



## *Nahant Town Hall*

TOWN OF NAHANT, MASSACHUSETTS

334 Nahant Road, Nahant, MA 01908

February 21, 2025

Secretary Ed Augustus  
Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300  
Boston, MA 02114

### **Re: MBTA Communities Regulations**

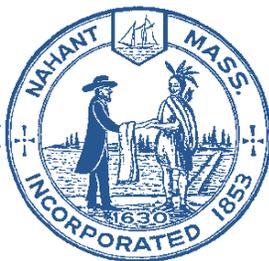
Dear Secretary Ed Augustus,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the MBTA Communities Regulations. Also, the Town of Nahant is appreciative of the response to our comments during the previous round of regulatory process. The creation of an Adjacent Small Town community category greatly captured the unique challenges that communities like ours face when approaching local zoning changes.

The Town of Nahant is a 1 square mile peninsula off the City of Lynn with only 1 bus route. Nahant is the smallest municipality in the Commonwealth with essentially no undeveloped land available for new housing. While the MBTA Communities regulations do not require new development and allow for the rezoning of pre-existing non-conforming multi-family dwellings, the lack of an affordability requirement poses a significant risk to residents in these areas.

Currently, many of these housing units are below or at the lower end of market rates even though they are not deed restricted and listed on the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory. Changing the zoning for these properties, even with the allowed restrictions, could open the door to redevelopment and increased housing costs leading to the displacement of current residents. Due to the lack of developable land in Nahant, it is difficult to find a way to combat this possible risk with new affordable housing.

That being said, the Town intends on developing and presenting a compliant zoning article to a Special Town Meeting before the end of 2025. We hope that we will be able to create a compliant solution that will not result in the displacement of residents and can be approved by the voters of Town Meeting. However, in a community with an Open Town Meeting form of government, compliance with the MBTA Communities law is truly the decision of the voters. Town leadership can do its best to present a sound proposal and educate the residents of its importance however we cannot dictate how the residents' vote. It is incumbent of the Commonwealth to respect the democratic process of town government and not penalize a community for the outcome. We have



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seen, in other communities and in ours, even unrelated to MBTA Community zoning, extensive efforts to put forward well thought out compliant zoning proposals with significant public engagement and still fail to pass them at Open Town Meeting. This is a real concern because of the penalties related to lack of compliance.

One of the largest concerns we have is that compliance with this housing policy is tied to climate change preparedness. **We urge the Commonwealth to consider eliminating grant programs related to climate change, such as Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP), from the list of grants that non-compliant MBTA Communities are deemed ineligible for.** These grants were not included in the legislation that created the MBTA Communities law nor were they mentioned throughout the legislative process. This indicates that the Legislature did not intend to include these types of grants as part of this effort. Additionally, the Town of Nahant is 99.9% surrounded by coastline. These grants are of immense importance to our community and the Town invested a great amount of time and resources to secure the designation of an MVP community. Again, as the smallest Town in the Commonwealth, with hardly any commercial or industrial revenue stream, almost completely funded by Proposition 2.5% real estate taxes and completely surrounded by the ocean, it is simply bad governmental policy to be disallowed from participating in these types of grant programs when Open Town Meeting ultimately decides if we are compliant or not. The Town of Nahant cannot afford to plan for sea level rise and climate change without the assistance of grant funding.

We also are aware that there are comments being submitted by some of our neighboring municipalities to create another community category. The proposed policy could apply to the Town of Nahant because of the density of housing and lack of developable land in our town. We understand and agree with efforts being taken by the Commonwealth to combat the housing crisis in our state and we are aware that you have to keep in mind the overall goal and how changes to the regulations may impact your effort. However, we ask that you strongly consider the unique challenges that small and dense communities face and evaluate potential policy changes that could help alleviate those challenges.

Sincerely,

*Antonio Barletta*

Town Administrator  
On behalf of the Board of Selectmen