

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
WOBURN CITY HALL
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
MONDAY, MAY 19, 2025, at 6:07 p.m.**

Voting Members present: President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Lou DiMambro, Councilor Charles Viola, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Councilor William Pappalardo, and Councilor Robert Toro, and Councilor Joanne Campbell

Also present: Mayor Michael Concannon

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Reading of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Viola to waive the reading of and approve the minutes of March 10, 2025; approved, 9-0.

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Resolve requesting the state legislative delegation provide an update to Committee on Liaison on Massachusetts housing laws: Present from the state legislative delegation were Rep. Richard Haggerty and Rep. Michelle Ciccolo. Councilor Demers thanked both legislators for attending. He said he filed this resolve because outside of a certain issue in Central Square one of the most consistent topics for discussion is the moving target when it comes to housing laws, which he said are being sidestepped by Ch. 40B, the MBTA Communities Act and Accessory Dwelling Units. He said there is some concern that the parameters for Ch. 40B may be changing and those changes might harm the city. He said he wants to open a line of communication so everyone is on the same page. Rep. Haggerty said he can provide a snapshot of what is going on with housing. He said the MBTA Communities Law was passed about four years ago and signed by Gov. Baker. He said the law has been adopted by 177 communities so far. He said he understands the council's concern. He said the city lived through some of the 40B lessons with Santullo Hill. He said the city dealt with being under the 10 percent affordable housing stock ratio. He said after the city learned these lessons, the council put in place aggressive housing parameters and options. He said there is a smart growth district on Presidential Way. He said the city's affordability requirement for new development was increased to 15 percent. He said he has not heard any rumors the affordable housing stock ratio is going to be increased at the state level to over 10 percent, at least for now. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said the council specifically had concerns about the MBTA Communities Act because it seemed no one at the State House paid attention to what Woburn was doing. She said the city did the work and it was ignored. She said it is disappointing and discouraging for the residents of this community. She said she understands the needs for housing but Woburn's hard work was ignored due to the state's one size fits all mentality. Rep. Haggerty said the hard thing from the state's perspective is the unpredictability of the housing market. He said the state is definitely in a housing crisis right now. He said it's a

major issue. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said what she doesn't understand is the way the state is trying to solve the problem. She said what is going to be built is high-rise apartment and condo buildings, when the focus should be on variety. She said that's not happening. She said there should be a plan in place to create a variety of housing. Rep. Haggerty said the legislature is trying to create a mixed option. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said there isn't support for high-rise housing. She said these are not new thoughts. She said she appreciates everything the legislative delegation does for the city. Rep. Ciccolo said she appreciates the council's frustration. She said she does think this unfolded as a one size fits all proposition. She said she does not think Gov. Baker took into account what Woburn had done. She said one of the benefits the council will see is senior citizens and empty nesters moving out of single-family homes. She said she expects those people will stay in their hometowns but will downsize their living arrangements. She said it is a virtuous circle. She said she applauds the City Council for attaining the 10 percent affordability threshold. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she appreciates Rep. Haggerty and Rep. Ciccolo for coming to City Hall to discuss this issue. She said she would implore them to no longer pass laws that turn over jurisdiction of housing to people who are not elected officials. She said she hopes elected people will do the heavy lifting. Rep. Haggerty said when you serve on committees you try to make things better. He said when the ADU law was passed, the legislature tried really hard to make sure site plan review was included. He said he thinks the legislature has heard in the last few months that it did a better job with that piece. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said the ADU statute is better than the MBTA Communities Law. Councilor DiMambro said Ward 6 has seen a lot of stuff happening lately. He said now the ADU statute is here. He said these are unfunded mandates. He said there need to be upgrades to the water and sewer systems and the power grid. He said there are road issues and street issues. He said there are sewerage issues. He said the city is trying to keep up with the times. He said there are already traffic issues. He said with all of the density, it is difficult to keep up with the demands. He said now the city has ADUs. He said the statute is in its infancy stage and no one is sure how it will impact the community. He said he has been struggling to get a new elementary school in North Woburn for 15 years. He said the population of Ward 6 changes and nothing is being done financially to account for the costs. He asked who is going to pay for this. He said the council can't keep passing tax increases along to residents. He said that is unsustainable. He said he is hearing from his constituents. He asked what the state can do. He said the city needs help. Rep. Haggerty said he does not think there is any help coming from the feds. He said the development of single-family homes will cause a greater influx of children than congregate housing. He said the additional housing will create more tax revenue through new growth. He said he also thinks challenges within budgets are a widespread phenomenon. He said people are going to need places to live. Rep. Ciccolo said one area of the budget she has been championing is Ch. 90 money (for roads). She said funding has not gone up in quite some time. She said the new millionaires' tax has gone toward education. She said there needs to be a way to advocate at the local level. Rep. Haggerty said the legislature is being more careful because the looming cuts at the federal level. He said all levels of government are in this together. He said they have to figure it out. Councilor DiMambro said whatever the delegation can do would be appreciated. Councilor Campbell said the city is facing a lot of different issues. She said Gov. Baker may have signed the bill but the legislature passed it in 2024. Rep. Ciccolo said Baker signed it and the legislature expanded it. She said Gov. Healey amended the bill and it was re-issued with some changes to the regulations because they were not properly promulgated. She said it was something Healey had to do. Councilor Campbell said Healey also changed it. Rep. Haggerty

said a housing bill with an ADU component was passed with the last budget, and the MBTA Communities Law was done under the previous administration. He said the Affordable Housing Act is dedicating money to housing authorities. Rep. Ciccolo said one of the biggest aspects of the Affordable Housing Act is provisions for water and sewer. She said that aspect is still in the process of being rolled out. Councilor Campbell said she is concerned about the state changing the safe harbor status to 15 percent from 10 percent of the housing stock. She said so many things are changing. She said her concern is the ratio will go up. She said her hope is the state delegation will fight to not have that go up. She said the city worked hard to get to the 10 percent threshold. She said if the ratio changes it would diminish all the hard work the city has done. Rep. Haggerty said in some ways it would be positive but he has not heard any discussion of that. Councilor Campbell said she hopes the delegation will go to bat for the city. Rep. Haggerty said the state should be putting more pressure on communities that are under 10 percent. Rep. Ciccolo said Lexington passed the MBTA Communities Act. She said Lexington is over the 10 percent threshold. She said Woburn is not alone in its concern about what the MBTA Communities Act has caused. She said she does not think there is any appetite to change the housing stock ratio. Councilor Campbell said they can understand the council's concern. She said she sees a flaw in the ADUs. She said unelected officials are making decisions. She said unelected officials do not know the concerns of citizens as well as state representatives do. She said they just blanket it to everyone. She said now they are going to allow in-law apartments. She asked where people are going to park. She said Woburn clearly has an issue with parking. Rep. Haggerty said parking requirements were added to the legislation. Councilor Campbell asked if on-street parking will be allowed. Rep. Haggerty said he thinks it's off-site parking. He said ADUs were legalized in Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield, and Winchester. He said Woburn is running a little behind. He said he does not expect to see these on every corner. He said only about half of the residential properties in Woburn will be susceptible to ADUs. He said there are a lot of requirements. Councilor Campbell said she does not think the legislation is very restrictive. She asked if there is a way to not give final say over housing bills to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Rep. Ciccolo said there is a lengthy process. She said she thinks the governor's office does recognize there is need for input from local communities. She said she does not think the legislature can get into that level of detail. She asked if the city is getting a lot of applications for ADUs. She said she is interested in feedback. Councilor Campbell asked if the ADU legislation will go back to the EOHLC or the legislature. Rep. Ciccolo said it will go back to the governor. Councilor Campbell asked if that can be changed to get input back from the legislature. Rep. Haggerty said he thinks the legislature did a better job on the second piece of the ADU statute. Councilor Campbell said the second version of the ADU statute was much better. She said she still thinks this type of legislation should go back to the legislature. She said she does appreciate Rep. Haggerty and Rep. Ciccolo coming here to hear their concerns. She said she is still wary the parameters for safe harbor are going to be dropped on Woburn. Councilor Ferullo said he has spent the last five years of his life fighting police reform. He said the legislature has done a much better job with housing than it did with police reform. Councilor Demers said what is frustrating is the city is being asked to create more affordable housing when the city has already done its share. He said the affordable housing rates for an apartment in Woburn are between \$2,800-\$3,000. He said Woburn people can't afford that. He said he does not think you are going to find a lot of 3-bedroom units in Woburn. He said the overall problem is people are not going to see many benefits from this legislation. He said when he worked for Rep. Dwyer the best idea he heard was to raise the housing stock ratio to 25

percent for places like Boston where people need affordable housing. He said Woburn did the right thing and that ought to be acknowledged. Rep. Haggerty said he thinks Massachusetts did not create enough affordable housing for a long, long time. Councilor DiMambro said he downloaded Gov. Healey's housing plan. He said the Unlocking Housing Production Commission wants to create 222,000 new housing units by 2035. He said that is pretty significant. Mayor Concannon said he appreciates the delegation coming to speak with the council. He said he shares the City Council's frustration. He said he sees Councilor Mercer-Bruen's point that the city worked really hard and it's as if the city did nothing. He said he would ask the delegation to impress upon the legislature at much as it can how much Woburn has done to create affordable housing. He said he thinks the city is doing a pretty good job of implementing state-mandates programs. He said he is not sure what will come out of the MBTA Communities Act and ADUs, but the expectation is the floodgates will open. He said he is concerned as much as anyone what they will lead to in terms of changes to the school population and infrastructure. Rep. Haggerty said it might be helpful for the city to get an idea of how many school-aged children are in these larger apartment complexes. Councilor Demers said the School Dept. had to add a new bus due to the number of children living in the Avalon project. President Dillon thanked both state legislators for coming. He said in the interests of full disclosure he is a real estate broker. He said he has been watching the situation with ADUs for years. He said if there was a component of owner-occupancy, he would be singing the praises of the ADU legislation from the rooftops. He said the concern here is there will be bad landlords. He said the other concern about ADUs is with a split entry it is very easy to modify them into a 2-family. He said he does think the city is going to see many more of these. He said he does not think Woburn can be compared to Lexington or Winchester. He said he thinks those towns do not have the rental properties Woburn has. He said there are a lot of good landlords in Woburn, but the city does have a problem with some of them. He said he does not think there have been any permits for ADUs issued in Woburn yet, but people are asking questions. He asked as far as the issue is concerned for the MBTA Communities Act if it is as simple as being a half mile from a bus stop. Rep. Haggerty said any community with a bus stop is defined as an MBTA community. He said "transit center" is defined in a certain way. He said the EOHLC used the definition as any community with a bus stop. President Dillon said as far as the ADUs are concerned he is worried. He said Building Commissioner Quinn has indicated one of his problems is dealing with absentee landlords. Rep. Haggerty said 43 percent of the housing stock in Woburn is rental units. He said he knows the council has accepted the ADU legislation. Councilor Demers said the ordinance came out ought to pass after the council made some clerical adjustments. He said the ordinance will be voted on tomorrow night. Rep. Haggerty said the state budget was passed with a 3 percent increase. He said as part of that there was a \$100,000 outlay for a Main Street improvement program, \$25,000 for the Woburn Police Dept., \$25,000 for the Woburn Fire Dept., an outlay for the Woburn Boys & Girls Club, a new bus for the Senior Center and new traffic signalization in East Woburn and Reading. He said the state delegation is working. Councilor Campbell said the council is being told the ADU legislation is still changing. She asked if there is any way at this stage to put in an owner-occupation requirement or at least allow the City Council to make that decision. Rep. Haggerty said he is happy to run that up the flagpole. President Dillon said if a state-wide rent control bill comes from the state level, he would ask the delegation to not support it. Rep. Haggerty said the legislature has voted it down several times. He said there is no appetite for it in the legislature.

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Resolve that the Economic Development Manager provide an update on May 19, 2025:

Representing the Economic Development Dept. was Economic Development Manager Casey Hagerty. Councilor Pappalardo said there have been things that are brewing downtown. He said EDM Hagerty is doing a great job. He said there were a lot of things that are happening that he didn't know about so he asked EDM Hagerty to address the committee. He said he thinks council members will learn something. He said it is really good to see all of this happening. EDM Hagerty said there is an effort underway to try to do more at the local level for businesses to succeed. She said her role it to be a liaison between the City Hall and the local business community. She said she has prepared a Power Point presentation for the committee. She said Woburn is a community of slightly less than 13 square miles with a population of slightly less than 42,000 and approximately 45,000 daytime employees. She said there are nearly 3,800 businesses in the city and 48 percent of the tax base is commercial. She said Woburn is a Platinum Bioready Community with a AAA bond rating. She said Woburn's tax rates are competitive with surrounding communities, all of which have split tax rates. She said 28 percent of the land in the city is zoned for commercial use and there are 996 commercial parcels. She said 8 percent of the land in the city is open space and 64 percent is residential. She said of the surrounding communities only Burlington comes close to those metrics. She said Lexington, Reading and Stoneham all have less than 10 percent of their land zoned for commercial use. She said North Woburn and the New Boston Street area are becoming a vital part of the economic engine of the city. She said there are approximately 5,000 employees in those parts of the city. She said most of the area is zoned Industrial Park (IP). She said there is a diverse mix of businesses in largely single-story, single use buildings. She said the dead end on New Boston Street has made this area isolated but a new \$25 million bridge is nearly complete and will open in about a year. She said this will unlock potential development. She said there has been an area near the Anderson/Woburn Regional Transportation Center set aside for development under the MBTA 3A Communities Law. She said Massport put in a Request for Expressions of Interest for the re-use of existing space. She said the city has applied for a community 1-stop for growth grant of \$115,000 from Mass. Development. She said the city's goal is to build an area that aligns with the city's economic goals. She said the city has hired a really good team of consultants. She said Woburn Village was re-zoned in 2019 under a Ch. 40R designation. She said this area is thriving. She said the Panera Bread restaurant is the 42nd most visited restaurant in the chain. She said National Amusements recently sold the Showcase Cinemas site to Home Depot for \$30 million. She said the city has not seen any plans yet. She said The Vale was constructed in 2019-21 and there are 197 residential units and 1 million square feet of commercial space. She said on the West Side there is the proposed realignment of the Bedford Street/Cambridge Road intersection, which she said will be a TIP-funded project. She said work is scheduled for summer 2026. She said a \$30,000 grant was secured for the Battle Road memorial area, which was be transformed from an underused area into a tourist destination with resounding success. In Woburn Center, she said there was a \$33 million renovation project for the Woburn Public Library, which she called one of the city's crown jewels. She said there is an effort to revitalize Woburn Square with the downtown improvement project, which she said should begin in the spring or summer of 2029. She said one important factor is improving safety.

She said the city received a \$250,000 earmark that was sponsored by Reps. Haggerty and Ciccolo for the downtown area. She said there is a re-imagining of Church Avenue with a temporary parklet that will be rolled out in the next few weeks. She said people can buy a coffee at Studio Café and drink it at the parklet or buy lunch from one of the other restaurants downtown and eat it there. She said the city obtained a \$100,000 grant for parking management downtown. She said she is excited to get this program kicked off. She said the goal is to improve turnover of high demand spaces and focus on short term versus long term parking strategies. She said there are 981 parking spaces downtown. She said Woburn has been a hub for green tech companies, which she said are doing incredible work. She said other initiatives include a 2023 designation as a PACE Community, a 2024 EOHLHC Housing Choice Community, the Massachusetts Digital Equity Program in 2024 with a \$100,000 grant from the Mass Tech Collaborative, a Green Community, a \$41,000 grant from the Mass Clean Energy Center for an on-street charging feasibility study, and a \$23,000 grant from the EOEEA for a housing production plan update. She said the city is engaged in a community electricity aggregation program, which she said goes out to bid tomorrow. She said the city has developed key partnerships with the Woburn Chamber of Commerce, Mass Hire, the Massachusetts Innovation Network, the Middlesex 3 Coalition, the Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the MAPC. She said she puts together a monthly newsletter that had gotten a lot of interest. Councilor DiMambro said once the New Boston Street bridge opens that part of North Woburn is going to be active. He said it would be nice to see what the city can do to get it right strategically. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she is encouraged to see all these projects, and that some of them are almost done. She said city officials have been talking about the New Boston Street bridge for 15 years. She said EDM Hagerty mentioned looking at the zoning for The Vale and asked if re-zoning is a consideration. EDM Hagerty said they are looking at the market. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said biotech was on fire when The Vale was approved. She said she is glad EDM Hagerty is asking people to take a look at the site. She thanked EDM Hagerty for her presentation. She said it is great to see it all in one package. Councilor Pappalardo said he sits in at the WRA meetings and he sees in some detail how much work EDM Hagerty puts in to her job. He said he thinks it is important to step back and see the whole thing. He said he thinks EDM Hagerty did an excellent job of highlighting what is taking place in her office. Councilor Demers said it is important for the city to attract different types of businesses to broaden the economic base. Councilor DiMambro said industry is always changing. He said there used to be industrial uses in North Woburn that were full of cars, but technology has allowed these businesses to exist with a much smaller footprint. He said there can be as many as 8-10 businesses operating out of an 80,000-square-foot facility. Councilor Toro thanked EDM Hagerty for her presentation. He said he can tell EDM Hagerty has a passion for her work. He said he is excited to see some of these projects. Mayor Concannon said the WRA has been rejuvenated by some new members. He said there are some exciting things going on downtown and with the New Boston Street bridge. He said when the bridge re-opens it will invigorate the New Boston Street area. He said he is excited about the downtown improvement project and he shares EDM Hagerty's enthusiasm about the WRA. He said it is great to see the newer members step up. He said the WRA is on the cusp of some really great things. Councilor Campbell asked EDM Hagerty to elaborate about the parklet on Church Avenue. EDM Hagerty said there will be seating that will be in a visible part of downtown, but precautions will also be taken to make sure the area is safe. She said she has met with the DPW, Police and Fire. Councilor Campbell said it

sounds terrific. She asked if Church Avenue will still be a through way. EDM Hagerty said they are taking up 1-3 parking spaces but the street will still be a through way.

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Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Viola to adjourn; approved, 9-0. President Dillon adjourned the meeting at 7:53 p.m.

Attest: _____

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees