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Dear Planning Board members,

I will not be able to attend the Planning Board 2/3/09 meeting due to another meeting but want to put my opinion on record in regard to your consideration of making changes to the FAR in both the SAV and the WAV at the April 2009 Town Meeting. I apologize for putting this in front of you on the day of your meeting.

If the Planning Board is inclined to make any changes to the FAR provisions, I support the Option A revision to the zoning bylaw Table of Standards Dimensional Regulations dealing with Floor Area Ratio (FAR). These revisions would clarify the intent of the Village Plans that brought forth the FAR zoning features. I believe no changes should be made that would downsize the villages' development potential.

I was a member of the Board of Selectmen when both the South Acton Village and West Acton Village Plans were created. There were dedicated members and village residents who spent many years developing a plan and a vision for each Village through an extensive public participation process. A package of zoning amendments was approved at the 1994 Town Meeting for West Acton Village and at the 1995 Town Meeting for South Acton Village. These included the existing FAR provisions. These Plans were expected to serve as a guide for both the commercial and residential development of West and South Acton Villages over the next twenty years with periodic updates every five years. Many of these members have moved out of town but left behind a legacy of public service and two fine blueprints for enhancing each village. The key objective of the South Acton Village Plan was to bring about revitalization, a goal that is just beginning to materialize thanks to infrastructure improvements. It has a long way to go and this is not the time to stop forward motion. Similarly, West Acton Village seems to have reached a stagnant point but there are hopeful signs of increased commercial opportunities.

My main reasons for opposing any changes to the FAR provisions are three-fold: 1. Lack of financial impact analysis, 2. Lack of a village plan update, and 3. Inappropriate timing as the Town is in the middle of a Comprehensive Community Plan.

Lack of financial impact analysis:

- How many properties will become non-conforming?
- What costs will property owners incur to determine their possible reduced FAR measurement?
- Will properties lose value assessed for future potential development? If so, will that value loss be spread over the rest of the town?

- Will this affect sewer betterment payments that may be currently assessed on full build-out potential?
- Will this result in the loss of new commercial development and new tax revenue?

Lack of village plan update:

- Has there been an update to the 1994 and 1995 village plans? If not, shouldn't that come first?
- Has the Planning Board reviewed the Village Plans to fully understand the intent?

Inappropriate timing:

- We are in the midst of a full recession, is this the time to downsize development potential taking away badly needed new tax revenues?
- We are in the midst of updating our Town Master Plan with a Comprehensive Community Planning effort. One of the key priorities coming out of the Phase 1 visioning and goal setting is "Enhance and improve village centers." At no time did I hear people say they meant to downsize the villages, they want to ENHANCE them. To me, that means more vibrancy with more people and more commercial opportunities.

As a member of the League of Women Voters' observer corps, I have been attending Historic District Commission meetings since October. My purpose is to report on the proceedings to help League members stay better informed about local government issues. I have observed that the FAR revision proposal began with the HDC. It is my opinion that it arose out of their concern about a proposed residential development at 53 River St. and a commercial development in West Acton Village. It appears to be an attempt to regulate growth and development through changing the FAR provisions contrary to the intent of the South Acton and West Acton Village Plans and without any study or financial analysis.

I urge the Planning Board to step back from this proposal and determine how to best "do no harm" to the Village Plans and the villages themselves. I know how hard it is to be constantly berated about growth and development but that is exactly why the Planning Board exists, to rise above the politics and make decisions that are in the best interest of the entire town and not just a few.

Thank you for your service and for listening.

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