

Arlington Master Plan Advisory Committee

Central School, Main Room - 7:00 PM

Minutes: May 15, 2014

Approved: as amended, June 5, 2014

Members present: Charles Kalaskas, Joe Barr, Harris Band, Greg Bowe, Carol Svenson, Pam Heidell, Ann LeRoyer, Bob Radochia, Wendy Richter

Members absent: Eric Bourassa, Sheri Baron

Also present: Consultant Judi Barrett (RKG); Christine Scypinski (ARB); Joe Curro (BoS); Carol Kowalski, Laura Wiener, Ted Fields, and Joey Glushko of the Planning Dept. There were approximately 12 individuals in the audience.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Charles Kalaskas greeted attendees and introduced presenter Judi Barrett. The evening's topic was a presentation on "Open Space and Natural Resources Areas Working Paper." Judi Barrett explained that the presentation would focus on conservation land and protected lands; responding to Jane Howard's inquiry, Judi clarified the meaning of cultural resource areas in the master plan context – emphasizing that "place" rather than programmatic activities are looked at.

Ms Barrett summarized the issues facing the community regarding these properties – the lack of planning for their use and maintenance; staffing in support of the maintenance; and allocation of resources, including funds, to support the properties. Following Judi Barrett's presentation, discussion questions were addressed; following are the questions, and some of the comments heard for each:

1. Since Arlington is substantially built out, development here will continue to be dominated by demolition and renovation or rebuild activities. The waste resulting from these activities includes wood, concrete, glass, metal, roofing materials, and so forth. Should the Town do more to regulate (through disincentives) teardowns and rebuilt projects?
 - A. It was observed that the question is whether to demolish and rebuild, or to support preservation and sustainability/environmental issues; it was felt there should be incentive to "save" rather than disincentives to teardown;
 - B. Joe Curro noted that there are many Town buildings that get rebuilt, replaced, or repaired. Town could state a policy of preference for renovation over demolition in public projects.
 - C. How will we support "sustainability"? One way is to control the waste stream.
 - D. The Advisory Committee asked for Judi to provide some examples of "disincentives" that were used; Judi will research this to find examples.

2. Throughout Arlington's Master Planning process, encouragement of mixed-use development along the Massachusetts Avenue and Broadway corridors has been touted as a solution to a multitude of housing, economic development, land use and transportation needs. It can also help us to preserve natural resources by encouraging building where there is already

infrastructure, and reducing pressure to build on open and undeveloped space. Sensitively concentrating development in this area can promote Arlington's sustainability and natural resource protection by reducing automobile dependency, increasing the employment of residents in town, and encouraging the building of more compact, energy efficient structures, and discouraging development on open space. Some residents may oppose mixed-use development as encouragement of "density" and "urbanism", arguing that Arlington is a suburb, not a city. What can be done to address the concerns of this opposition?

- A. A discussant asked about alternative zoning controls, like form-based codes; Ms Scypinski responded that both form based codes and design guidelines provide a mechanism for imposing control over appearance.
- B. There was a brief explanation of the upcoming Visual Preference Survey (June 10);
- C. There was inquiry regarding LEED Design;
- D. There was a brief discussion about transfer of development rights (TDR) and its applicability to preserving a parcel such as Mugar. Judi will look into this further.
- E. It was acknowledged that there is support for mixed use development in Arlington.

3. Where do you think Arlington's best opportunities are for trying to link some of its existing, disconnected open space? What strategies can the Town pursue to link these open spaces?

- A. Support for the Mill Brook Linear Park concept
- B. Arlington Catholic Field, which blocks link to Cooke's Hollow
- C. Spy Pond Park to the Boys' and Girls' Club is a narrow road with no sidewalk, and lots of pedestrian traffic
- D. Shoreline access to and around Spy Pond and Mystic Lakes
- E. Sidewalks can provide connections as well as open space. An example would be an interesting public realm that connects Arlington Center to the Bikepath.
- F. Utility rights of way can provide connections for wildlife.

4. Some urban communities in the United States are focusing their sustainability planning on promoting local sources of food. What approaches to urban agriculture would work in Arlington, and where might the potential conflicts arise?

- A. Urban forest(s) and street tree planting and maintenance
- B. Town lots such as the Crusher Lot (next to Ottoson) for community gardening
- C. Encourage green roofs and roof-top gardens – engineering, access, and content issues
- D. School location sites for gardens
- E. Lex-Farm – and impact on the Arlington Reservoir waters and land
- F. Winter Farmers' Market
- G. Regional cooperation such as Lex-Farm (Busa).
- H. Urban greenhouses – size and impact in neighborhoods
- I. Vertical greenhouses
- J. Recapture land now used for roads

5. How can the Town's residents support efforts to better maintain its trees, water bodies and passive recreation land?

- A. Friends groups
- B. Street tree program and education to maintain plantings
- C. Specify tree protection in DPW contracts
- D. Consider reducing roadway surface treatments in winter

6. The Town has very little privately owned open space. Should the town be planning for and/or protecting the Mugar parcel (17 acres along Route 2 in East Arlington) and Poet's Corner (13 acres owned by the Archdiocese of Boston along Route 2 at the western boundary of Arlington), and other undeveloped private land?

- A. How should these Open Space areas which are zoned R1 (residential, single family) be rezoned to accommodate tax and possibly future development potential?

A participant noted the strong preference among members of the Finance Committee and other members of the community that we increase our taxable commercial property to diversify the tax base. She commented that we should not be rezoning to preclude development.

Others noted that Mugar is needed for flood control. Can we explore transfer of development rights from Mugar to another site and if so, where? Another idea mentioned was concentrated development on a portion of the site, with some preservation of open space.

Arlington has two golf courses on its borders; Carol Kowalski explained that they are zoned residential, but both have Chapter 61B reduced tax status as recreation use. The acreage is considered buildable land for calculating affordable housing requirements. They could be developed by right as market rate single family homes. Judi noted that private land cannot be rezoned for an uneconomic use such as open space. "If you want to control it you have to buy it."

A participant who is a regular attendee at the MPAC presentations brought attention to the small audience that she has noted attend these Master Plan presentations and discussions. She recognized the importance of a broad participation in these efforts, and asked how she, the Advisory Committee and others, could bring more input to the topics that have been presented. It was recognized that there have been many modes used to try to reach out and draw the public into the discussions and planning efforts: public forums and presentations, on-line participation, cable access, on-line surveys, etc.

The presentation and discussion ended at 9:15 pm. The Advisory Committee met to discuss other business. Minutes of April 10 and April 17 were accepted as presented; minutes of May 5 were accepted as amended.

The MPAC presented a status report to Town Meeting on May 5; there was a “positive reception” of the material and the accomplishments of the Committee.

On June 5, the Committee will meet to review a rough draft of the Visual Preference Survey; presentation of the Survey will be on June 10. On June 19 we will begin review of the amended Working Papers that the “element” groups have been working on. The July and August schedules for the committee are somewhat in flux, but there will be a meeting on July 10, and the Zoning Diagnostic report will be presented on July 22. The Committee was reminded that Town Day is Sept. 13; we will meet in August to discuss material for the booth.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 PM.

Minutes submitted by Joey Glushko.