

Holyokers continue to push back on sweeping zoning changes, call for delay

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HOLYOKE — Residents are continuing to push back against a sweeping proposal to overhaul the city’s zoning rules, arguing that officials are moving too quickly on a package of 47 changes that could reshape neighborhoods for decades.

The proposed changes include updates that could allow new housing density, mixed-use development and revised land-use rules in parts of the city.

At a May 26 Planning Board meeting, residents argued that the city should slow down and complete its long-promised comprehensive plan before approving major updates.

About nine people spoke during the in-person meeting, raising concerns and asking questions, according to resident Paola Ferrario. Board members also discussed a two-year backlog of missing meeting minutes.

Two Ward 6 residents, Christine Futia and Jessica Montagna, were among those who spoke at length, urging officials to reconsider the pace and approach of the proposal.

Futia, who moved to Holyoke about 15 months ago, said she supports development but believes the city is moving ahead without a finished long-term plan to guide decisions.

The current plan is outdated and incomplete, missing clear goals, details and priorities, Futia said.

She also raised concerns about how the zoning proposals were shared, saying the materials are too hard to understand, and outreach has fallen short. That has led to confusion and growing mistrust among property owners, she said.

While Futia said she supports updating outdated zoning rules for administrative clarity, she suggested separating those changes from broader proposals aimed at encouraging development.

Montagna echoed those concerns, saying many residents feel the process has moved too quickly and without enough transparency.

“The level of concern and confusion expressed by many residents makes it clear that this process was done in haste,” Montagna said.

She said more than 100 residents recently signed a letter calling for the zoning changes to be delayed. An earlier effort gathered more than 80 signatures from community members asking for clearer communication and better public engagement.

Montagna said those signatures were collected through grassroots outreach led by a small group of residents without funding or broader promotion, but they still drew a strong response.

“That should tell this board something important: People are concerned,” she said.

She also pointed to concerns raised by current and former city councilors, who, she said, have noted that zoning changes are typically handled one at a time and are often tied to specific projects.

Montagna said many residents still do not understand how the proposed changes connect to the city's draft comprehensive plan or how neighborhoods could be affected.

She called for more accessible information, including clearer visuals and neighborhood-level meetings, to help residents better understand the proposals.

“The draft comprehensive plan speaks about creating a welcoming, healthy and safe city,” Montagna said. But many residents are struggling with serious quality-of-life concerns right now, she added.

“Families are worried about crime, housing instability, neighborhood impacts and decisions that feel disconnected from the realities they are experiencing day-to-day,” she said.

“Planning for the future cannot happen in a vacuum. It requires trust. And trust is built through transparency, accessibility, and genuine collaboration with the public.”

She urged the Planning Board to pause the process and focus on improving communication, strengthening the comprehensive plan and rebuilding trust with the public before moving forward.

In earlier comments, Mayor Joshua Garcia said the zoning overhaul is part of an ongoing public process, not a final decision.

In his recent State of the City [address](#), Garcia acknowledged the rollout caused confusion and said the city plans to slow the effort and allow for more public input — a step residents at the meeting said is overdue.