

Master Plan Implementation Committee

Report to Annual Town Meeting

April 26, 2021

The Arlington Master Plan, “Your Town Your Future,” was adopted by approximately 75% of Town Meeting members in 2015. The Town then appointed a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) which meets quarterly to oversee and ensure plan implementation. MPIC reports are organized to follow the topic areas of the Master Plan: Land Use, Traffic and Circulation, Housing and Residential Development, Economic Development, Historic and Cultural Resource Areas, Natural Resources and Open Space, and Public Facilities and Services. The following report provides highlights of accomplishments since Annual Town Meeting and the ongoing and upcoming projects.

Land Use

- **Update Industrial District zoning to reflect current needs of today’s industrial uses and markets.** Following an appropriation at Annual Town Meeting, in late 2019, through a competitive procurement process, RKG Associates and Harriman were selected to complete the Economic Analysis of the Industrial Zoning Districts. The goals of the project include positioning Arlington to attract new businesses and jobs in emerging growth industries to the Industrial Districts and creating opportunities for the Town to realize greater revenue by making strategic amendments to the Zoning Bylaw. Over the course of 2020, RKG Associates and Harriman provided a review of the market and fiscal realities of development scenarios that informed zoning recommendations and possible amendments to match the needs of today’s industrial developers and businesses and well-position Arlington in a highly competitive industrial and commercial marketplace. Article 35 includes the proposed zoning amendments developed by the Zoning Bylaw Working Group and the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

Traffic and Circulation

- **Advancement of a Sustainable Transportation Plan.** While the Master Plan provides goals and strategies for transportation planning in Town, several emerging mobility issues were not fully addressed, including technologies that are starting to change travel patterns and behaviors. As such, the Sustainable Transportation Plan Advisory Committee and DPCD undertook the completion of a Sustainable Transportation, known as Connect Arlington, during 2020. The completion of the plan is anticipated this Spring 2021, and components of the plan will address many actions in the Master Plan Implementation Plan. Connect Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan to ensure that all Arlingtonians, workers, business owners and visitors are provided a safe, reliable, multimodal transportation network that meets the needs of all people of all ages and abilities. Related to this project is Minuteman Bikeway Visioning Project, funded by the Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee. This project will focus on developing a shared community vision and implementation plan for the Minuteman Bikeway would simultaneously address users’ expressed concerns about pressing issues while providing an opportunity for the town to be more visionary about what the future Bikeway could look and feel like and how it could function.
- **Lake Street/Minuteman Bikeway Signal.** The Lake Street/Minuteman Bikeway signal project, a key priority in Arlington’s Complete Streets Action Plan, is now substantially complete. Construction began in summer 2020 and was complete by late fall. The improvements to the intersection of Lake Street and the Minuteman Bikeway included the installation of a new vehicle/pedestrian/bicycle signal at the intersection that is coordinated with the signal at Brooks Avenue and Lake Street, which was also upgraded. The project also created a separated crossing for bicyclists and pedestrians on the Bikeway, created new gathering and sitting areas along the Bikeway near the intersection, improved sight lines for drivers and Bikeway users, new signage and pavement markings, handicap access improvements, and vegetation maintenance. This project was made possible by \$750,000 in funding approved by the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.
- **Continue to support and expand the Safe Routes to School program to encourage more biking and walking to school.** The Town received a Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Project Award to fund pedestrian safety improvements near the Stratton Elementary School.

The proposed project will provide a fully accessible walking route with safe roadway crossings for children and others walking to Stratton along Hemlock Street between Brattle Street and Dickson Avenue and Dickson Avenue between Hemlock Street and Pheasant Avenue. DPCD continues to work with MassDOT's consultant, AECOM, to guide the project through the MassDOT project development process. The Massachusetts SRTS Program is a federally-funded initiative of MassDOT. It is anticipated that this SRTS project will be funded in Fiscal Year 2024.

- **Review the extension of the regional bike share program into Arlington.** In 2020, the Town became part of the Bluebikes regional bike share system. Since Lime announced in March 2020 that its bike share system would be discontinued, the Town, through its Department of Planning and Community Development, investigated options to bring bike share back to the community to provide a sustainable first mile/last mile transportation solution. Bluebikes is the docked bike share system that operates in Boston, Cambridge, Brookline, Everett, and Somerville. Five stations were installed in East Arlington and Arlington Center in the fall of 2020, and this Spring, the stations will be reinstalled with a sixth at Broadway Plaza. The Town continues to investigate locations to continue the network through the Center and into Arlington Heights.
- **Manage parking in commercial areas.** Although during most of 2020 the Select Board did not collect parking fees in Arlington Center due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Parking Advisory Committee worked to update all parking meters to be compliant with a PayByPhone. PayByPhone is a leading global provider of mobile parking payment solutions and will be available at more than 500 spaces at surface lots, including the Railroad Lot, Russell Common Lot, and Library Lot, and on the streets in Arlington Center. With PayByPhone, visitors to the Center will have a contactless parking option. The Parking Advisory Committee works with appropriate Town staff to make parking policy recommendations based on this Study and other information and research to encourage parking turnover in the business districts. Installing meters was one such recommendation, and the introduction of a contactless system ensures that the parking experience is seamless in the current environment.
- **Adopt a plan for future sidewalk paving design treatments according to density and road geometry, consistent with the Sidewalks Plan.** The Arlington Center Sidewalk Project got underway and was completed during 2020. The project is one component of ongoing improvements to the Massachusetts Avenue corridor. It also includes the reconstruction of Broadway Plaza, which is the location of a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) project scheduled for 2021. As part of this project, the brick sidewalks in Arlington Center were removed and replaced with an accessible sidewalk paving design.
- **Pandemic-Related Activities.** DPCD's Transportation Planner, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, worked to implement shared and slow streets to provide safe social distancing space for people walking, bicycling, and rolling. Gateways, traffic calming, and signage will be key components to creating spaces that are safe and comfortable for sharing streets with drivers, serving Arlington's larger goal of creating shared street networks and supporting healthy travel as the community continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Shared and slow streets were implemented along Brooks Avenue, several side streets between Brooks Avenue and Herbert Road, and along Mary Street. This project was supported by MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Grant released to support municipalities during the pandemic.

Housing and Residential Development

- **Study and consider techniques that could address concern for neighborhood impacts of new large homes constructed in existing residential neighborhoods.** In 2019, DPCD staff prepared a study of the impact of the demolition of structures and the compatibility of the new structures in established neighborhoods. One of the key recommendations of this report was to develop residential design guidelines. The Design Review Working Group (DRWG) and DPCD worked with consultant Harriman, hired in late 2019, to engage the community through virtual public workshops, surveys, and remote input opportunities in the development of the guidelines. The Residential Design Guidelines outline design recommendations based on community input and feedback, specify how these recommendations can be met, and describe a review process by which proposals for new construction and additions can be evaluated. While the guidelines are advisory in nature, they will be

considered by the Zoning Board of Appeals and staff when evaluating applications and requests for Special Permits.

- **Update to Housing Production Plan.** The existing Housing Production Plan (HPP) will expire in late 2021. The existing HPP positioned the Town to better meet local market-rate and affordable housing needs and demand, and in doing so work towards the Chapter 40B 10% statutory minimum. Towards that end, the HPP consists of three major components: a housing needs and demand assessment; an analysis of development constraints, capacity, and opportunities in town; and an implementation plan consisting of housing goals and strategies to achieve them. The Housing Plan Implementation Committee is charged with implementing the actions identified in the Housing Production Plan. In early 2021, the Town hired Barrett Planning Group, LLC, to complete the update of the HPP during the upcoming calendar year, which will have a five-year time horizon.

Economic Development

- **Pandemic-Related Activities.** DPCD's Economic Development Coordinator was called on to provide dedicated support to the Arlington business community during the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic impacts. The Economic Development Coordinator established the Arlington Economic Development Recovery Task Force, which includes representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Select Board, the Park and Recreation Department, the Office of the Town Manager, the Arlington Redevelopment Board and the Department of Planning and Community Development. These Town officials and their boards and committees establish, create, and implement policies and regulations that will help drive and revive our town's economic recovery. The role of business owners, nonprofit leaders, property owners, banking executives, and others on the Task Force is to provide the Town with guidance to create policies and procedures in Arlington that meet real needs and address concerns of health and safety as businesses can reopen by the state. The contributions of members of this Task Force will also inform the town's longer-term economic recovery to ensure the long-term health and stability of our business districts.

In addition to relaying important information from the state government to the local business community, the Economic Development Coordinator worked with the Select Board, the Recreation Department, and the Department of Public Works to ensure that local businesses could utilize outdoor spaces to support businesses. The Select Board provided the ability for permitting to be handled administratively in an expeditious manner to allow businesses to hold classes outdoors in public spaces like parks and other recreational facilities and to allow restaurants and food establishments to utilize the sidewalk for outdoor dining.

Further, with the support of a MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces grant, three new public parklets and other public space improvements were installed in Arlington Center and Arlington Heights to enhance public and private outdoor seating, ensure pedestrian safety, and provide bicycle parking infrastructure. Converting parking spaces, small roadways, and pedestrian alleyways into safer areas to dine outdoors, walk, and travel by bicycle will assist businesses by providing additional public space for their customers' use and safer means of access to commercial centers during the pandemic. The MassDOT grant enabled the Town to purchase equipment to dramatically expand outdoor seating capacity for dining and other passive uses and will be reinstalled in spring 2021.

Finally, in partnership with the Towns of Bedford and Lexington, the Town was awarded a Local Rapid Recovery Planning (LRRP) grant by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI). The goal of the LRRP program is to give every municipality in Massachusetts the opportunity to develop plans tailored to the unique economic challenges and immediate COVID-19 impacts that have affected downtowns, town centers, and commercial areas throughout Massachusetts. To that end, Lexington has teamed up with Arlington and Bedford to see how they can leverage the traffic on the shared asset of the Minuteman Bikeway to drive more customers to their business districts as a recovery strategy from the pandemic. Arlington Heights, East Lexington, and Bedford Center will be areas of specific focus.

Historic and Cultural Resource Areas

- **Place preservation restrictions on town-owned historic properties not already protected.** In 2019, the Community-Wide Historic Preservation Survey Master Plan was completed. Acting on the recommendations in the plan, the Department of Planning and Community Development applied for CPA funding to complete a community-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey and documentation of historic municipal resources. The funding was approved by the November 2020 Special Town Meeting. The archaeological study will produce a comprehensive inventory of known archaeologically sensitive historic and cultural landscapes, including Mill Brook, industrial areas near Spy Pond, Elizabeth's Island, and town-owned recreational areas, and identify areas of high potential for further planning and preservation. This project will lay the groundwork for potential additional protections of these assets, if necessary. The documentation of historic municipal resources will inventory a variety of town-owned properties, including nine landscapes, one burial ground, and ten buildings, in order to enable the town to pursue grant funding to preserve these historic properties. A request for proposals will be released Spring 2021 and the Historic and Cultural Resources Working Group will work with the Department of Planning and Community Development on these two projects.

Natural Resources and Open Space

- **Update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.** The Open Space Committee, with assistance from the Department of Planning and Community Development, will update the Open Space and Recreation Plan, which will expire in 2022. The update will extend the lifetime of the plan for seven years through 2029. CPA funding was granted to hire a consultant to assist in the development of the plan. In 2020, Horsley Witten Group was hired. The Town of Arlington has had an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan in place since 1996. This update will be the fifth such Plan. The Open Space and Recreation Plan is a foundational document for all town planning and programs relating to parks, playgrounds, playing fields, natural resources, conservation land, sustainable development, climate resiliency, and other open space issues. Communities with an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan are eligible to apply for funding from the Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Program, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program, and other grant programs administered by the State.

Public Facilities and Services

- **Prepare a feasibility study for an updated Community Center/Senior Center.** A Feasibility Study for a Multi-Purpose Senior Center at the Central School was completed in 2017. Capital funds were used to hire an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) and designer for the renovation project in 2017 and 2018. Construction of the \$8.1 million project began in March 2020 and continued through the coronavirus pandemic with minimal delays. Completion of the Central School renovation, including the Community Center/Senior Center and Town offices, and building-wide improvements is expected during the summer of 2021.
- **Address ADA requirements.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan was completed in June 2020 utilizing Community Development Block Grant and Massachusetts Office on Disability planning grant funds. The Town hired the Institute for Human Centered Design in 2019 to survey 27 public buildings – including four public safety buildings, 12 public school facilities, two libraries, two facilities managed by the Arlington Redevelopment Board, one cemetery building, one Recreation Department facility, and five Town-owned buildings. The accessibility survey of those facilities includes all the spaces where the Town offers programs, services, and activities to members of the public. Each of the facility reports include an overview that identifies the most substantial accessibility issues and order of magnitude cost estimates for corrective action. The prioritization plan was completed with input from various Town departments as well as the Disability Commission. The Town allocated annual funding in the five-year Capital Plan to remove architectural barriers and address accessibility issues.

Respectfully submitted by the Master Plan Implementation Committee:

Michael Byrne, Inspectional Services, ex officio
Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager, ex officio
Joe Barr (Co-Chair), ARB appointee

Charles Kalaskas (Co-Chair), Select Board appointee
Ann LeRoy, Town Meeting Moderator appointee
Wendy Richter, ARB appointee

Peter Howard, Finance Committee appointee

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with staff support from Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Erin Zwirko, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development

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