

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING: March 28, 2024; 5:30 in the Town Office Meeting Room

Has the State mandated our Town to permit and/or regulate rental properties in South Thomaston?

In an effort toward increasing the availability of housing in Maine, the State Legislature mandated significant changes to Land Use Ordinances. The required changes can be broadly broken down into four sections:

1. Identify the municipal role in increasing affordable housing.
2. Require municipalities to adopt additional density requirements and other processes to allow and facilitate additional affordable housing development under local land use ordinances.
3. Require municipalities to allow additional dwelling units on lots where residential uses are allowed.
4. Require municipalities to allow an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) on the same lot as a single-family dwelling unit.

The Town has until July 1, 2024 to comply with this new mandate. The Town will vote on the Land Use Ordinance changes at the Annual Town Meeting on June 18.

Our Comprehensive Plan does identify increasing Affordable Housing as one of the primary recommendations. It also identifies maintaining our rural/scenic landscape and protecting our resources as primary recommendations. Specifically:

“In the survey of South Thomaston residents not only did 54% express a need for more affordable housing but the town’s people also placed a high priority on maintaining South Thomaston’s rural character, coastline, waterfront character, and scenic resources. ...The management and proper enforcement of land use regulations to protect our natural resources and the environment are essential to maintaining our fisheries and agricultural lands as well as to guaranteeing the clean water in a town where aquifers and wells are the sole providers for drinking water for the town’s population.”

So, balancing these competing priorities are important as we move forward. We hope this meeting will foster discussions to help us with this juggling act.

The Planning Board and the Ordinance Review Committee (ORC) has been working with our lawyer to draft changes to our Ordinance. So far, the intention of our draft has been to comply with the law(s) without imposing any additional or ‘more restrictive’ requirements than required.

In addition, the Maine State Law(s) that are forcing us to take action and make changes also requires: towns “...ensure local ordinances to ‘affirmatively further’ the purposes of the Fair Housing Act (FHA) and the Maine Human Rights Act (MHRA) to achieve the statewide regional housing production goals.” And encourages towns to “...establish and enforce short-term rental regulations to achieve housing production goals.”

We definitely need your help in figuring out how we demonstrate we ‘affirmatively further’ additional and affordable housing. Does that mean we need to permit short-term rentals? Can we just register short-term rentals?

If you can’t make the meeting and have questions or inputs/opinions/ideas please contact the CEO (Terri = codeenforcement@souththomaston.me) or the ORC Chair (Jeff@souththomaston.me).