

# The Falmouth Enterprise

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Devoted To The Interests Of The Falmouth Community

## *There's Been Plenty Of 'Give' On Galasso's Part*

We agree with zoning board member Marc Finneran that when the town is reviewing a proposed development, there needs to be some give and take from both sides.

We don't agree with him that when it comes to Michael Galasso's plan to convert the former nursing home on East Main Street into housing, Mr. Galasso has been stingy on the "giving" end of the equation.

That's simply not true.

Mr. Galasso is before the board seeking a special permit to convert the former Royal Falmouth Nursing & Rehabilitation Center into a mix of year-round apartments and private rooms to be rented on a monthly basis. As initially proposed, there were to be 71 housing units, at least a quarter of them restricted as affordable.

The project has been making its way through the town's permitting channels since January 2023.

In August, after six months of discussion (give and take), the planning board approved the project under the Mixed Residential and Commercial Overlay District bylaw—known as Mr. Cod—which was designed to expediate affordable housing along Main Street by making the planning board the sole permitting authority.

However, the zoning board pronounced the planning board's approval flawed, insisted that Mr. Cod didn't apply and then claimed authority over the project.

The board's big hang-ups are the number of units and the number of parking spaces. Too many of the former and too few of the latter.

On the topic of density, Mr. Galasso has argued that there would be fewer people residing in the building than when it was a nursing home. The building is on the town sewer and close to downtown amenities, including public transportation.

"If there's an appropriate place for density, it's here," he has said. We agree.

Mr. Galasso's lawyer has stated what seems to be obvious to almost everyone except several of the board's members: "We have an existing structure that is literally begging to be used with a need that needs to be met."

The building commission and several zoning board members have criticized this one-of-a-kind project for "not fitting into the box" of the Mr. Cod bylaw. Time to think outside the box and instead take a cue from the town's own Comprehensive Plan: "Create a strategy based on redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing structures leading to new, innovative housing types."

Still, Mr. Galasso responded by trimming the number of units by four (give).

As for parking, Mr. Galasso said he will provide rideshare cars on site that could be rented by the hour, shared electric bicycles and a van for transporting people to work (give, give, give). When the board refused to believe that these amenities would appeal to prospective tenants, Mr. Galasso then arranged to lease an adjacent vacant lot and build a 24-space parking lot (a big give).

Even this concession was met with pushback. The zoning board began to quibble over the length of the lease on the parking land.

We've said it before on this page: This is a good project. The zoning board members need to climb out of their trench and face reality: this is a creative use of an existing building that answers the call of the strategic goals ratified by Town Meeting.

Is it a perfect plan? No, but it's close—and perfect plans seldom come along. Workforce housing is in critical short supply. The town should stop inspecting every centimeter of this gift horse's teeth.