

# Holyoke residents call for a halt to proposed zoning changes; council slows process

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HOLYOKE — A Holyoke resident and 100 likeminded petitioners are urging city officials to halt a broad set of proposed zoning changes, saying more time and public input are needed before moving forward.

Resident Jessica Montagna spoke during a public hearing Thursday before the City Council's ordinance committee, the second hearing on the proposed zoning changes.

In the end, the council left the hearing open, with plans to revisit the issue in September. During that time, councilors said they would work to educate the public, though Montagna said no details were provided on how or when that would happen.

Earlier, Montagna submitted a letter signed by more than 100 residents, calling on the committee to stop the process and restart it, with proposals introduced “in a responsible way and one at a time.”

The letter also requested that no zone change be made before a “well-vetted” comprehensive plan is adopted, and that any future proposals be aligned with that plan.

Montagna said key points were raised during the hearing, including comments from former Councilor Helen Norris, who noted that zoning changes are typically considered individually and over time, often in connection with a specific project.

“None of these 47 changes have a clear project that it is associated with,” Montagna said.

Montagna said the signatures were collected through grassroots outreach by a small group, without significant online promotion or organizational support, and with limited time and resources. She said broader awareness could have resulted in more participation.

She also referenced a previous letter, signed by about 80 residents, that requested more transparency around the city's outreach and engagement efforts related to the zoning proposals.

“That raises an important question. If this public hearing is truly important, and if the city genuinely values public comment and community involvement, why was this hearing not heavily promoted by the city itself?” she said.

Advertising of municipal meetings usually consists of postings on bulletin boards, both real and virtual, legal notices in newspapers of record, as well as on governmental websites.

Montagna said the proposed zoning changes are moving forward, while many residents feel “unheard, confused and disconnected from the process.”

She acknowledged that the city's draft comprehensive plan describes Holyoke as a welcoming and safe community, but said residents continue to face issues.