

Dear members of the Finance Committee:

The purpose of this letter is to reiterate the Planning Board's support for a full-time Town Planner in the FY2022 budget.

For nearly two years, the Town of Pepperell has operated with extremely limited hours from our Town Planner and part-time assistance supported by staff from Town Hall. Most residents may be surprised to know how little staff time is allocated to the Planning Department, given the immense workload with processing permit applications, assisting residents, grant writing, drafting new bylaws, and undertaking projects on behalf of the Town. A planned hire for a Planning Assistant was canceled in 2020 due to the ongoing pandemic.

With the Master Plan completed, Town boards, commissions, and departments are hard at work bringing recommendations to life. As the entity with responsibility for the Master Plan under state law, many of the recommendations falls either directly or indirectly under the purview of the Planning Board, including major overhauls to zoning. We are hopeful that we can access grant funding to assist with many of the necessary updates and improvements; even with limited hours, in the past few months our planner Lisa Davis has authored several winning grants to access COVID recovery funding and money to support changes to our Open Space Residential Design bylaw and to revise our design guidelines in 2021. However, without a full-time planner it will be difficult to continue to write grant applications, manage consultants, and provide the professional oversight needed to facilitate a successful process. Several other initiatives have also required work from our planner, including the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program and the Complete Streets program. The new One Stop for Growth initiative is yet another opportunity for Pepperell to access assistance and funding to propel us forward.

The Planning Board's ability to perform its duties and responsibilities to support the tax base and encourage strategic growth is critical to the future growth and success of the Town, and full-time professional support is critical to that effort. We strongly recommend that funding for a salaried full-time planner be included in the FY22 budget for approval by the citizens of Pepperell.

Sincerely,

Casey Campetti

Chair, Town of Pepperell Planning Board

*This letter was drafted and approved at the March 1, 2021 meeting of the Planning Board*