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Burlington Vote Catches Attention Of Healey's Team

Execs Tell Governor Housing Costs Putting Drag On Business Expansion

Sam Doran

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Gov. Maura Healey talks with local officials about Burlington's new mixed-use zoning plan during a visit to the public works yard on Jan. 28, 2025.

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BURLINGTON, MASS., JAN. 28, 2025.....In Burlington to promote her 10-year transportation funding plan, Gov. Maura Healey also happened to be in the right place to talk up new housing construction after what her transportation chief called a "historic vote" just 12 hours earlier.

Burlington Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly Monday night in support of a mixed-use district to feature both housing and commercial space centered around the Burlington Mall.

After Healey touted her \$8 billion transportation plan in a Department of Public Works break room, Transportation Secretary Monica Tibbits-Nutt chimed in about the vote to "reinforce Burlington's commitment to housing."

"They are going all in on this. So I think this was great timing to be able to come out and just say thank you," Tibbits-Nutt said.

Healey said she appreciated the local support to help move the state toward its housing goals. Other towns, like Milton and Needham, have been sour on the idea of adopting state-mandated MBTA Communities zoning plans. Burlington voted last year for a separate plan to comply with the MBTA zoning mandate.

"OK, like I've said, there are some towns that are fighting us on this. And look, I grew up in a small town. I understand some of the NIMBY-ism," the governor said. "But at the end of the day, your kids cannot afford to stay in the state if we don't build more housing. Right? Grandparents can't afford to downsize and stay in Massachusetts near their grandkids because of housing costs."

Healey pointed to "really hot" life sciences and technology businesses locating around Burlington, which sits at the intersection of Route 128 and Route 3. But she said people at the companies tell her they are unsure about remaining or expanding because housing costs make it difficult to recruit new talent.

Burlington's mixed-use district envisions "strategic infill" around the mall, town economic development director Melisa Tintocalis said. The area features around 3 million square feet of asphalt and has not significantly changed in 65 years, she said.

On a tour of the DPW barn, local officials eagerly gave the governor details of their plan, which Selectman James Tigges said passed Town Meeting with around 90 percent voting in favor.

The landslide vote was not the result of "an MBTA play or some other thing," Tintocalis said. "It's our choice for smart growth. That's huge. Because we understand the economic benefit."

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