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Mayor Yvonne M. Spicer's Position A Housing Moratorium Inhibits Framingham's Potential for Decades to Come

Framingham - On July 21, the Framingham City Council voted to impose a 9-month moratorium on building new multi-unit housing in the City of Framingham. I want to make it clear that as Mayor, I do not support this moratorium, which I think will adversely impact the City's growth and economic opportunities going forward. Moreover, I'm concerned it will derail progress in attracting new investment.

The word "moratorium" is defined in Merriam Webster dictionary as "a suspension of activity," which is synonymous with words like - cold storage, deep freeze, and doldrums, to name a few. No matter how we try to couch it, a moratorium means one thing: curtailing progress in our community.

Moreover, the broader message sent to our community is the lack of equity in housing. There are residents who have lived here 30+ years and wish to downsize. There are those just graduating from college and want to live here while pursuing their new careers. For these people, as well as others, a moratorium will give them fewer options. Lastly, we have a shortage of accessible, veteran, affordable, and workforce housing options that serve a broad constituency at multiple price points.

The advocates for this moratorium have used traffic and school impacts as an argument that has been dispelled several times. The increased cost of student enrollment has been negligible. Increased traffic is often cited as a concern as well. If we had the housing for people who work in Framingham, it would curtail the need for people to commute to the City for employment, alleviating additional stress of traffic from commuters.

A MORATORIUM MEANS FRAMINGHAM TO BE VIEWED AS "NOT OPEN" FOR BUSINESS

In 2015, after years of careful discussion and deliberation with the community, Framingham's Town Meeting members voted to rezone downtown Framingham to encourage more housing. A similar effort also took place in the Nobscot neighborhood. Those rezoning efforts were deliberate in the way that they considered what new housing would look like in those neighborhoods, in short, to ensure that the growth was specific and well-controlled.

Because of the rezoning, downtown Framingham has benefited from more investment than it has in several decades, and the neighborhood has become more active and vibrant. In my five years as a Town Meeting member and the past two and a half as the Mayor, Framingham has profited from great changes in our economic landscape. We are on the cusp of becoming a Flagship City.

Imposing this housing moratorium undermines the efforts of which the community initially intended. Furthermore, it repeats previous missteps, which is why so much of Framingham's business community has opposed it. We have long since used neighboring communities as a measuring stick, but Framingham is unique.

In the 1970s, Framingham agreed to a similar moratorium to negative results. It exacerbated the impacts of the economic downturn we were experiencing at the time and sent a message to developers that they weren't welcome here.

The City has spent many years seeking to turn around the "anti-business" message. This new moratorium will once again send a clear signal that Framingham is closed to meaningful economic development.

At first, I focused on downtown Framingham to prioritize resources based on need. My vision for economic growth in the City still includes downtown and includes an emphasis on businesses along the 9/90 corridor and through the Tech Park.

Many Framingham businesses have pivoted, but they are navigating through the phases of re-opening, with staff working remotely, leveraging Cares Act Relief, etc. Many of our businesses are working to survive this pandemic, but some, unfortunately, have not. A moratorium does not send a positive message to this community and instead demonstrates a lack of strategy and long-term thinking for economic growth.

A MORATORIUM IMPACTS OUR HOUSING SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY

Framingham is a community that welcomes a diverse business base from retail to life sciences to restaurants and as well as a global population. Each year, we graduate more than 800 students from Framingham State University and Mass Bay Community College. Our diverse workforce and opportunities for professional entrée for young professionals are critical. Creating an environment where they can live, work, and play in our community only serves us collectively. All we have to do is look at the Alta Union House that is more than 75% rented in a few short months, and we are seeing growing occupancy at other developments.

A limit to the production of multifamily housing also harms vulnerable populations such as low-to-moderate-income families and individuals, older adults, and those with disabilities. The data has shown that black and brown residents are most affected by housing injustice, as well as the public health crises of the pandemic and racial injustice.

If we want the City to grow economically with the opening of new businesses, we need more people to call Framingham home. We need people to drive Framingham's economic engine.

A MORATORIUM MEANS FRAMINGHAM LOSES OUT ON STATE AND FEDERAL SUPPORT

Finally, Massachusetts Governor Baker has made it clear that one of his highest priorities is producing new housing in the Commonwealth, which is facing a severe housing shortage, impacting the State's ability to attract and retain new talent. Framingham has been designated a Housing Choice community as of 2018, which gives us access to millions of dollars of grants and other resources that we would otherwise not have. At a time when our budgets are strained, it seems irresponsible to forego aid from the State and Federal governments for a moratorium that has more downside than upside.

IN CONCLUSION

As we climb our way out of an economic downturn due to the pandemic, the last thing we want to do is send a message that we are not invested in economic recovery, opportunity, and growth.

Please read the [comprehensive report](#) by Planning and Community Development, and listen to the Planning Board deliberations and discussions [July 16](#) and [July 23](#).

Any moratorium, including a nine-month one, will hurt the City of Framingham and have a long-lasting negative impact.

I urge our City Council not to derail the progress we've made thus far, be cautiously optimistic about our development and future, and with a bold vision, reject this moratorium.