**PRIMER FOR THINKING ABOUT HOUSING PRIORITIES IN 2025 MASTER PLAN**

The relationship between a **Master Plan** and **zoning ordinances** is foundational in guiding land use, growth, and development within a municipality. Ideally, the two work together in the following ways:

**1. Master Plan as Visionary Framework**

* The Master Plan serves as the town's **long-term vision** for growth, land use, transportation, housing, economic development, open space, and other community priorities.
* It outlines **broad goals and policies** for how the town should develop or preserve its character over time, typically looking ahead 10-20 years.

**2. Zoning as Regulatory Tool**

* Zoning ordinances are the **legal mechanisms** to implement the Master Plan’s vision. They set specific rules and standards for land use (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial), density, building heights, lot sizes, and setbacks.
* They ensure day-to-day decisions on permits, developments, and land use align with the Master Plan's goals.

**3. Alignment and Consistency**

* Ideally, zoning ordinances should **reflect and reinforce** the Master Plan's goals. For example:
	+ If the Master Plan envisions walkable, mixed-use development in the town center, zoning should allow for mixed-use buildings and pedestrian-friendly design standards.
	+ If the Master Plan prioritizes preserving open space, zoning ordinances might include conservation districts or cluster development provisions.
* Regular updates to zoning should follow significant updates to the Master Plan to ensure consistency.

**4. Master Plan as Guidance, Zoning as Law**

* While the Master Plan is advisory and sets out the town’s aspirations, zoning ordinances are legally binding. The Master Plan provides the **policy basis** for zoning amendments or changes.
* Courts often look to the Master Plan when interpreting zoning disputes, making it a critical supporting document for zoning decisions.

**5. Community Engagement in Both**

* Both the Master Plan and zoning rely on public input. The Master Plan involves broader engagement to set priorities and vision, while zoning adjustments may require more technical and legal consultations.
* Engaging stakeholders in both ensures that the vision (Master Plan) and the rules (zoning) align with community values.

**6. Periodic Updates**

* A well-aligned system ensures the zoning ordinances evolve alongside updates to the Master Plan. Since your town’s Master Plan will be updated in 2025, this may trigger a review and potential revision of zoning ordinances to reflect any new goals or priorities.

**Challenges to Avoid**

* **Inconsistencies:** If zoning ordinances contradict the Master Plan, development patterns may diverge from the town's vision, leading to community dissatisfaction or legal challenges.
* **Delay in Updates:** Failing to update zoning ordinances after revising the Master Plan can create a gap between long-term aspirations and current land use regulations.

In summary, the Master Plan sets the **why and what** for your town’s development, while zoning determines the **how and where.** Maintaining a strong connection between the two ensures cohesive, intentional growth aligned with the community’s goals.

**PROMPTS/NOTES FROM MEMBER OF PLANNING COMMUNITY (added Jan 18, 2025)**

We choose to live here, let’s not mess it up. Prepare by listing aspects of Portsmouth we must preserve:

* Specific and historical
* Some reflective of ethos of city
* Some environmental and landscape-related
* Some recreational

**Example**: We don’t deal logically with downtown parking. Zoning calls for each housing parcel to have its own parking. The requirement is often waived. More centralized parking would be more cost effective (for constructing housing) and could result in better architecture. Developers could pay an impact fee for a more equitable approach.

**Example:** Where should the next neighborhood development take place and what amenities should be encouraged?

**Example**: Explicit, trackable goals for:

* Housing
* Affordable housing
* Housing suitable for young families
* Bike lanes
* Public access to shorelines.

**Example:** A resource to help drafters could include an inventory of what is needed for a successful community with a current assessment: excellent, adequate, or needs improvement. Covering areas such as: medical facilities; recreation facilities; senior center; shopping - all types; schools; water; sewer; utilities, including internet and broadband.