

LOCAL NEWS

Weston votes down MBTA Communities Act zoning proposal

The town could be ineligible for some state grants if it does not comply with the law by the end of the year.



An outbound MBTA commuter rail train drops off passengers at the Wellesley Farms stop. *Lane Turner/Globe Staff*

By **Lindsay Shachnow**



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At a Special Town Meeting Tuesday night, Weston voters rejected a rezoning proposal that would have made the town compliant with the state's recent multi-family housing law, putting the town at risk of punitive action from the state.



Map: Deadline looms for 130 MBTA Communities. What's next for your town.

The town voted against **amending zoning bylaws** to adhere with the **MBTA Communities Act**, Assistant Town Manager Lisa J. Yanakakis confirmed.

One-hundred and ninety-five people voted in favor of the amendment, 544 voted in opposition, and five abstained, Yanakakis told Boston.com.

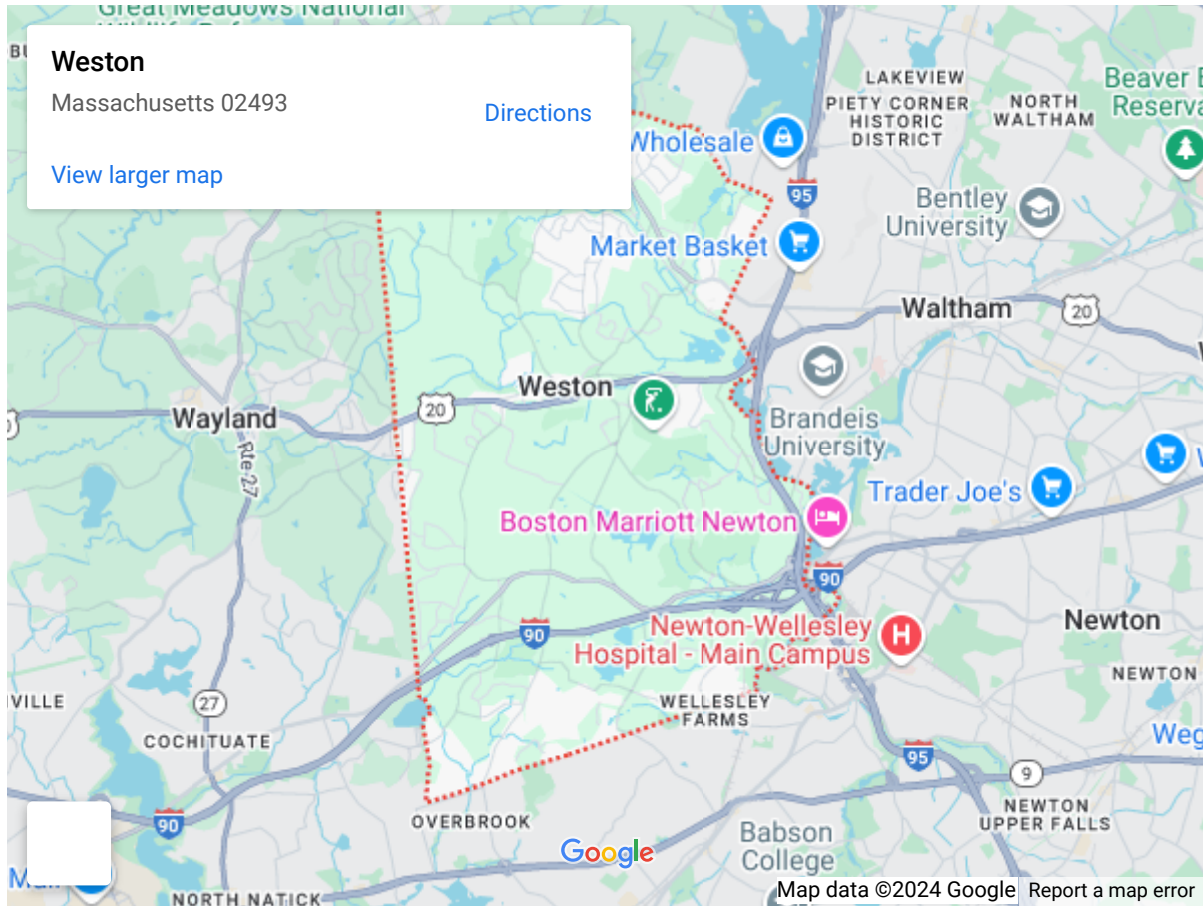
Signed in 2021 by former Gov. Charlie Baker, the law requires certain municipalities in Massachusetts to rezone for multi-family housing near MBTA stations in an effort to address the state's housing crisis.

“The lack of zoning for multi-family housing is a barrier for new housing development in Massachusetts,” **the act's website says**. “By allowing multifamily housing near transit, we can create new housing in walkable neighborhoods closer to transit. This is not just good housing policy, it is good climate and transportation policy, too.”

Like **130 other towns**, Weston has a compliance deadline of Dec, 31, 2024. The state classified Weston — an upscale community west of Newton and Waltham — as a “commuter rail MBTA community,” meaning that it has at least 100 acres of developable area associated with one or more commuter rail stations.

Weston is required to rezone 50 acres to permit multi-family capacity of 750 units, and 40% of the 50 acres and 40% of the 750 units need be within a half mile radius of

Kendal Green, Riverside, and/or Wellesley Farms stations, **according to the town**. The zoning for the remaining 30 acres and 450 units can be located anywhere in Weston.



In 2023, Lexington became the first town to comply with the law, and nearly 1,000 new apartments and condos are on track to be built under the new rules, ***The Boston Globe* reported**.

However, the MBTA Communities Act has been met with opposition by many town residents across Massachusetts who see the law as overstepping. In Milton, a **town-wide referendum** invalidated an article that would have made Milton compliant with the law, resulting in a **lawsuit** against the town filed by the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office.

But despite warnings that compliance is required, some municipalities like Weston continue to push back.

“Compliance with the MBTA Communities Zoning Law is not only mandatory, it is an essential tool for the Commonwealth to address its housing crisis along with our climate and transportation goals,” Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell **said in a statement** last year. “While the housing crisis disproportionately affects communities of color and poor, working families, it threatens all of us along with our economy, and

thus requires all of us do our part, including ensuring adequate development of affordable, transit-oriented housing for our residents and families.”

Like other towns, failure to comply with the act could result in Weston’s loss of eligibility for certain state grants.

Still, in a May **survey** of 131 Weston residents, 60% said they were at least “somewhat comfortable” with risking disciplinary action from the state, “including loss of funding and enforcement by the Attorney General.”

“Compliance with Chapter 3A is a dynamic process and this is all new territory,” Weston Planning Board Chair Leslie Glynn **said in a statement** prior to Tuesday night’s vote. “We will look to all the Boards and Committees in town to support this endeavor according to their purview.”



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