

## NEWS

# 3 more South Shore towns don't pass MBTA zoning rules at May town meeting



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Voters in three South Shore communities this week used their May town meetings to send a message to the state: We don't want to be forced to comply.

Hanson and Norwell residents on Monday evening voted down a proposed zoning change that would make it easier to build apartments near public transportation as part of the MBTA Communities Act. In Hanover, voters decided on Tuesday to send the proposed zoning back to the town's planning board for deeper review.

Words and phrases like "extortion" and "unfunded mandate" were thrown around during these three meetings, with some taking jabs at Gov. Maura Healey. Former Gov. Charlie Baker was in office when this zoning requirement passed.

"It's nothing but extortion," said Hanson resident Stacey Sabbag. "When they say they're going to withhold grants, it's our tax money. We can't just roll over and let them bully us because it's never going to stop."

**More:** Marshfield voters reject MBTA zoning plan. Might the state sue the town?

All three towns have until the end of this year to pass rules for their respective municipalities. The MBTA Communities Act, passed in 2020, requires 177 communities across Massachusetts to designate at least one zoning district that allows multifamily housing as of right, meaning certain zoning approvals like special permits or variances aren't required. The effort was intended to lower housing costs by way of boosting housing production.

These zoning overlay districts must allow for projects that are suitable for families and have a minimum density of 15 units per acre. If applicable, these districts must be within a half-mile of public transportation and are encouraged to be near existing commercial districts.

This type of zoning would allow multifamily housing in addition to the land's existing zoning. The proposal does not require that anything be built.

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Town officials warned the voters about the impacts of not passing these zoning changes, like being barred from state money and the state filing a lawsuit. Such has already happened in Milton, which initially passed its zoning change before its deadline last year, but voters came back in February to repeal their decision.

The majority of South Shore communities have passed their respective MBTA zoning proposals, including Rockland and Whitman on Monday. Hull, which opened its town meeting Monday, was set to vote on its warrant article Wednesday. A handful of other towns have yet to present their proposal at town meeting. Marshfield voters rejected their MBTA proposal in April.

The presentation, discussion and vote on the MBTA zoning proposals in Hanson, Hanover and Norwell took less than an hour each. Towns need a simple majority vote to pass the proposal. These three towns needed to zone for a minimum of 750 units.

Norwell spent just 15 minutes debating the issue before taking a vote, with 329 against and 241 for the change. The other towns denied their MBTA proposals by a voice vote.

Some residents and officials said they would want to hold another vote during the fall town meeting, giving them time to see if other Massachusetts municipalities would also vote “no” on MBTA zoning and, if so, how the state would respond. Others expressed that their mind would be unchanged.

“If I have to be back here at special town meeting in October, I’ll be here to vote again. Next year in May, I’ll be here to vote again. Next October, I’ll vote again,” Hanson resident Daniel Strautman said. “To hell and back, I will be here to vote ‘no’ every single time.”

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