling Unit (“ADU”) Study Committee (“the Study Committee”), including its proposed zoning bylaw amendment. We ask the Planning Board to support the proposed amendment to permit homeowners to rent both attached and detached units to non-family members, subject to the size, setback, and other parameters proposed in the Study Committee’s Report and draft bylaw.

The lack of affordable housing is a crisis across Massachusetts and much of the country. The Town of Hingham has responded with a significant commitment to expanding affordable housing opportunities. Among other things, the Town adopted the Community Preservation Act in 2001, to provide annual funding for affordable housing. It established in 2007 the Affordable Housing Trust, whose mission includes working to “propose, support and develop affordable housing that contributes positively to the character of the town, considering both Hingham’s history and its future.” The Town has provided land to Habitat for Humanity to enable it to build affordable homes on Central St. and Whiting St. And in 2021, the Town’s Master Plan confirmed as one of the Town’s seven priorities improving the availability of affordable housing.

The Affordable Housing Trust, in seeking to expand affordable housing opportunities in Hingham, is guided by the 2021 Hingham Housing Plan, which is the product of extensive community input and which the Select Board and the Planning Board have endorsed.<sup>1</sup> The Housing Plan includes extensive data on Hingham’s changing population and living costs. It concluded that “an aging population, fewer young adults, more residents living alone, increasing very low income earners, very high housing prices, low vacancy rates, increasing cost burdens, and large up-front cash requirements for homeownership and rentals – all point to a challenging affordability gap for the Hingham community.” *Id. at p. 58.* Those challenges have only worsened in recent years, as the median home sale price in Hingham exceeded \$1.1 million in 2021 while rents have also climbed.

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the Hingham Housing Plan is available at: [Housing-Plan\\_June-2021-Final \(hingham-ma.gov\)](https://www.hingham-ma.gov/Housing-Plan_June-2021-Final)

The existing ADU bylaw permits ADUs enabling a family member or caregiver to live with the homeowner. While the bylaw has given the Town experience with ADUs under the special permit process, the family-member / caregiver restriction has meant that only 16 homeowners have taken advantage of their availability to date. But it does not address that there is a separate, important reason to permit ADU's in Hingham – affordability. Permitting homeowners to rent space within the home or in a detached structure to a non-relative provides for more affordable housing options, benefiting both the homeowner and the renter.

For that reason, the Hingham Housing Plan recommended that the Planning Board and Affordable Housing Trust work to expand the availability of ADUs in Hingham. *Id. at 87-89*. The Plan pointed out that while the existing bylaw is “a step in the right direction,” it “sidesteps one of the primary purposes and benefits of such units – to provide homeowners with additional income that is particularly important to elderly homeowners, single parents, and others who are spending too much of their income on housing and for whom such income may be critical to remaining in their homes.” *Id. at 88*. The Housing Plan notes a number of reasons for expanding the availability of ADUs in Hingham, including:

- ADU's are moderately-priced housing for those who might otherwise find it difficult to find housing, including for young adults and senior citizens;
- ADU's are an inexpensive means for the Town to increase the supply of year-round rental units; they cost less than new construction without significant impacts on neighborhoods;
- ADU's do not require additional Town services, such as new streets or utilities, and involve little or no loss of open space;
- ADU's may provide companionship, security and services for the homeowner or tenant; and
- ADU's may generate increased tax revenue because accessory units typically add value to existing homes.

*Id.*

Significantly, Hingham's peer towns that have adopted ADU regulations almost uniformly have chosen *not* to impose family / caregiver occupancy restrictions. As the Study Committee report points out, these include not only our neighboring communities of Norwell, Scituate, Cohasset, and Duxbury, but other benchmark towns such as Concord, Lexington, Weston, Dedham and Westwood.<sup>2</sup> We are confident that the Zoning Board or Appeals can apply

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<sup>2</sup> Study Committee Report, App. B. The Hingham Housing Plan also notes that the Town of Needham surveyed nine comparable towns that permit ADU's – including Acton, Bedford, Carlisle, Milton, Newton, and several of our benchmark communities – and found that they broadened housing options for those with moderate incomes without negative impacts. *Id. at 88*.

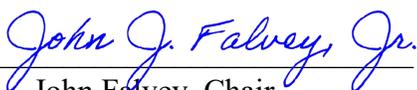
the reasonable restrictions described in the Study Committee's Report and draft bylaw amendment to ensure that such units will fit well in our neighborhoods and our community.

The Affordable Housing Trust focuses much of our efforts on creating affordable housing that "locks in" future affordability via deed restrictions and thus can be included in the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory under Chapter 40B, the Massachusetts Affordable Housing statute. But we also strongly support "naturally occurring" opportunities such as ADUs that do not include deed restrictions but, as a practical matter, offer homeowners the chance to remain here and those new to Hingham the chance to move here at reasonable cost. Every step helps.

We are grateful to the Study Committee and Town staff for their excellent and comprehensive work on this issue over the last year. We ask the Planning Board to support the proposed bylaw amendment to permit homeowners to offer detached rental units to non-family members.

Respectfully,

Hingham Affordable Housing Trust

By:   
John Falvey, Chair

Members:

Pamela Bates  
Elizabeth Cullen  
John Falvey  
Elizabeth Klein  
Brigid Ryan  
Gregory Waxman  
Randall Winters