

Keep Concord's Character Unique

Please join with us in voting for Article 29 to keep Concord Center's character unique with the proposed Formula Business Bylaw (FBB), which would provide a limit on the number of formula businesses that can operate in the village center at any one time.

Town documents have identified such a bylaw as a Recommended Action as far back as 2007 (Village-Centers-Study), and as recently as last year (2018 Comprehensive-Long-Range-Plan). The Planning Board recommends it unanimously. To make it a reality, Article 29 will need a two-thirds majority vote to pass at Town Meeting next week.

Concord Center is one of the nation's most recognized New England village centers, with vibrant one-of-a-kind shops warmly welcoming both the Concord community and its visitors. These are essential contributors to Concord Center's inimitable appeal and genuine sense of place. Without Article 29, such character-enhancing establishments are vulnerable to being gradually displaced by generic, ubiquitous businesses. No town center is immune from such erosion to its character, not even a remarkable historic one.

For this reason – and to ensure the economic vibrancy and diversity that unique shops and services bring to a center -- many proactive, forward-thinking towns nationwide have enacted Formula Business Bylaws, including Barnstable, Chatham, Dennis, Eastham, Nantucket, and Provincetown.

Article 29 is a cap, not a ban, recognizing that formula businesses can be a valuable part of our lives and our town center, in moderation. Article 29 provides a limit of 12 formula businesses in Concord Center; currently, there are 10. West Concord Center's FBB, passed in 2011, has a limit of 10; currently, there are 7. Given that thriving West Concord's cap has not been reached, no one can accuse the FBB of keeping out formula businesses.

People are sometimes lulled into thinking that the Historic Districts Commission (HDC) can protect the Center from the spread of formula businesses, or that the Center's small-store footprints are sufficient deterrents, or that increased tourism can fix the problem – but this is not the case. The HDC can't protect the Center: its authority is limited to exterior features seen from the public way. Hence, we could eventually see Main and Walden Streets primarily populated by appropriate-looking formula businesses. Small-store footprints can't protect the Center: there's a growing new trend among formula businesses toward finding discreet, smaller spaces--something we've just seen in the past year. Expanding tourism can't: while this is an important economic goal, bringing in more tourists will not prevent the incremental spread of formula businesses in the Center.

The 2005 Comprehensive-Long-Range-Plan proclaimed: "Town-wide property values and commercial enterprise benefit from the remarkable character of the town...Concord is challenged on a regular basis by potentially detrimental changes and growth demands. The town's attractiveness and unique character can be easily and inadvertently lost." Article 29 is a response to this appeal. If passed at Town Meeting, it will take its place in the halls of Concord's long tradition for proactive, far-sighted planning to preserve our Town's commonly-held assets. To learn more: www.ProtectConcordCenter.org

Mary White
Monsen Road

Janet Lawson
Lee Drive