

Residential Study Group (RSG)
January 3, 2019
8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Arlington Town Hall, First Floor Conference Room
MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Mike Ciampa, Bill Copithorne, Wynelle Evens, Pat Hanlon, Kelly Lynema, Steve McKenna, Pasi Miettinen, Kathy O'Rourke, Liz Pyle, Jenny Raitt, Erin Zwirko

Guests: Steve Makowka, Wendy Ritcher, Don Seltzer, Jo Anne Preston

After a round of introductions, Kelly provided an update on the response to the items attached to the 2018 warrant article as identified by the Select Board. The impact on the character of neighborhoods and historic preservation efforts is discussed in the draft report reviewed by the Study Group in December. Information on sellers, including an analysis of the demographic and economic profile of such individuals is not readily available data, however, a review of the demographic changes over time can be provided. Affordability of housing is discussed in the draft report reviewed by the Study Group in December. The persons employed in the building trades are not tracked in a publically available database, but information on employment can be compiled from Census information. Kelly interviewed the Tree Warden and staff in the Engineering Division to report on the natural environment, and found that both are working to continue to implement existing bylaws and requirements related to tree preservation and stormwater control, respectively. A review of local regulatory and licensing bodies is provided in the draft report reviewed by the Study Group in December. The survey to be issued will assist in assessing localized disruption and health impacts during demolition and construction.

There was some discussion on the best way to present the information collected to the wider community. There was also discussion on whether the report is really the Residential Study Group's report or the Planning Department's report. Pat indicated that there needs to be consensus on the report, and perhaps if that it too time consuming or unattainable, the Study Group could prepare an Executive Summary to the report. There was no decision made by the Study Group.

Wynelle and Liz pointed out that the discussion about affordability is not complete. Liz indicated that there has been a loss of income diversity in the community. She suggested highlighting the middle that has been lost. Bill pointed out that 47 homes in the last year were sold for under \$700,000, while 53 homes were sold for over \$1 million. Steve McKenna indicated that what is affordable cannot be dictated. Liz stated that less costly homes are being purchased and torn down, and there should be policy that addresses how to prevent this occurrence. Steve McKenna stated that it is market driven, and there are people willing to pay what is necessary to purchase a home in Arlington.

Pat suggested that there needs to be clearer discussion of what is a substantial renovation versus a demolition. Pasi did not think that that is so important, as the outward appearance may not be so different.

Jenny indicated that there could be discussion of the “missing middle” added to the report. She also stated that demolition delay is a historic preservation tool, which should not be misconstrued to be a tool to protect affordability in a community. Pat suggested looking at demographics, as there may not even be a “middle” in Arlington. A subcommittee of Pat, Steve McKenna, and Wynelle was formed to review data with the staff.

Jo Anne indicated that the Tree Committee had identified new development as directly attributing to the loss of trees in the community. She was surprised about the conclusions drawn and suggested that the Select Board had indicated a different direction.

Liz asked about demolition delay, and whether the Study Group should be making recommendations to the Historical Commission. Erin indicated that there was some discussion about this at the November meeting. Specifically, Erin indicated that the data review identified areas around Sunnyside Avenue as being more affordable than other parts of the community and also having an interesting architectural typology which might suggest a need for preservation. Additionally, Erin indicated that the average built date for structures in the R0, R1, and R2 districts are identified in the report, which might be the start of a recommendation to the Historical Commission as well. However, while the Historical Commission chair is invited to the Study Group meetings and is provided the Study Group materials, the Historical Commission needs to decide whether there needs to be a change to the threshold of demolition delay. Steve Makowka expressed the same, and wondered if there was an interim measure that the Study Group could suggest to the Historical Commission.

Moving on to the draft warrant article regarding a request for an appropriation to hire a consultant to develop residential design guidelines, Pat suggested that this might be one measure to move forward while further discussion on demolition delay continues. Wynelle suggested that there should be a neighborhood representative on a design review board. Wynelle also stated that there could be potential warrant articles to address regulatory changes. She indicated that there could be improvements to the Good Neighbor Agreement such as including tree removal as a trigger and adjusting the driveway slope requirements in the bylaw to close a loophole.

There was some discussion about whether there should just be an appropriation for funds or if there should be a second article to establish the design review board. Jenny suggested that the appropriation for funds should indicate that the funds would be used to hire a consultant to develop design guidelines through a public process but also assess the organization for the best way to incorporate design guidelines into the organization. There was agreement on that recommendation.

Wynelle also asked about requiring a special permit for demolition. Mike indicated that the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) has been busy this year.

Jenny summarized the action items: Pat, Steve McKenna, and Wynelle would work with the staff on the “missing middle” discussion, the warrant article would be tweaked based on the report, and recommended that each member consider how to issue the report.

On the meeting summary from December 13, 2018, Bill Copithorne made a motion to accept the meeting summaries. Wynelle seconded. All those in attendance voted in favor of approval.

The next meeting will be held on January 18 at 8:30 AM.

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