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Wakefield joins growing resistance to MBTA Communities Law

Story by Louisa Moller • 1w • 2 min read

WAKEFIELD - An auditorium in Wakefield was full of tension Monday night, with sounds of murmurs from the crowd and a moderator frequently telling residents to quiet down.

Wakefield is the latest town to vote down plans to comply with the state's MBTA Communities Law and Monday's town meeting played out like a bad movie on repeat.

"This is a developers bonanza," one man said to the crowd.

"I almost feel like this is a bait and switch thing," said another woman.

What is the MBTA Communities Law?

The law requires towns served by transit to zone for more multi-family housing near train stations. It is an effort to address Massachusetts' dire housing crisis but it is also facing growing defiance.

"The T's not dependable to start with so before you force people to use something, maybe you ought to fix the inherent problems that you already have," said Teddy Menounos, a Winchester resident.

Towns challenge the law

Critics are worried about over-crowding and stretching town resources too thin like schools and trash collection. More than a handful of towns are now resisting the law. Milton, for example, has flat out rejected the law and is suing the state. Wrentham sent a letter to the governor asking for a reduction of requirements. In Rockport, citizens filed suit over the weekend challenging the towns attempts to comply with the law.

Twelve communities did not comply with the 2023 deadline to submit a zoning bylaw or ordinance to the state for approval.

One hundred and thirty communities have a deadline of December 31, 2024, to adopt zoning changes under the law. It is unclear what will happen if some towns do not meet that deadline.

"It's a power delegated by the state"

Suffolk Law Professor John Infranca says the state has the legal authority to compel communities to change their zoning rules. He backs Attorney General Andrea Campbell's move to [sue the town of Milton](#) for non-compliance.

"I think the attorney general's lawsuit stands on very firm grounds," Infranca said, "It's a power delegated by the state. It's a power that is exercised pursuant to the state police power."


For now, the state is withholding grant money from Milton. If towns do not listen, Infranca says the state could step in and tell them exactly how and where to zone.

"In some sense, kind of put the locality's feet to the fire," Infranca said.

Where some Wakefield residents sit, that sounds like a bad idea.

"It doesn't fit with the culture of the community," said resident Keith Lagraves.

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