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| N:\sterling seal2.gif | **TOWN OF STERLING****PLANNING BOARD**Butterick Building1 Park Street \* Sterling, Massachusetts 01564Website: www.sterling-ma.gov**Bus: (978) 422-8111 x2301 \* FAX (978) 422-0289** | Carl Corrinne, ChairMichael Temple, ClerkVal Pruneau, MemberJohn Santoro, MemberEric Newman, Member |

July 14th, 2025

Dear Sterling land owner:

You are receiving this letter because you own a property that is planned to be included in a new zoning overlay district located on either side of Route 12 near Sterling’s border with Leominster (see attached map). This district, to be known as the Multi-Family Overlay District (MFOD), gives property owners the option to build small-scale multifamily housing on their land By Right, as opposed to building such housing By Special Permit as is currently the case.

The Planning Board is creating this district to meet the requirements of the MBTA Communities Act, which requires the majority of communities in Eastern Massachusetts to create a zoning district where property owners will have the option to build small-scale multifamily housing By Right.

**How does inclusion in this zoning district affect property owners**?

Property owners are not required to take any action as a result of inclusion in the multi-family overlay district. Owners can continue using their land as they have been, and are not required to make any changes. All that is changing is the way multi-family housing is allowed in this area: changing from being allowed By Special Permit to being allowed By Right.

The land in the new overlay district is currently zoned Rural-Residential (RR) and this zoning will remain in place. The Rural-Residential district currently allows the following land uses By Right: single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, farming, religious buildings, and child care facilities. The Rural-Residential district currently allows multi-family dwellings By Special Permit. The new overlay district will change this to allow multi-family dwellings By Right instead of By Special Permit.

**What is the difference between allowing multi-family housing By Right instead of By Special Permit**?

At present, a proposal for a multi-family housing development must obtain a Special Permit from the Zoning Board, then obtain Site Plan approval from the Planning Board. Allowing multi-family housing By Right removes the need for a Special Permit from the Zoning Board and all that is required is Site Plan approval from the Planning Board. When the Planning Board reviews a Site Plan, a public meeting is held and abutters are notified. The Planning Board uses the Site Plan approval process to help shape the project design so that it fits in with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Abutter input is critical to the final design of any project requiring Site Plan approval.

**Has this zoning overlay district already been passed?**

No. Although the Planning Board is recommending this zoning overlay district, any changes to the Zoning Bylaws in Sterling must be passed at Town Meeting. The town anticipates holding a Special Town Meeting before the end of the calendar year.

Sterling is required to approve a multifamily zoning district by December 31, 2025 to remain in compliance with State zoning law.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact Town Planner Stephen Wallace by phone (978-422-8111, Extension 2320), email: swallace@sterling-ma.gov

or stop by his office (Room 202 in the Butterick Municipal Building).

You can also go to <https://www.sterling-ma.gov/planning-board/pages/mbta-communities-zoning-requirements> to learn more about Sterling’s MBTA Communities zoning proposal.