

June 10, 2025

Barbara Marty, Chair
Zoning Board of Adjustment
Town of Warner
Warner, NH 03278

Subject: CATCH Special Exception and Variance (Cases 2025-05 and 2025-06)

Dear Chair Marty and Members of the Zoning Board of Adjustment:

I am writing in support of the application by CATCH in the above-cited cases for the development of multifamily rental workforce housing in the Intervale/Commercial District on Route 103 near I-89 Exit 9.

For almost twenty years I worked for New Hampshire Housing, which has financed several housing developments built by CATCH. CATCH has a reputation for excellence in both construction and property management. Its properties make strong positive contributions to their communities. CATCH has applied to Board for a special exception and a variance to allow construction of a 34-unit multifamily rental workforce housing development on Route 103 in the Intervale District.

In the Warner zoning ordinance, the Intervale District includes the following statement: "It is critical that development in this area reflect the character of the town as it has grown and developed for over 200 years, including elements of architecture, scale and setting of buildings and roadways into the landscape, landscaping features, and features that accommodate and encourage non- vehicular traffic."

The proposed three-story structure is more consistent with historical development patterns than other buildings currently existing in the district. Consider that the building that contains Market Basket is considerably larger in square footage than the proposed structure yet has few redeeming architectural attributes. Large, flat-roof, single-story buildings do not reflect a sense of historical development in Warner. By contrast, the proposed CATCH building echoes of the multi-story "crutch factory" that once stood on Depot Street and is of similar height to the existing Odd Fellows Building in the center of town. Other large structures also once occupied prominent locations in the village center. Consider that the zoning ordinance permits structures in this district to have a height of up to 45 feet. It is not reasonable to suggest that buildings of such a height are inconsistent with the town's wishes, given that the voters have adopted this standard.

The proposed development will have little impact on the school system. One of the most commonly repeated myths about affordable housing is that it will flood the schools. New Hampshire Housing has produced several studies over the past 25 years demonstrating that the number of school children per unit in a multi-family housing development is far below that of single-family housing. The most recent study was done in 2024 and found that

multi-family housing produced 0.06 students per unit, while single-family housing produced 0.4 students per unit.¹

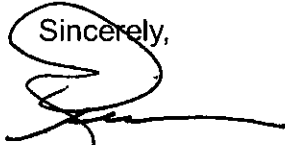
While multi-family housing may not be the use that some people would choose for this site, the application before the Board should not be decided as a popularity contest. What to build on private property is a decision to be made by the owner, not by the government or by other people, whether they are abutters or not. The question is whether it meets the requirements of the town's zoning ordinance. The proposed use is permitted under the zoning ordinance, subject to the conditions of a special exception. Among those conditions is whether the proposed use is "essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare." While this is a standard that may be abused because of its inherently subjective nature, a few points nevertheless stand out:

1. New Hampshire is in a well-documented crisis of housing affordability, the solution to which is construction of more housing. In a recent state-wide housing needs assessment, New Hampshire Housing determined that the state overall would need to build approximately 90,000 new units of housing between 2020 and 2040 to meet demand.²
2. The CATCH proposal is for workforce housing. Warner has a legal obligation under the state Workforce Housing Law (RSA 674:59) to provide "reasonable and realistic opportunities for the development of workforce housing, including rental multifamily housing." Warner's zoning ordinance was written with this legal obligation in mind.
3. The proposed use – multifamily rental workforce housing – is specifically listed in the zoning ordinance, unlike many other more general uses, whether by right or by special exception. This demonstrates that it is a desired use. For it then to be dismissed as undesirable would make this zoning provision a nullity.

Specifically concerning the application for a variance, the conditions of the property (slope, proximity to wetlands) present a hardship that can only be met for this proposal by granting a variance, given the demands for parking imposed by the zoning ordinance.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Board to grant the special exception and variance for the CATCH proposal.

Sincerely,



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¹ New Hampshire Housing, "From Homes to Classrooms." September 2024. https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/From_Homes_To_Classrooms_2024.pdf

² New Hampshire Housing, "2023 New Hampshire Statewide Housing Needs Assessment." <https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023-NH-Statewide-Housing-Needs-Assessment.pdf>