

The veto override Waltham needed

A mixed-use complex that the City Council approved over the mayor's objections will bring important revenue to the city.

By [The Editorial Board](#) Updated August 11, 2026, 4:00 a.m.



Bay Colony, shown here during a redesign in 2012, is one of three districts the Waltham City Council voted in June to rezone from commercial to mixed use. THE BOSTON GLOBE/GLOBE FREELANCE

The Waltham City Council just did its part to address the critical housing shortage in Massachusetts.

[By a 12-1 vote](#), council members overturned a veto by Mayor Jeannette McCarthy that would have stopped the rezoning of an office complex off Winter Street known as Bay Colony for mixed-use development. As a result of that vote, plans to construct up to 1,200 new homes on the 135-acre site can move forward.

McCarthy did not respond to an emailed request for comment from the editorial board about the council's override vote. But from the council's perspective, there was strong incentive to move forward on the plan.

Nearly half of Waltham's property tax base comes from commercial real estate, [and as a recent article in Tech Times put it](#), the "fiscal arithmetic" of that market is "in structural decline," nationally and locally. The suburban market has been hit especially hard, with Greater Boston's Route 128 and Interstate 495 corridors carrying a combined suburban vacancy rate of about 26 percent, according to Tech Times.

With the high number of vacant office buildings comes owners seeking tax abatements, which in turn leads to decreasing revenue for the city, Waltham City Council president Robert Logan told the editorial board. As Logan sees it, the switch to mixed use at Bay Colony is win-win, from a housing and tax revenue standpoint.

"The Waltham City Council is very concerned about the supply of housing and the supply of affordable housing and saw this as an opportunity to do something impactful," Logan said. "This will take some of the vacant space, flip it to residential," generating tax revenue that does not come from empty spaces.

He said the council did its "due diligence," holding three public hearings, a neighborhood meeting, and multiple committee meetings.

As the Globe reported, Bay Colony, which is owned by BXP (formerly Boston Properties), is one of three districts the council voted in June to rezone from commercial to mixed use.

With the rezoning, a 20-acre site off Jones Road, also owned by BXP, is slated to produce 300 to 400 new housing units, and 600 more could be built at the former Polaroid campus on Main Street owned by local developer J & Co LLC.

McCarthy approved the zoning for the Jones Road and Polaroid sites but vetoed the Bay Colony district over traffic concerns and proximity to a residential neighborhood.

According to Tom Benavides, founder and policy coordinator of Waltham Inclusive Neighborhoods, a housing advocacy group, support for the Bay Colony rezoning effort came together because of the confluence of three realities — the housing crisis, the decline in commercial tax revenue, and funding commitments from the state and the developer for several key infrastructure improvements.

The cost of these road upgrades, which include a new connector between heavily trafficked roads, is expected to be roughly \$30 million. According to contract information Benavides obtained through a public records request and shared with the editorial board, the state is committing \$15 million for infrastructure work that will also support the Bay Colony project. According to the contract, BXP is committed to investing up to \$15 million.

According to Benavides, funding commitments from the state and developer for those infrastructure improvements were key to winning initial support for the project, and then key to convincing the council “to buck the mayor.”

“For 15 years, the city of Waltham has had plans and renderings to improve highway access, but it had no funding,” he said. Then the state and the developer said “if you do the rezoning” they would collectively supply the funding for needed infrastructure changes.

After the mayor’s veto put the Bay Colony project in jeopardy, Benavides credits a strong public advocacy campaign, including emails of support from abutters, for convincing the council to overturn it. “It felt very good,” he said about the result. “We weren’t entirely sure how the vote would go.”

The only vote against the override came from council Vice President Randall LeBlanc, who said he was not against housing but believed the mayor’s concerns deserved more consideration.

However, City Councilor Colleen Bradley-MacArthur told the board it was “disappointing and frustrating” to have the mayor veto the proposal after all the community outreach. It would have been a shame, she said, to squander this opportunity.

Because of all the space available for development, she said Waltham is “the envy of all these municipalities around us. ... We have the ability to do the kind of growth required to keep our finances and our city vibrant and healthy.”

While Waltham’s vacant office space is a threat when it results in a drop in tax revenue, it also holds great promise. The “live-work-play” model that’s so popular now can work well in what were once strictly commercial developments.

As Boston has seen, office to residential conversions are not always so simple. Physically, it can be difficult to do, requiring different water and sewer hook-ups and other building changes. Politically, it can be difficult too. That is also true in suburban areas where residents worry about the traffic and other concerns associated with more residential housing.

“Greater Boston is looking at a necessary time of renewal and self-invention,” state Senator Michael Barrett, whose district covers Waltham, told the editorial board. “Waltham is showing us how it’s done.”

Showing how it’s done means accepting the reality of change in the commercial real estate market — and having the political will to fight for the kind of change that the Waltham City Council just voted for.