

To: The Long Range Planning Committee
From: Bob Andrews, for ConcordCAN!
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Over 400 people have now signed an online petition calling upon the CLRPC to include a new Formula Business bylaw in the long range plan as an option for the Planning Board. We would go beyond the petition, however, to ask that the committee recommend to the Planning Board that such a bylaw be written to include all of Concord's business centers now.

We feel strongly that the presence of the existing bylaw in West Concord provides a great model of the benefits of lending our support to local independent businesses. These businesses are a vital and highly valued part of Concord's unique culture because they are attuned to what people who live in this community need, want, and enjoy. They build community, knitting people together and helping to prevent us from becoming more and more isolated from one another. This goes to the very core of sustainability and resilience. People who know and support each other and have personal relationships with their business owners and shop keepers will have the inner strength and trust to spring back when the storms of the century hit us. Big businesses with a formula for their stores can easily afford to crowd out the small businesses we love and respect; and some owners will prefer to rent to them because they can get higher rents.

The time to prevent this is now--not after an unnecessary further study of the business centers. We do not need to study this further because the unique attributes of Concord Center have already been studied extensively when the West Concord bylaw was established. We have an excellent model in West Concord Center; and a study would seem like a delay that benefits the formula businesses and the owners who prefer them. We are not asking for a ban, moreover; we are asking to safeguard the current proportion of independent businesses and formula businesses.

In asking for this new bylaw, we are asking that the Town honor the fourth sustainability principle which they adopted in 2011, which asks that human needs be met in a fair and equitable manner. Tax incentives, mentioned at the recent public meeting, may at first glance seem alluring to some because they would provide commercial property owners a choice. The proposed bylaw, in contrast, would put a requirement in place. Tax incentives cannot guarantee the protections that only a formula business bylaw with caps can provide. Offering a new bylaw to the Planning Board as an option would, we feel, be a timid approach to the issue and would be out of synch with the wishes of a large number of citizens of this community. We ask that you get squarely behind this and be true to the principles the Town has repeatedly embraced.

Bob Andrews, for ConcordCAN!