

Open Letter to the Planning Board

Supporting business development in Belmont can be good for our schools. Relaxing restrictive zoning bylaws for restaurants in Belmont should provide commercial tax revenue that pays for operating the schools, sponsorship and support for school programs and after-school activities, job opportunities for Belmont students, and places for Belmont students and families to enjoy.

I have seen the support that local businesses provide in Belmont, both on the School Committee and the Butler PTA. I have also seen it throughout Massachusetts as a professional evaluator of programs dedicated to fostering broader participation and deeper engagement of students with science, technology, engineering, and math.

This support can be both financial and non-financial support. Based on my professional experience in communities with dense local business development, local businesses partner with schools, sponsor educational programs, provide resources, and donate funds. Local businesses sponsor sports teams, arts programs, and other extracurricular activities, alleviating the financial burden on schools and allowing them to offer a wider range of activities for students. Such partnerships enhance the educational experience for students.

Engaging with local businesses fosters a sense of community. Business leaders and employees may participate in school events, mentor students, and collaborate with schools to develop curricula that align with the skills needed in the local job market. Local businesses also provide jobs for students and prepare them for future employment.

Businesses also generate tax revenue. Although the necessary, short-term option for increasing funding for Belmont schools is to pass an override in April, supporting business development is a feasible long-term strategy for generating additional tax revenue that can fund our schools while offloading the tax burden felt by many in our community. **Making our zoning bylaws friendlier to restaurants is a necessary step for encouraging business development.**

As a School Committee member, parent, and educator, I spend a lot of time thinking about the core ingredients of effective schools and learning opportunities for all students. I am in good company with my education preoccupation in Belmont: the schools are one of the top reasons that people move to Belmont.

And, being involved in local politics, what I notice is we all share the same agenda: increase sources of revenue to offload the tax burden on individuals. Getting clear on how we can achieve that goal means we all get to row in the same direction. Making zoning bylaws less restrictive will help us move closer to generating more tax revenue for maintaining and even expanding or improving learning opportunities for all students in Belmont.

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