

2. LAND USE

A. INTRODUCTION

Most people do not use the term “land use” when they try to explain what a town looks like. Often, they refer to locally important landmarks and images that can be seen from the road or sidewalk. Describing Arlington Center as a linear district composed of several sub-districts, with an impressive civic block and low-rise commercial buildings, or its adjacent neighborhoods as moderately dense housing on tree-lined streets, is to characterize these areas by their land use patterns.

Land Use as an element of the Master Plan that connects all the other elements because land use planning incorporates all the land in Town, and the Town’s vision for it. Land use refers to the location, type, and intensity of a community’s residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional development, along with roads, open land, and water. Patterns of development vary by the land and water resources that support them, the eras in which growth occurred, and the evolution of a town’s transportation infrastructure. The ages of buildings in each part of a town usually correlate with changes in land use patterns. Similarly, the placement of buildings in relation to the street and to each other tends to be inseparable from their age and whether they were constructed before or after the adoption of zoning. Furthermore, a town’s development pattern and shape sometimes hint at its annexation history, or exchanges of land with adjacent cities and towns.



Arlington Center

Just about all of these traits can be found in Arlington. The boundaries of its 5.2 square mile (sq. mi) land area¹ largely stem from changes that occurred as the colonial settlement of Cambridge grew, divided into precincts, and eventually spawned new towns. Arlington’s present shape is defined in part by water and by political choices that gave birth to West Cambridge, Watertown, Somerville, and Belmont. Its development pattern hints at the seamless ties that Arlington once had with neighboring communities – ties reinforced by historic Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street. Of course, Arlington and all of the surrounding towns have regulated land use through zoning for many decades now, and the imprint of zoning can be seen in some newer neighborhoods and commercial projects, too. Arlington’s land use pattern reflects both organic and regulated forms.

From the World Café in October 2012 and the community meetings in June 2013, it seems that many Arlington residents understand that the pressure for development is high and that change is inevitable. Planning for change in the future through the Master Plan will result in better neighborhoods, a stronger local economy, more civic attributes, and a better quality of life for current and future residents. There seems to be considerable support for focusing growth in walkable activity centers while protecting existing neighborhoods. This working paper explores how to transition from traditional ways of regulating land use to organizing decisions according to a framework based on conservation and growth areas in order to produce compatible and complete neighborhoods, villages, and corridors.

¹ Arlington’s total area is 5.6 sq. mi., according to data from Arlington GIS and MassGIS. The federal Census Bureau reports Arlington’s total area as 5.5 sq. mi.

B. LAND USE GOALS

- Balance Arlington’s housing growth with efforts to strengthen and expand commercial and industrial uses.
- Concentrate new growth in areas with existing infrastructure, commercial services and transit.
- Promote development patterns that preserve open space and enhance the quality of the environment.
- Focus mixed use development in Arlington’s commercial areas to support local businesses and provide services for residents.

C. KEY FINDINGS

- Massachusetts Avenue has room to grow. The corridor would benefit from increased density with greater building height and building massing commensurate with its role as the primary commercial corridor with good bus transit service and pedestrian and bike access to Alewife Station.
- Arlington suffers from a lack of publicly owned land. The High School, Cemetery, Public Works Department and Recreation Department have difficulty meeting all their present and future needs due to insufficient land.
- Arlington still has a few vacant, developable land parcels, e.g., at Poet’s Corner and the Mugar property, and naturally the Town is concerned about them. While the master plan should pay attention to the opportunities for conservation and development on these and other sites, the critical growth management focus in Arlington should be the evolution of Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway, and the future of the Mill Brook corridor.
- The Mill Brook is an untapped resource, and properties adjacent to it are likely to change in ownership and use over time. Sites along the waterway are well-positioned for redevelopment, for they are bracketed between the two other linear corridors which help to form an identity for the Town: the Minuteman Bikeway (as a primary open space corridor) and Massachusetts Avenue (as the primary commercial corridor). The large swath of land between these two corridors has some of the largest lots in the Town, and a number of the sites are publicly-held.
- Arlington’s zoning relies heavily on special permits to regulate land use. Special permits can create uncertainty for landowners and developers who must figure out what the community wants, and make it difficult for residents to anticipate the kinds of changes that can occur in or near their neighborhoods.

D. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Arlington is a predominantly residential suburb of Cambridge and Boston, bounded by the towns of Belmont, Lexington, and Winchester and the cities of Medford, Somerville, and Cambridge. It is maturely developed, with commercial centers along Massachusetts Avenue surrounded by densely developed, largely walkable neighborhoods. The most obvious center of activity in Arlington lies between Massachusetts Avenue and Summer Street, an area that roughly corresponds with an east-west valley that crosses the town and once carried rail service between Concord and Somerville until the late 1970s. The Mill Brook runs through this area, too. Together, the old railroad and the waterway help to explain the remnants of industrial land found in the vicinity of Arlington Heights. The former rail bed was rebuilt in 1992 and serves as the Minuteman Bikeway. The future of industrial and commercial parcels in this part of town will have a substantial impact on Arlington’s character, quality of life, and tax base.

1. Land Use Patterns

Land uses can be quantified – that is, reported by the amounts of land used for various purposes – but a more enlightening approach involves analyzing a community’s land use patterns. If anything can be said about the land use patterns in Arlington, it is that the town is full of eclectic spaces: areas with a seemingly random mix of uses,

variable lot sizes, building types and orientations, all combined in fairly tight quarters. In many cases, these mixed-use areas pre-date the adoption of zoning and they contribute to the “organic” feel of Arlington’s neighborhoods. They also increase the risk of land use conflicts, for the surrounding neighborhoods have developed and filled in very close to commercial, industrial, and other uses.

Massachusetts Avenue has played a critical role in Arlington’s evolution. It is the literal and figurative heart of Arlington, spanning the town east to west and linking it to Cambridge and Lexington. Massachusetts Avenue lies in the flatlands of the town, and as the primary commercial corridor it draws from the many residential neighborhoods nestled in the hills that surround it. The many areas along this corridor have their own identity and sense of place. Arlington Center is understood to be distinct from the Capitol Square district or Arlington Heights.

Arlington’s roads tell the story of its growth history. Many of the earliest roads in Arlington were based on Native American travel routes. Since Arlington as we know it did not exist in the 1700s and early 1800s, the main roads served as connections to distant parts of the same large jurisdiction, e.g., between Arlington and Charlestown, both being part of Cambridge long ago. These older routes also ran across upland locations. It makes sense that the greatest concentration of extant structures built prior to the Civil War can be found in and around Arlington Center along these early routes, in the vicinity of Massachusetts Avenue, Mystic Street, Pleasant Street, and Medford Street. The railroad also played a role in its development, with many industrial areas adjacent to what is now the Minuteman Bikeway, and was once a railroad corridor.

Not surprisingly, development extended from the historic core south along Jason Street and Academy Street, north along Medford Street and Mystic Street, and east along Broadway and Warren Street. There is also evidence of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century housing development in Arlington Heights and around Park Avenue, and in East Arlington as well – some of it from before West Cambridge changed its name to Arlington. Electric street cars along Massachusetts Avenue, Mystic and Medford Streets, and Broadway no doubt contributed to the attractiveness of these areas for housing development. The urban street grid that characterizes much of East Arlington coincides with a significant concentration of densely developed worker housing: mostly two--family houses, and sometimes larger, most likely responding to the industrial growth that occurred in Arlington after the mid-nineteenth century. Although many of the mills constructed during that era are gone, the housing units remain.

Arlington grew dramatically during the interwar years (1920-1940) and again during the “Baby Boom” era (1946-1964). Neighborhoods filled in throughout the south part of town (south of Massachusetts Avenue), with single-family home subdivisions around Park Circle and Menotomy Rocks Park and small-scale multifamily housing in East Arlington. Entire neighborhoods were created in Arlington Heights as household formation rates skyrocketed during the 1950s. These neighborhoods have the classic curved streets and road layouts designed to discourage through traffic, which typified suburban subdivisions at the time. One can see the twentieth century evolution of roadway design principles in almost all of Arlington’s newer neighborhoods. In these locations, the housing also tends to be lower density and composed primarily of detached single-family homes.

E. ZONING REGULATIONS

An important component of any master plan is an assessment of local zoning requirements, especially for consistency or conflicts with the community’s goals and aspirations for the future. Zoning should express a community’s development blueprint: the “where, what, and how much” of land uses, intensity of uses, and the relationship between abutting land uses and the roads that serve them. Ideally, one can open a zoning ordinance or bylaw and understand what the community wants to achieve. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in Massachusetts cities and towns, and Arlington is no exception.

1. Use Districts

Arlington adopted its first Zoning Bylaw in 1924, but the version currently in use was adopted in 1975 and it has been amended many times since then. It divides the town into nineteen use districts (see Zoning Map), or areas zoned for residential, commercial, industrial, or other purposes. There is nothing inherently wrong with a large

number of zoning districts as long as the regulations make sense “on the ground.” In many cases, especially along Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington essentially zoned the land for whatever purpose existed at the time, which in turn makes for an odd arrangement of districts – and often results in very shallow, single-parcel districts. Some districts are also divided by Massachusetts Avenue, i.e., different districts on opposite sides of the road.

Table 2.1. Zoning Districts by Land Area

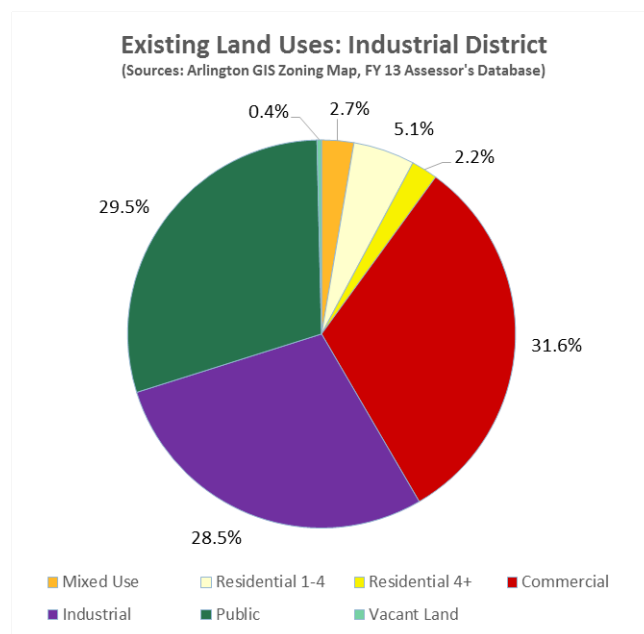
Abbr.	District Name	Acres	Abbr.	District Name	Acres
R0	Large Lot Single Family	238.2	B1	Neighborhood Office	25.9
R1	Single Family	1,771.5	B2	Neighborhood Business	16.9
R2	Two Family	619.7	B2A	Major Business	22.2
R3	Three Family	8.3	B3	Village Business	30.2
R4	Town House	19.4	B4	Vehicular Oriented Business	30.0
R5	Apartments Low Density	63.7	B5	Central Business	10.3
R6	Apartments Med Density	49.0	I	Industrial	48.7
R7	Apartments High Density	18.7	MU	Multi-Use	18.0
OS	Open Space	275.9	T	Transportation	0.8
PUD	Planned Unit Development	16.2		Total Acres (w/out water)	3,283.6

Source: Arlington GIS, “zoning.shp”. Table omits water area. With water, the total area in the GIS zoning map is 3,509.89 acres (5.6 sq. mi.).

There is also a wetlands protection overlay district that appears only in part on the Zoning Map. Like many towns in Massachusetts, Arlington has an Inland Wetland District that pre-dates the adoption of the state Wetlands Protection Act. The Zoning Bylaw relies on a text description for some covered wetlands that are not specifically mapped, e.g., 25 feet from the centerline of rivers, brooks, and streams, despite a requirement of the state Zoning Act (Chapter 40A) that all districts be mapped.²

People usually think that the name of a zoning district indicates what the land can be used for, and to a point, this is true. As suggested by the charts above, the amount of land zoned for various purposes aligns fairly well with the amount of land actually used for those purposes, but there are exceptions. For example, Arlington has more land zoned for single-family housing development than the amount of land that is actually used for single-family homes. This is partially because public service uses such as schools and parks often occupy land in residential neighborhoods. Curiously, the only district in which Arlington allows adult uses is the Central Business District (B5), the purpose of which is “to reinforce the Center’s role as the focus of activity in Arlington...” Moreover, the bylaw has no regulations to control the location or extent of adult uses within the B5 district.

Much of Arlington’s industrially zoned land is no longer used for industrial purposes. While the town has zoned about 49 acres for industrial development, a comparison of the Zoning Map and assessor’s records shows that only fourteen acres (about 29 percent) of the Industrial District is actually used for industrial purposes such as manufacturing, warehouse/distribution, storage, and related office facilities. One reason for these differences is that Arlington allows non-industrial uses in the industrial districts. Some of the non-



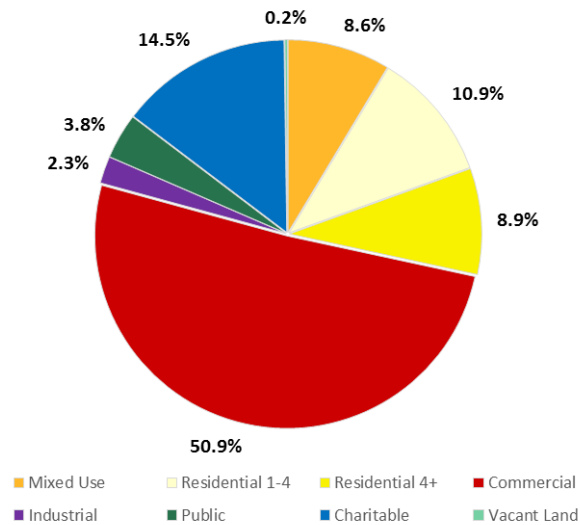
² G.L. c. 40A, § 4.

industrial uses may also be “grandfathered,” i.e., pre-existing nonconforming uses that were legal when created but do not comply with current zoning requirements. According to the assessor’s data, the largest individual users of industrial land in Arlington are municipal (e.g., the Department of Public Works compound on Grove Street), or privately owned such as the Gold’s Gym site on Park Ave., a warehouse/storage facility on Ryder Street, and one of several auto repair facilities currently operating in Arlington. In fact, auto-related businesses account for most of the Industrial District’s commercial uses: auto repair shops, gasoline station, and commercial parking.

Similarly, the six Business Districts have been developed for many uses in addition to the commercial uses for which they are principally intended. Information reported in the assessor’s database shows that over half of Arlington’s business-zoned land is used for some type of commercial use – retail, restaurants, offices, and so forth – but 20 percent is used for residential purposes, from scattered-site single-family homes to fairly dense apartments. Unlike its policies in the Industrial district, Arlington allows multifamily housing by special permit in most of the Business districts, and some of the apartments and townhouses located on business-zoned land came about because of this provision in the Zoning Bylaw. It seems that Arlington residents do not realize their zoning provides for a change from nonresidential to residential uses by special permit. An oft-heard complaint at public meetings and in interviews was that Arlington should stop “rezoning” commercial land for residential development, but the zoning to allow these kinds of changes in use already exists. For example, Arlington encourages single-family homes by allowing them by right in all residential and business districts, and two-family homes by right in most districts, even those ostensibly purposed for business uses.

Existing Land Uses: Business Districts

(Sources: Arlington GIS Zoning Map, FY 13 Assessor’s Database)



Many residents say **mixed-use development** should be explored along Massachusetts Avenue. Mixed use generally means retail on the first floor with residential above it. The first floor retail helps build an interesting, walkable business district, while upper story residential provides customers for the retail, and vibrant street life both day and night. Arlington’s zoning does not specifically provide for mixed-use buildings, although mixed uses occupy several historic buildings in the Industrial and Business districts.³ Past plans promote the inclusion of mixed-use buildings in the commercial centers,⁴ and comments at the public meetings for this plan indicate that many residents would like to see mixed-use development as well.

³ On this point, the Zoning Bylaw (ZBL) is ambiguous. For example, in ZBL Section 3.02, the Village Business District (B3) description provides, in part: “Multi-use development is encouraged, such as retail with office or business and residential,” yet multi-use development is not specifically listed as permitted or allowed by special permit in the Table of Use Regulations. However, in Section 5.02, Permitted Uses, the ZBL provides: “A lot or structure located in the R6, R7, B1, B2, B2A, B3, B4, B5, PUD, I, MU, and T districts may contain more than one principal use as listed in Section 5.04 ‘Table of Use Regulation.’ For the purposes of interpretation of this Bylaw, the use containing the largest floor area shall be deemed the principal use and all other uses shall be classified as accessory uses. In the case of existing commercial uses, the addition or expansion of residential use within the existing building footprint shall not require adherence to setback regulations for residential uses even if the residential use becomes the principal use of the property.”

⁴ See, for example, Larry Koff Associates, *A Vision and Action Plan for Commercial Revitalization* (July 2010).

2. Use Regulations

The Table of Use Regulations in Section 5.04 identifies a variety of land uses that are allowed by right or special permit in each zoning district. The land uses fall into the following categories:

- Residential
- Institutional and Educational
- Agricultural
- Public, Recreational and Entertainment
- Utility, Transportation and Communications
- Commercial and Storage
- Personal, Consumer and Business Services
- Eating and Drinking
- Retail
- Office Uses
- Wholesale Business and Storage
- Light Industry
- Accessory Uses

In general, Arlington's Table of Use Regulations is unusually restrictive. The vast majority of uses are allowed only by special permit (SP) from the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) or Zoning Board of Appeals. That Arlington has so many special permit options makes it nearly impossible to develop a plausible forecast of the Town's so-called buildout potential, i.e., the difference between the amount of development that exists now and that which could still be built under existing zoning.

- **Residential.** These uses include a broad range of residential building types, from single-family detached homes to various multi-family types, dormitories, assisted living facilities, and hotels. Single-family detached units are allowed in all districts except MU, I, T, and OS, and two-family dwellings are also not allowed in the same districts plus the single family districts RO and R1. Allowing single family homes and duplexes in nearly all districts is sometimes referred to as cumulative zoning, which can result in incompatible uses (e.g., single family dwellings in a central business district may not be appropriate). All other residential uses are allowed only by special permit in the other zoning districts, which is highly restrictive.
- **Institutional and Educational.** These uses include community centers and related civic uses, hospitals, schools, daycare facilities, and cemeteries and similar types of uses. All uses in this category are allowed only by special permit in each zoning district except that private schools and institutions are allowed by right in Business Districts B2 through B5. This is highly restrictive.
- **Agricultural.** Agricultural uses include a range of farming (except livestock), sale of garden and agricultural supplies, and greenhouse uses. They are allowed by right in all zoning district as is common in Massachusetts. However, various forms of urban agriculture should be considered by the Town as being appropriate in more urban settings such as the village centers and central business districts.
- **Public, Recreational, and Entertainment.** The uses include a variety of public and civic services as well as recreational uses which are allowed by right in most zoning districts. Other uses such as a post office,

private recreational business, construction yards, theaters, and outdoor amusement are allowed only by special permit and in specific districts.

- **Utility, Transportation, and Communications.** These uses include bus, rail, and freight facilities, public and private parking facilities, and telephone utilities. All uses are allowed only by special permit in a limited number of districts except overhead utility poles which are allowed in all districts.
- **Commercial and Storage.** These are auto-related sales and service businesses which are restricted by special permit only in B4, PUD and I zoning districts.
- **Personal, Consumer, and Business Services.** These uses include print shops, financial institutions, various personal services, laundry services, consumer service establishments, funeral homes, veterinary clinic. These uses are allowed by right or by special permit in selected business districts as well as the PUD and I districts. Only funeral homes are allowed in residential districts R5-R7 by special permit. There are performance standards related to size for financial institutions (more than 2,000 gross sq. ft. requires a special permit) and laundry and consumer services (more than five employees requires a special permit in some districts).
- **Eating and Drinking.** This category includes traditional restaurants, fast food establishments, drive-in establishments, and catering services which are allowed by right primarily in the business districts. There are performance standards related to the size of the restaurants requiring a special permit for those bigger than 2,000 gross sq. ft. and on lots greater than 10,000 sq. ft., which is a fairly low standard for a typical restaurant. There are no specific “drinking” establishments identified such as bars, pubs or taverns which are not permitted in Arlington. This sector has been growing rapidly over the past decade or more since Arlington started allowing beer and wine, and then liquor to be served in restaurants.
- **Retail.** Retail uses have performance standards related to size so that stores of 3,000 gross sq. ft. or more require special permits in business districts B2-B5 under the assumption that they are serving more than just the needs of “the residents of the vicinity”. This is a fairly low size threshold for local businesses that may in fact be serving a primary market of customers in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Office Uses.** This category includes professional, business, medical and technical offices allowed by right and special permit in the higher density residential districts, business districts, and MU, PUD and I districts. General office uses also have performance standards related to size requiring special permits for those 3,000 gross sq. ft. or more, which is also a fairly low threshold.
- **Wholesale Business and Storage.** These uses all require special permits and are limited in the B2A, B4, and the industrial district.
- **Light Industry.** These types of uses are mostly allowed by right in the industrial district but restricted by special permit in the B4 district. Only research and development facilities are allowed by right or special permit in high density residential, business and industrial districts.
- **Accessory Uses.** This category includes a diverse range of uses from private garages, home occupations, accessory dwellings, nursery schools, auxiliary retail, and storage. They are allowed by right and special permit in a broad range of zoning districts, as is appropriate.
- **Mixed Uses.** Mixed-use development is available on a limited basis in Arlington. The only Mixed Use district in town is located on the former Symmes property. (See also, footnote 3.)

3. Regulating Density and Design

Arlington has adopted a fairly prescriptive, traditional approach to regulating the amount of development that can occur on a lot (or adjoining lots in common ownership). The Town’s basic dimensional requirements cover several pages in the Zoning Bylaw, including some twenty footnotes that either explain or provide exceptions (or both) to

the Table of Dimensional and Density Regulations. In addition to minimum lot area requirements, Arlington regulates **floor area ratios**, lot coverage, front, side, and rear yards, building height, parking requirements and minimum open space. In most districts, the maximum building height is 35 feet and 2 ½ stories – traditional height limits for single-family and two-family homes but challenging for commercial buildings – yet apartment buildings in some of the business-zoned areas can be as tall as 60 or 75 feet, and possibly higher with an Environmental Design Review (EDR) special permit from the ARB (Section 11.06 of the bylaw).⁵ The Zoning Bylaw lacks requirements such as building placement on a lot and building orientation, or tools that could help to regulate form in a coherent way, and in a way that comports with Arlington’s historic development patterns. Due to the prevalence of one-parcel districts along Massachusetts Avenue, the Town essentially requires variable building setbacks from lot to lot, though most of these properties have some zoning protection for pre-existing conditions. Still, a project involving parcel assembly and new construction might be in more than one zoning district and have to contend with varying zoning requirements. It might not be harmonious with adjacent uses.

a) Residential Districts

- **Lot Requirements.** The minimum lot size for residential uses ranges from 5,000 to 9,000 square feet and appears to be consistent with the prevailing development patterns in the various neighborhoods and underlying zoning districts. Large lot sizes are required for multi-family buildings, as expected. The Minimum Frontage requirements are also generally consistent with prevailing development patterns in the neighborhoods and underlying zoning districts. One exception is that Town House structures require 20,000 square feet (sq. ft.) and 100 feet of frontage. This is inconsistent with typical townhouses which are attached single family homes on separate lots. They typically have frontage widths of 16 to 30 feet and lot sizes as small as 2,000 square feet. The standards should be revised to clarify the number of attached townhouses that are permitted without a break (such as 9 to 12).
- **Intensity of Development.** These standards, including Maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR), Lot Coverage Maximum Percent, and Minimum Lot Area/D.U., appear to be reasonable and consistent with prevailing development patterns in the neighborhoods and underlying zoning districts. One exception is that townhouses typically have higher FARs than 0.75. These building forms should be considered separately from apartment houses and office structures in the dimensional requirements.
- **Minimum Yards.** The Front, Side, and Rear setback requirements appear to be consistent with the prevailing development patterns in the neighborhoods and underlying zoning districts.
- **Building Height Maximum.** The maximum residential height, typically 35 feet and 2½ stories in the lower intensity residential districts and 40 feet and 3 stories in the higher density districts, appear to be consistent with prevailing development patterns in the neighborhoods and commercial corridors. However, if Arlington wants to provide for a broader range of housing types and mixed uses, taller buildings and a reduction in square feet per dwelling unit may be desirable in selected areas. These kinds of incentives can be augmented with an increase in the percentage of usable open space on a site with access to the surrounding area.
- **Open Space Minimum Percentage of Gross Floor Area.** Required Landscaped and Usable open space appears to be consistent with the prevailing development patterns in the neighborhoods and underlying zoning districts.

b) Business Districts

- **Lot Requirements.** The Minimum Lot Size and Minimum Frontage are reasonable and consistent with prevailing development patterns and context of the different districts. For example, no minimum lot size and 50 feet of frontage for most uses in the village centers is a context-based dimensional standard.

⁵ The Planning Department notes that since cellars do not count toward the calculation of maximum building height, they can effectively cause structures to be taller than 35 feet.

- **Intensity of Development.** The Floor Area Ratio of 1.0 to 1.4 is reasonable and can be adjusted with a special permit. Lot coverage is not applicable for the most part, which is as it should be. The minimum lot area per dwelling unit may be a deterrent to mixed use development and unnecessary in areas such as the village centers. The amount of area needed for commercial lots will always be driven by the amount of parking either required by zoning or demanded by the market. Adding artificial standards that increase lot size without a particular benefit to the inhabitants is not advised. The requirements for landscaped and usable open space are more of a factor in mixed use and can help attract residents to live in village centers.
 - **Minimum Yards.** The minimum front, side and rear yard requirements coupled with the landscaping and screening standards where necessary appear to be consistent with existing development in the various business districts. For example, in the B3 and B5 districts which cover the vast majority of land in the village centers, there are no front or side setback requirements. This allows buildings to be placed at the edge of the sidewalk, thereby enhancing the pedestrian environment by moving parking lots to the side or rear. However, this does not guarantee that buildings be close to the street. They could be set back, diminishing walkability and street activation, because the Town does not have building placement and occupation standards in areas that cater to pedestrians, e.g., Arlington Center, Arlington Heights, and East Arlington.
 - **Building Height Maximum.** The maximum height and number of stories appears to be consistent and provide incentives for new infill development in the various business districts. However, in certain areas where 2 or 3 stories are typical, a building of 5 stories and 60 feet may appear out of context and scale with the surrounding area. This type of impact could be mitigated with additional setback or building step backs, or a combination of thereof.
 - **Open Space Minimum Percentage of Gross Floor Area.** These requirements appear reasonable but may need to be more specific in certain districts. Landscaping in most business districts should be primarily focused on streetscape enhancements (street trees, planters, and hardscapes such as plazas and seating areas), shading of parking lots, and screening from abutting uses where necessary. Usable open space in the village centers is critical. This can take place on individual lots (such as dining terraces, forecourts, etc.) and collective spaces such as plazas, commons, greens, and pocket parks. These usable open spaces are a significant draw to the districts and can be publically owned or privately owned with property owners in the district contributing to their establishment and maintenance in lieu of on-site requirements.
- c) MU, PUD, I, T and OS Districts**
- Requirements for lot size, yards, building heights, intensity of development, and open space in the MU, PUD, I and T districts are fairly minimal and flexible, providing additional incentives for redevelopment. Regulations for the Open Space district (OS) are very strict, for this district includes public parks, conservation lands, and open spaces.

4. Other Requirements

Environmental Design Review (EDR). Arlington's EDR process blends an enhanced form of **site plan review** with authority for the ARB to grant special permits. EDR applies to most uses over a certain size that abut the Town's important thoroughfares—Mass. Ave., Pleasant Street, Broadway, the Minuteman Bikeway, and parts of Mystic and Medford Streets within Arlington Center. The Town requires an EDR special permit for any residential development of six or more units, and all nonresidential uses that exceed specified floor area thresholds. The ARB conducts design review as part of the EDR process under Section 11.06, but the Town has not formally adopted design guidelines for the commercial areas. It would be difficult for property owners and developers to know what the Town actually wants and to plan their projects accordingly.

Off-Street Parking. Arlington requires all land uses to provide off-street parking. In many ways, the Town's off-street parking requirements are quite thoughtful. For example, requirements such as one space per 300 sq. ft. of retail development and one space per 500 sq. ft. of office development are fairly reasonable compared with the rules

that apply in many towns. Arlington also provides for off-street parking on premises other than the lot served (i.e., off-site parking), if the permitting authority finds that it is impractical to construct the required parking on the same lot and the property owners have a long-term agreement to secure the parking. In addition, Arlington allows substitution of public parking in lieu of off-street parking if the public lot is within 1,000 feet of the proposed use. Consistent with the purpose statement of Section 8.01 (Off-Street Parking and Loading Regulations), Arlington prohibits front yard parking in residential areas in order to promote aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods, preserve property values, and avoid undue congestion. Arlington has adopted bicycle parking requirements for lots with eight or more vehicular parking spaces, too.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the Town's generally reasonable parking standards, complaints about inadequate parking abound in Arlington. Property owners and merchants say the situation in East Arlington is most troublesome and that the area's development potential is capped by the lack of parking. Meanwhile, residents complain that the two-hour parking limits in East Arlington are enforced only in the business districts, not in the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Moreover, Arlington does not have an abundance of on-street or public parking, so the seemingly flexible provisions of the Zoning Bylaw may not have much practical benefit. Even in districts where maximum height limits would not impede redevelopment, the off-street parking regulations could do just that – making parking regulations a form of dimensional and density control. It should be noted that many admired older buildings in the commercial districts do not meet parking requirements and would therefore be forbidden today. Parking supply management is not a land use issue per se, but it has an undeniable impact on the public's receptivity to more intensive development – which in turn has an impact on a special permit granting authority's approach to development review and permitting.

5. Nonconforming Uses and Structures

Arlington's zoning makes a remarkably clear statement about **nonconforming uses and structures**: they cannot be extended (increased). While the Town gives the Board of Appeals some latitude to approve a change of one nonconforming use to another nonconforming use that is reasonably similar, the overall message of the Zoning Bylaw is that nonconformities should be eliminated over time. Still, according to the Planning Department, the Town has given "wide latitude" to nonconforming structures, sometimes granting them greater expansion than conforming structures.

Under both state law and the Town's zoning, the standards for expanding or altering nonconforming single-family and two-family homes are less demanding than for other land uses. Single-family and two-family homes may be altered and extended if a proposed project does not create new nonconformities and the Board of Appeals finds that the project will not be more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing condition. (Substantial changes to nonconforming structures may also trigger Arlington's demolition delay bylaw.)

Arlington's zoning does not allow use variances.

6. Potential Conflicts with State Law

Arlington's present zoning is sometimes inconsistent with the State Zoning Act Chapter 40A and case law. For example, the town requires a special permit for churches and other religious uses, day care and kindergarten programs, and public and private non-profit schools, yet Chapter 40A specifically exempts these uses from local control, other than "reasonable" dimensional regulations. Libraries, which usually qualify as an educational use, also require a special permit in Arlington. Ironically, non-exempt schools such as trade schools conducted as a private business are allowed as of right in Arlington's business districts, yet public and non-profit schools require a special permit. "Rehabilitation residence," which Arlington defines as a "group residence" licensed or operated by the state, also requires a special permit, but Chapter 40A forbids imposing special permit requirements on housing for people with disabilities.

In addition, the Town's approach to regulating farms does not square with state law, which specifically protects farming in all of its varieties (including agriculture, horticulture, and permaculture) on five or more acres of land. As a practical matter, Arlington's compliance or lack thereof with the state's agricultural protections may be a moot

point because the Town does not have five-acre parcels in agricultural use. Nevertheless, the bylaw's attempt to block livestock or poultry even on larger parcels is incompatible with state law.

F. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A significant investment in time and resources has been dedicated toward eliciting ideas from Arlington residents about what the future holds for their community. Over sixty stakeholder interviews and a number of major public meetings helped the consulting team learn about Arlington's wants and needs. Many people spoke of Arlington's high quality of life, picturesque open spaces, excellent schools, and civic engagement. Comments were also made about the desire to keep things as they are and resist change. In short, most residents treasure Arlington and its many assets.

Concerns about Change. Whether in Arlington or most any other town, people like to keep things "as is," yet change will continue to occur. Many people interviewed during the early stages of developing this master plan had lots to say when asked what had changed in Arlington during their time here. Future changes will come either in a way that is directed and achieves the goals citizens have carefully cultivated, or in a reactionary way, emerging haphazardly as developers capitalize on opportunities as they occur in a piecemeal fashion.

In public meetings for this Master Plan, residents said they want to maintain Arlington's historic character, and curb – or at least exercise greater control over – new development. Residents seem concerned that additional development will be out of scale or character with the qualities they value in their community. One purpose of a master plan is to identify and strive to preserve the community character that residents cherish. Another purpose is to identify areas that might benefit from reinvestment, and to enable the community to take an active role in encouraging redevelopment in strategic areas to meet community needs. When development is directed toward underutilized sites, these sites can be put to greater use, while also lessening development pressures elsewhere.

Development and Sustainability. There is a general sentiment among residents of Arlington that the town is already built out. However, a closer urban design examination reveals that Arlington has considerable potential for change. In some areas, redevelopment could enhance characteristics the community cherishes while at the same time contribute to a tax base that needs expansion and diversification. Existing development needs ways to evolve when it become unmarketable or obsolete for its original intended use, e.g., the redevelopment of the former Symmes Hospital site. Growth does not have to occur at the expense of open space. On the contrary, creating incentives and establishing a favorable development climate for density in certain locations can offset pressures where open space and parks are in greatest need. Wherever possible, Arlington should seek to direct new development to locations with or adjacent to existing assets, near transit in order to reduce auto dependency, and near existing services and infrastructure.

Mill Brook. The revitalization of former industrial sites along the Mill Brook will have a significant and ongoing economic impact on the town. This area and the legacy it represents can provide the building blocks for new economic development in Arlington. By focusing attention and resources on this corridor, Arlington would be directing its resources to areas with the greatest need and potential. Resuscitating some of the large sites and underutilized buildings in this area should be a high priority if Arlington seeks to preserve the existing character of other districts. In addition, Arlington has a strong trail network that in many places abuts the Mill Brook. Properties that are currently oriented away from the Mill Brook could be compelled to change their orientation and recognize both the brook and the Minuteman Bikeway as assets. The ability to craft and implement a successful redevelopment program for this underutilized area depends partly on the desirability of Arlington as a business location, the economics of the individual properties, and on the Town's ability to foster incremental changes.

Massachusetts Avenue. While market demands and individual development decisions will continue to occur on a town-wide scale, the geography most advantageous for redevelopment is that which is proximate to the primary

commercial corridor, Massachusetts Avenue. Arlington Heights, Arlington Center, and Capitol Square in East Arlington each benefit from their relationship to the town's primary transit corridor, but each one maintains its own identity and characteristics. Arlington's commercial areas are made up of distinct sub-districts. For example, Arlington Heights has one of the last remaining industrial areas. It is also bounded by two major arteries, Park Avenue and Lowell Street. As the Minuteman Bikeway continues to emerge as a viable commuting and recreational corridor between Massachusetts Avenue and Summer Street, additional development pressures will place greater burdens on this underutilized swath of land. Arlington Center lies at the confluence of the town's commerce and civic uses. It is the undeniable center of town. How can it grow in ways that do not burden an already congested roadway network during the peak travel periods? East Arlington's Capitol Square area continues to build a reputation for new restaurants and shops. In what ways can this area grow and become more of a destination?

Though it is outside the scope of a town-wide master plan to "design" individual buildings, there are fundamental design principles that can mitigate the effects of increased height or greater lot coverage on adjoining properties. Density is not a bad word, and to a large degree the alignment, form, and massing of a project can make the difference between a development that ignores its context and one that contributes to the character of the town. Arlington, like any town, needs to evolve and grow in order to thrive in the 21st century. Development studies conducted for later phases of the master plan will illuminate the inherent advantages of redevelopment along the Massachusetts Avenue and Mill Brook corridors and demonstrate ways for Arlington to grow that are sustainable and enhance the qualities of the place.

1. Arlington's Village Centers

Arlington is a linear community traditionally centered on Massachusetts Avenue, which is anchored by three business districts - Arlington Heights, Arlington Center, and East Arlington. The 1975 Arlington Center and Mill Brook Valley Plan recommended keeping strong commercial uses on the corridor. In 2009, Arlington retained Larry Koff & Associates to address concerns raised by residents, business owners, and town officials about the existing and future vitality of these three primary commercial nodes. Koff & Associates built on ICON Architecture's 1994 ABC Study that supported creation of a "string of three villages along the Mass Ave. boulevard." In their 2010 plan, *A Vision and Action Plan for Commercial Area Redevelopment*, Koff & Associates identify three primary findings and outline methods for addressing them in Arlington's commercial districts:

- Arlington Center should be the focus of a comprehensive revitalization initiative
- A range of actions should take place in each of the districts involving physical improvements, revised regulations, enhanced tenant mix, and organization support.
- Public/private partnership is necessary to be successful in the revitalization process.

The following evaluation and recommendations for Arlington's village centers incorporates and reinforces the Koff plan.⁶

a) Arlington Heights

General Context and Character. This neighborhood business district is centered on the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Park Avenue. Also located in close proximity are the Mill Brook and the Minuteman Bikeway. The Heights provides a mix of retail shops, personal and professional services, and restaurants primarily supporting the needs of surrounding neighborhoods, but also including some "destination" retail that serves a broader customer base. In terms of public and civic amenities, the Minuteman Bikeway crosses the district on Park Avenue north of the intersection. The Post Office is located on Massachusetts Avenue, and there are a number of religious institutions in the area. The Locke School Condominiums and playground are located in this area, and the Mt Gilboa conservation area and Hurd Field are a few blocks away. The Mill Brook also bisects the district and provides future opportunities for passive recreation and attractive redevelopment.

⁶ For graphics that accompany this section, see Appendix 1.

Generally, Arlington Heights is in the best physical condition of the three village centers. Streetscape enhancements coupled with façade and sign upgrades have improved the aesthetic qualities and vibrancy of the district. The local businesses are also well organized and involved in promotional activities including their own website (Shopintheheights.com).

The Gold's Gym site is located in Arlington Heights on Park Avenue, with access from Park Avenue, and frontage on Lowell Street, and bordering the Minuteman Bikeway. It is bisected by the Mill Brook. Higher density mixed uses in this location could increase the draw to the Arlington Heights commercial center, add new customers to the trade area, expand housing options to local residents, provide new business needed and desired by area residents, enhance access to the Minuteman Bikeway and Mill Brook, and create a positive transition between the business districts and neighborhoods to the north. A project of this type and form would require rezoning to allow for a mixed use development in this location.

Needs:

- Retain and recruit desired business mix to support local needs and draw new customers.
- Revise regulations to support desired and appropriate building placement, form, scale, density and mix of uses, particularly on the Gold's Gym and Arlington Coal & Lumber properties. Modify zoning bylaws to promote mixed-use development in the Heights business district.
- Continue to make parking enhancements, including parking management. Explore possibilities for the Town to lease private property along Massachusetts Avenue for public parking spaces.
- Make necessary physical improvements to maintain the district's appearance and physical character (target deteriorated buildings, street furniture, sites, and public realm).
- Encourage storefront façade upgrades and sign enhancements where needed.
- Adjust streetscape where needed to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety, and walkability.
- Expand business involvement in the local merchants' association.
- Keep the Arlington Heights business directory updated, and possibly replace slat signs with a map graphic that can be easily updated by the Town.
- Revise regulations to support mixed use development which typically includes first floor retail and upper story residential that can support local businesses.

b) East Arlington

General Context and Character. East Arlington is a thriving business district, entertainment destination, and center for creative arts and crafts. Capitol Square is the focal point of the district, centered on the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Lake Street, and it includes the surrounding blocks along Mass Ave between Oxford Street and Orvis Road to the west and Melrose Street to the east. The district is anchored by the Capitol Theater, which has attracted other complementary businesses including a series of arts and crafts boutiques, and eating and drinking establishments. Its proximity to the Minuteman Bikeway and Alewife MBTA station are important assets. While East Arlington is a town-wide and visitor destination, it has a number of personal and professional services, religious institutions, and the Fox Library, all providing for the regular needs of surrounding neighborhoods. Nearby public and civic amenities include the Crosby School and playground on Winter Street, and Hardy School and playground on Lake Street and the Minuteman Bikeway..

The East Arlington Massachusetts Avenue Rebuild Project will upgrade the corridor between the Cambridge city line and Pond Lane, and include improvements in the East Arlington Business District to revitalize the streetscape

and enhance mobility and safety for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists with new bicycle lanes and pedestrian crossings.

One of the main issues in East Arlington is the amount, distribution and use of parking in and around Capitol Square. It is constrained by the lack of a publicly owned parking lot within the Center. Parking strategies are evolving through a cooperative initiative involving the Town, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), and local business owners to consider the following:

- Facilitate shared-parking agreements between property owners to maximize the supply of short-term parking spaces most convenient to customers.
- Collaborate with local businesses, property owners, and residents to assess the need for changes to parking management to improve parking turnover and provide revenue for parking improvements and revitalization in the district.

East Arlington Village Center will continue to grow as a local and regional destination for food, art, and entertainment

Needs:

- Address parking needs in the district by considering shared parking, a permit program, new facilities, adjusted time limits, consistent enforcement, and metered parking.
- Include further enhancements that promote street life and walkability to the East Arlington Massachusetts Avenue Rebuild Project
- Facilitate building façade and sign enhancements including restorations, window signs and treatments, blade signs, sandwich board signs, lighting, and other enhancements.
- Revise regulations to support mixed use development with first floor retail and upper story residential that supports local businesses.

c) Arlington Center

General Context and Character. Arlington Center is the “downtown” and historic center of the town. Its axis is on the Massachusetts Avenue intersection with Mystic Street/Pleasant Street. Arlington Center includes two sub-districts east and west of this intersection: Arlington Center East (ACE) and Arlington Center West (ACW). ACE includes the area centered on Massachusetts Avenue between Mystic Street and Franklin Street. Within the ACE sub-district, there are six focus areas:

- Jefferson-Cutter House and Park
- Russell Common/Mystic Street Corridor
- Massachusetts Avenue Corridor Core Area
- Medford Street Corridor
- Broadway Plaza (at confluence of Mass. Ave., Broadway and Medford Street)
- Monument Square (the triangle of land between Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway and Franklin Street)

The Arlington Center West (ACW) sub-district is centered on Massachusetts Avenue between Pleasant Street and Academy Street. This is the historic and civic core. It includes Arlington Town Hall, the Robbins Library, the

Central School containing the Senior Center, the main Post Office, the Whittemore-Robbins House, and several social and religious institutions.

Arlington Center includes several public open spaces such as the Winfield-Robbins Memorial Garden (between the library and Town Hall), Whittemore Robbins House Park and Old Burying Ground (both off Peg Spengler Way), Whittemore Park and Jefferson Cutter House (at the corner of Mystic Street), Uncle Sam Park (at the northwest corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Mystic Street) and Broadway Plaza. The district is also bisected by the Minuteman Bikeway. Many formal and informal community activities are held on these grounds throughout the year. Other nearby public and institutional facilities include several active churches, the Central Fire Station, Jason Russell House, Spy Pond recreational fields and Spy Pond Park, Arlington High School, and Arlington Catholic High School.

Needs. Arlington Center needs improvements to walkability, connectivity, and access between and within the Arlington Center sub-districts. This includes a more uniform streetscape across the district that ties it together and supports business activity, enhances public amenities and opportunities for civic gatherings, and is friendly and intuitive for different modes of travel (vehicles, bus transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists). There are other needs as well:

- Enhance and maintain the district's appearance and physical character with physical improvements and renovations to deteriorated sites, buildings, street furniture and rights of way.
- Attention should be focused on rebuilding Broadway Plaza to make it more inviting, attractive and useful to shoppers, pedestrians, diners and other users.
- Revise regulations to support desired and appropriate building placement, form, scale, density and mix of uses.
- Address parking needs in the district including shared parking, on-street parking additions, new facilities, adjusted time limits, better management of existing parking supply, and consistent enforcement. Critically examine options for building structured parking on the Russell Common parking site.
- Make walkability and street activation enhancements such as sidewalk areas for outdoor dining and entertainment, gateway treatments and wayfinding signage.
- Encourage storefront façade and sign enhancements where needed, window signs and treatments, blade signs, lighting, and other enhancements.
- Facilitate building façade restorations where needed.,
- Revise regulations to support mixed use development with first floor retail and upper story residential to supports local businesses.

d) Traditional Settlement Patterns and Design Characteristics

Traditional village centers and neighborhoods, whether established and historic, or new and emerging, often have common settlement and design characteristics as identified below:

- Tight Settlement Patterns.
- Building Functional and Architectural Compatibility.
- Moderate Block Size with lengths and widths that are at comfortable pedestrian scale.
- Street Wall/Street Enclosure (the ratio of building height to street width) that provides a comfortable pedestrian environment.

- Strong Terminal Vistas.

Arlington is fortunate to have these elements already in place in many areas. These design indicators should be considered baseline criteria for revitalization initiatives in the village centers, and other commercial areas along Arlington's primary corridors including Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway, and Summer Street.

Traditional Settlement Patterns. Tight settlement patterns provide good walkability and support diverse retail in traditional village and neighborhood centers where pedestrians have an opportunity to view more storefronts in a shorter distance. Tight settlements can generally be determined by key building placement and dimensions such as:

- Zero or short building setbacks;
- High frontage occupation by the primary buildings;
- Narrow frontages and storefront widths; and
- High ratios of building coverage to land area and floor area ratios (density indicators).

Arlington Center, East Arlington and Arlington Heights all share these traditional settlement patterns which provide an urban form that supports walkability. Arlington Center in particular illustrates the traditional patterns with the orderly row of commercial, institutional and mixed use buildings lining the sidewalk along Massachusetts Avenue with intermittent public open spaces. Most of the historic settlement patterns in the three village centers remain intact and should be retained. These patterns are typically different from other corridor segments along Mass. Ave. where larger and wider buildings may be pushed back from the street with parking in front.

Functional and Architectural Building Compatibility. Building compatibility can be determined by their use, placement, size, scale, height, forms, and general architectural styles. For the most part, buildings in Arlington Center, East Arlington and Arlington Heights were constructed before the automobile was commonplace, and designed to be an excellent pedestrian environment which was often the primary mode of transportation. Residences, businesses and workplaces were meant to be accessible on a pedestrian scale, and the architecture supported both density and mixed use. The majority of buildings in the three village center core areas are one to three stories. This is somewhat shorter than commercial districts in Cambridge and Somerville, likely because of the more linear development pattern created by the streetcar and being in the rural fringe at a time of significant growth. Many buildings are partitioned into shop fronts of 20 to 40 feet facing Massachusetts Avenue. These buildings are typically placed along front lot line at the sidewalk edge. Most buildings have high ground floor plates allowing for taller shop front facades and windows. Tall windows and transoms allowed natural light to reach the back of the store providing energy efficiency.

Block Size. Moderate block size is an important factor in creating walkable streets and a comfortable pedestrian environment. In a traditional village center, an ideal block width is about 250 feet and a maximum of 600 feet. (Traditional neighborhoods can have longer blocks). If blocks are too long (greater distances between intersections), vehicle travel speeds tend to increase which can diminish the pedestrian environment. Shorter blocks break up the building spaces and provide depths to the business district, which may improve access to parking and interest to the pedestrian. The additional street frontage can also create new business development opportunities. Arlington Center, East Arlington and Arlington Heights all have short blocks, typically 250 to 350 feet between intersecting streets. However, because the Town witnessed significant growth along Mass. Ave with the addition of the streetcar, the commercial development is more linear in form than most communities and the depth of the three village centers is limited to one block by the well established residential neighborhoods that abut the districts.

Street Wall and Enclosure. This feature is the ratio of building height to the width between buildings (typically includes the street, sidewalk, and front yards of buildings). Street enclosure contributes to a comfortable pedestrian environment. In a traditional village center, good street enclosure ratios would generally be around 1:2. If the ratio is too low, the buildings across the street feel distant and disconnected. If the ratio is too high the buildings may

appear too large creating a canyon effect along the street and shadowing during long stretches of the day. As street enclosure is an important walkability indicator, it was measured in several locations along Mass. Ave. in Arlington Center, East Arlington and Arlington Heights as illustrated in the figures below. Where street enclosure is less than desirable, there may be opportunities for infill development to build up the street wall. If this is not possible, than various streetscape enhancements can help improve the pedestrian environment. These principles apply to established as well as emerging centers as well as targeted redevelopment sites where improved walkability is a design objective.

Transitions. Transitions or “Like Facing Like” refers to the way different building types are situated on a street. Ideally, the same building types should be across the street from each other. In many places including Arlington with conventional zoning regulations, blocks are built so that the same or similar building types are built along the same side of the street with different building types located across the street. For example, Arlington Center has Village Business District (B3) on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue facing a Central Business District (B5) on the south side of street, east of Mystic Avenue; and a Central Business District (B5) and Village Business District (B3) on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue are facing a Single Family Residential District (R1) on the south side, west of Pleasant Street. This checkerboard zoning pattern is even more prevalent on other segments of Massachusetts Avenue., as well as Broadway and Summer Street. This approach can be unpredictable, generate incompatible uses, impact access and walkability, and potentially result in lower property values. As an alternative, similar building types should be facing each other because this arrangement protects the character of the streetscape by ensuring that buildings with similar densities are facing one another. The official zoning district map should be examined to identify where potential conflicts exist now and may occur in the future. Opportunities to create more compatible “transitions” should be considered and zoning districts amended accordingly.

Vertical and Horizontal Mixed Uses. Mixed use (commercial and residential) in the three village centers is generally limited. Possible reasons for this may be the size of the buildings and current zoning restrictions. Most buildings in the core areas are one or two stories in height, and this limits opportunities for upper-floor residential. Additionally, the current zoning regulations do not favor vertical mixed use. On the other hand, there is a fair amount of horizontal mixed use activity in and around the village centers. Larger multifamily structures (apartments and condominiums) are typically at the edge of the core commercial areas. While vertical mixed use with residential over commercial can be highly beneficial to a village center (residential use provides built-in customers and security for the businesses), horizontal mixed use can be detrimental if improperly located. For example, if creating clusters of desirable and complementary businesses is a goal for Arlington Center, East Arlington, and Arlington Heights, placing a large residential building on the same frontage with commercial uses can create a void and disrupt vibrancy of the district. Requiring retail uses on the first floor of buildings in the three village centers, and emerging commercial centers will help strengthen the business districts’ walkability and other design objectives.

e) Public/Private Cooperation and Commitment to the Village Centers

Good public/private cooperation is based on an understanding of the interdependence of buildings and the “public realm” in traditional village centers, e.g., streets, sidewalks, parking, and open space. Creating a good pedestrian environment requires attention to civic gathering spaces, sidewalks, and street activation which in turn encourages private investment and a mix of business types.

Public/private cooperation in the revitalization of Arlington’s village centers needs to involve a broad range of municipal departments, boards and committees. On the private side, property owners, residents, business owners, potential developers, and local business organizations such as the Friends of Broadway Plaza, Capitol Square Business Association, and the Arlington Heights merchants group need to be committed to the revitalization process and to working with the Town toward common goals.

f) Form-Based Codes in the Village Centers

Arlington should consider revising the Zoning Bylaw by embracing a form-based approach to development in the commercial centers. Form-based codes work to consolidate, simplify, and update zoning requirements to reflect a

community's desires. A form-based code shifts the emphasis from land use to building form, placement, and character as the primary organizing principles.

In conventional zoning like Arlington's existing bylaw, a community is divided into pods of segregated land uses, i.e. zoning districts. The allowed uses fall into broad categories--- commercial, residential, institutional, agricultural and industrial. Most uses in the districts are compatible and they have traditionally co-existed for a long time. Conventional zoning focuses on the control of development intensity by simple (and often arbitrary) numerical parameters such as minimum lot size and coverage, maximum building height, minimum setbacks and frontages, and maximum floor area ratios (FAR). These dimensional standards can be inconsistent with the desired vision for the future. Instead of regulating minimum building setbacks, form-based codes identify where the front of a building should be placed (i.e. build-to-lines, build-to-zones, and frontage occupation standards). Instead of FAR, form-based code defines appropriate scale and massing of buildings. Much of this information is conveyed through the use of simple and clear diagrams of other graphic illustrations.

Among planners, conventional zoning is now considered largely outdated. The separation and spreading out of low-density uses that is the result of current zoning standards is a source of many traffic, social, and environmental problems facing communities today. Form-based codes focus on the form of a place, including size, massing, placement on the lot in relation to the sidewalk and other public space and surrounding areas. Form-based codes also consider the scale of blocks in order to create walkable places.

The requirements in form-based codes are presented in both written and diagram formats, keyed generally to the village center or corridor conceptual design plans, and specifically to a regulating plan (a revised zoning map) which designates the appropriate building types, uses, scale and placement, streets types, and civic spaces. Essentially form-based code integrates and creates strong relationships between building envelopes and the public realm. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general policy statements, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. The potential benefits of adopting form-based codes in Arlington's village centers and in designated mixed use activity centers include the following:

- Better predictability in the physical outcome of development.
- Higher quality and context-based development as a result of well-defined development standards.
- Stronger connections between private development plans and public infrastructure and facilities.

A form-based code tells developers what to do instead of telling them what *not* to do. This is a subtle but important difference, both psychologically and practically. If a developer willing to invest in Arlington knows what the community wants and submits plans that are in keeping with the intent of the vision, they should be able to more quickly move through the approvals process, saving time and money.

Most importantly, form-based codes focus on allowing buildings to create places that contribute to a more sustainable, healthy, and safe public realm. Form-based codes support desired development that works better for people and the environment. They make it easier to transform the built environment over time as the market calls for new development.

2. Unique Mixed Use Activity Centers

Arlington has opportunities to develop unique mixed use activity centers in strategic locations along its primary corridors, including Mass. Ave., Broadway, and Summer Street. The presence of activity centers should further the town's economic vitality while also promoting social interaction and community building. These evolving centers, where appropriate, could include a mix of uses and activities located close together, providing people with new options for places to live, work, shop, and participate in civic life. Centers should vary in scale, use, and intensity. They should fill voids in Arlington's hierarchy of village centers, corridors, and neighborhoods such as with new walkable neighborhood centers and commons. They should be targeted to vacant, obsolete and underutilized

properties. Potential opportunity areas could include land along the Mill Brook corridor, Broadway, the Battle Road Scenic Byway, Mirak Car Dealership and Theodore Schwamb Mill, Gold's Gym, and Schouler Court.

3. Complete Neighborhoods

Within each of Arlington's neighborhoods, consideration should be given to providing more "complete" neighborhoods that provide for a limited mix of uses and diverse housing types, close to schools, open spaces, and other activity centers. Methods may be considered such as corner stores and live-work units at designated intersections, accessory apartments, co-operative or co-housing, and others.

4. Green Urbanism

Green urbanism has been defined as the practice of creating more sustainable places through a series of adjustments to human environments and lifestyles focused on efficient land uses and consuming fewer resources. Green urbanism has many applications in Arlington to enhance both the built environment and open spaces. The following "tool box" should be considered as part of the revitalization and reinvestment process.

Urban Agriculture. Growing vegetables, fruits, herbs, and (possibly) meat for families, friends and customers in an urban environment can reinforce relationships between residents and businesses. It also can address sustainability issues such as open space conservation, self-sufficiency, improved nutrition, recreation, exercise, and saving on food expenses. Additionally, urban agriculture can provide new opportunities to put fallow lands to active use. Forms of urban agriculture that may be applicable in Arlington include: Grey water systems, community gardens, yard gardens, backyard homesteading, rooftop gardens, container gardens, edible landscapes, park gardens, and schoolyard gardens. These are all part of a growing trend in which individuals, families, and communities seek to grow or locally source as much of their own food as practical.

Green Infrastructure. An urban infrastructure network providing the techniques to address urban and climatic challenges through stormwater management, climate adaptation, less heat stress, better air quality, sustainable energy production, clean water and healthy soils, as well as the more anthropocentric functions such as increased quality of life through recreation and providing shade and shelter in and around towns and cities. Some common green urbanism applications to infrastructure include: green streets, infiltration parks, green plazas, pervious pavers and parking lots, and shade trees.

Green Buildings. "Green Buildings" refers to structures in an urban context that are environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout a building's life-cycle. Although new technologies are constantly being developed to complement current practices in creating greener structures, the common objective is that green buildings are designed to reduce the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by:

- Efficiently using energy, water, and other resources.
- Protecting occupant health and improving employee productivity.
- Reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation.

Some examples in an urban setting include green roofs, solar orientation, and natural light and ventilation.

5. Alternatives to the Special Permit

Arlington uses the special permit as a tool to control the scale and design of development, which may be necessary for large complex proposals. However, it may not be necessary for small projects and uses that are more typical in a given zoning district. An alternative to controlling nearly all uses by special permit would be to allow more uses by right with specific performance standards that address the potential impacts on surrounding land uses. Performance standards may include limits not only on business size, but on building scale and massing, placement on the lot, height, screening and landscaping buffers, parking requirements, light and noise limitations, and other particulars such as limitations on drive-thru establishments.

G. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How do we preserve the Town's historic character and also allow for new growth or redevelopment?
- Are mixing of uses desirable in predominantly residential areas, commercial areas, or both?
- Is the form that new development takes (its appearance) more important than the uses (what goes on in the buildings) of the development?
- Are there potential sites or parcels in Arlington where development or redevelopment should be encouraged?
- With an understanding that change is inevitable, can Arlington develop in a way that allows for better predictability in the physical makeup of the town?
- With an MBTA-station planned for Route 16 and Boston Ave. in Somerville, within 1 mile of Broadway in Arlington, should we encourage live/work and other mixed use redevelopment opportunities nearby, here in Arlington?
- Forty acres of undeveloped land (some of it near a Route 2 interchange) currently in country-club use are zoned large-lot residential. If these businesses were to sell land, is single-family home development the right use, or the only appropriate use?
- Poet's Corner and the Mugar property are important undeveloped areas in the Town. There are opportunities and concerns about whether these areas should be conserved or developed, and how. What are the advantages and disadvantages of change in these areas?
- Market forces combined with current zoning create a prescription to convert our business districts to residential use. Should this continue?