

In Winthrop, the state's ambitious housing law was on the ballot. It lost in a rout.

Six candidates who oppose the town complying with MBTA Communities were elected to Town Council.

By **Andrew Brinker** Globe Staff, Updated November 5, 2025, 10 minutes ago



A water tower is seen in the Point Shirley neighborhood of Winthrop, Massachusetts October 29, 2025. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Voters in Winthrop doubled down Tuesday on the town's [staunch opposition to a state housing law](#) that mandates communities served by the T make room for more housing, handing a decisive victory to a slate of Town Council candidates who pledged to stonewall any plan to comply with the law.

Candidates who oppose [the MBTA Communities Act](#) — the controversial housing law that has ignited fierce debate in Winthrop and other towns in Eastern Massachusetts — swept all six council seats in Tuesday's election. The nine member council will now consist of seven councilors who are opposed to the law, and only two members who have supported plans to follow it.

The results solidify Winthrop's position as one of [a handful of communities that have refused to pass a plan that complies](#) with the law, nearly a year after its original deadline to do so. The council, which has been split on the issue, has already twice rejected compliance plans, and now seems less likely to pass one.

The law, which seeks to address [Massachusetts' deep housing shortage](#) by mandating 177 communities create new zoning districts to allow for more dense housing, has been controversial in many communities. But in Winthrop, the debate over it has torn the community apart, ending friendships, triggering lawsuits, and sparking conspiracy theories.

Misinformation has run rampant, and Tuesday's election boiled down to whether a candidate supported complying with the law or vowed to fight it. Opponents cast pro-MBTA Communities candidates as representing the state's interests over the town, and claimed they were being backed by developers. They've expressed fears about worsening traffic and overcrowded schools.

One lawn sign told voters: "Don't Gamble With Winthrop's Future. Voter for councilors who will protect our Small Town from Big Developers."

The law also became a catch-all in Winthrop for concerns about broader economic and demographic shifts that are reshaping communities across Greater Boston.



Winthrop town square. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Jim Letterie, one of the law's staunchest opponents, ran for reelection as Town Council President — effectively Winthrop's chief executive — with the campaign slogan "Keep Winthrop Winthrop." He won reelection over his challenger, council Vice President, and compliance plan supporter, Hannah Belcher, by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent. He said his victory represented a statement by the town.

"Keeping Winthrop, Winthrop is not just a slogan; it comes from the heart," he wrote on Facebook. "I truly believe our community deserves to preserve its charm, character, and unique spirit. I may have won the race, but it's Winthrop that made a statement about its future."

That so many residents are so fiercely opposed to MBTA Communities has confounded some in town. Winthrop is one of the densest communities in the state, with 18,700 residents sandwiched into just 1.6 square miles of land. While the law mandates Winthrop make room for 882 new homes, few of those units are likely to be built; The compliance plan written by the planning board would have only rezoned areas where apartment and condo buildings already exist, [a tactic other dense towns have also used](#) to comply with the law while avoiding new development.

Brian Martynowicz, a member of the local pro-housing group Winthrop Working Together, said many residents misunderstood that fact, in part because opponents have insisted that the law would lead to widespread development.

“We’re obviously saddened by the results yesterday,” said Martynowicz, whose group supported a slate of candidates who pledged to pass a compliance plan. “This conversation has become so toxic that many people won’t listen to factual arguments anymore. So Winthrop is going to keep being Winthrop, at least for the time being.”

The town’s opposition to the law has already caused it to miss out on several key state grants, including [one that would have helped fund a berm](#) to protect a neighborhood on Morton Street from the frequent flooding of the Belle Isle Marsh. The state has made MBTA Communities compliance a condition for many discretionary grant programs, and said the town did not receive the grant for the berm because of its opposition to the law.

The town could also be sued if it continues to oppose the law. When voters in Milton [rejected a compliance plan in a referendum](#) in early 2024, Attorney General Andrea Campbell [sued the town](#), and the state Supreme Judicial Court [sided with Campbell](#). Milton [has since passed an MBTA Communities plan](#).

“This problem is going to self-resolve, as we’ve seen with Milton,” said Martynowicz. “There’s a legal framework for addressing this. And ironically, all of the fears from opponents about the state interfering with our local affairs will come true, just not in the form of a zoning plan.”



Winthrop has been denied a state planning grant for a berm to protect against sea level rise, because it is one of just a handful of communities in Eastern Massachusetts that has not complied with a state law requiring towns to zone for denser housing.
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