

# MBTA COMMUNITIES

ZONING FOR MULTIFAMILY HOUSING IN ARLINGTON



## Community Visioning Kit for Multifamily Housing in Arlington

Welcome! Thank you for agreeing to host a community conversation for your friends and neighbors! This kit includes the basic materials you need to conduct your meeting and provide feedback to the Town. You should find the following items in the packet. If something is missing, please contact Marisa Lau, Senior Planner, [mlau@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:mlau@town.arlington.ma.us), at the Department of Planning and Community Development.

### Instructions for you, the host:

Process overview (pg. 2)

Annotated meeting agenda (pg. 3)

Final Steps: submitting your meeting materials to DPCD (pg. 4)

Sample Invitation (pg. 5) (don't forget to attach the MBTA Communities Overview pdf!)

### Materials for you to distribute at the meeting:

	Title	Number of Pages
<b>Sheet A</b>	Sign-in Sheet for Participants	1
<b>Sheet B</b>	Meeting Agenda	1
<b>Sheet D</b>	My Vision (participant worksheets)	1 double-sided page 1 map

Remember to bring enough copies of each sheet for your participants!

### Additional items you will need:

Pens/pencils

Flip chart (or other paper for taking notes), markers, and tape

Return envelope

# Instructions for Meeting Host: Process Overview

## 1. Invite

- Identify people or groups that you want to invite to your Meeting in a Box. (Plan on one facilitator for every 8-12 people in a small-group discussion).
- Send the meeting invitation via e-mail or mail or call invitees.
- **Make sure to share the MBTA Communities / Section 3A info sheet with your invitation!**

## 2. Remind

- Call and/or e-mail the people you invited 1-2 days before the scheduled meeting.

## 3. Set up

- Select a location where all participants can comfortably sit, ideally in a circle.
- Sort copies of meeting materials into sets for participants.
- Have enough pens/pencils available.

## 4. Maintain Sign-in Sheets

- Make sure facilitators and note-takers sign in on Sheet A
- Ask attendees to sign in on Sheet B. There is space on Sheet B to ask to be added to a list for future information about the Arlington Housing Plan.

## 5. Facilitate

- Share an overview of Section 3A (MBTA Communities) legislation and what it means for Arlington.
- Lead a small-group discussion, making sure the meeting stays on topic and all discussion questions are answered.
- Use the PDF of topical maps and graphics to guide the questions about each topic.

## 6. Return

- Collect all materials, including the individual worksheets and feedback sheets from each participant, and make sure each sheet is labeled with the meeting code (see details under "Host Instructions").
- Package them together and return the response packet to the address provided on the return information sheet. Please recycle any unused materials.

## Group Logistics

These meetings are designed to encourage conversation. The meeting is designed to take about two hours from start to finish. The host is responsible for coordinating all aspects of the meeting. If you host a large meeting, we suggest that you break into groups of 8-12 people and ask for a facilitator and note-taker for each group. The facilitator (who could also be the host) is responsible for keeping the conversation focused and ensuring everyone has a chance to speak. The note-taker takes notes throughout the discussion. If you do break into groups, please name/number the groups and indicate this on the discussion notes.

# Annotated Meeting Agenda

 Hand out **Sheet B.**

The agenda and instructions below are guidelines for you as facilitator.

## **PART ONE: WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS (10 – 15 minutes)**

### **1. Who's in the room?**

Take a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting for introductions. Ask people to tell something about themselves in addition to their name (e.g., their neighborhood, any affiliations, their interest in the multifamily housing, etc.) so that everyone gets a better sense of who is participating and why. No need to spend too much time on this activity.

### **2. Meeting overview and purpose**

Briefly review the information on the meeting agenda.

### **3. What is MBTA Communities?**

Allow a few minutes for people to ask clarifying questions about the MBTA Communities / Section 3A overview (Sheet D) that was sent before the meeting. There is a FAQ available on the Town's MBTA Communities page to help answer questions. That said, remind people that the purpose of the meeting is to understand the community vision and have a group discussion about where in Arlington multifamily housing should be located.

## **PART TWO: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (15 minutes per question, 60 minutes total).**

 Hand out **Sheet D.**

### **4. Explain how input from this meeting will be used**

The Department of Planning and Community Development and MBTA Communities Working Group will use public input to explain the community vision for multifamily housing in Arlington. The outcome of these meetings, along with responses at the March 9 public meeting and the communitywide survey, will help us develop scenarios that best fit what we hear from participants in this process.

### **5. Discussion**

#### **a. Explain Group Discussion Guidelines**

Review the suggested discussion guidelines or ask the group to brainstorm guidelines that will help everyone to participate. Ask if anyone has any questions and if everyone agrees to the discussion guidelines. Clarify as needed and address any concerns. Ask if the group needs anything else to help stay focused and have an effective meeting.

#### **b. Discussion questions**

Give participants a few minutes to answer the first question on their worksheets before beginning the discussion questions. During discussion, a note-taker should write down comments and questions, ideally on a flip chart or large piece of paper taped to the wall so everyone can see. After everyone has had a chance to speak, briefly review all thoughts the group generated.

## **PART THREE: WRAP-UP (5 minutes)**

If you have divided participants into small groups, reconvene the larger group. See if there are any issues or concerns that seemed to be mentioned by many participants in the meeting.

# Final Steps: Submitting your meeting materials to DPCD

## **Collect and sort the meeting materials.**

After the meeting, package up the materials for return. Sort the materials into sets, keeping like items together:

Sign-in sheets (**Sheet A**)

Group discussion materials (if you had more than one group, keep each group's materials together):

Group discussion notes

Participant worksheets (**Sheet D**)

## **Label the meeting materials.**

Assign a code to your meeting following the instructions below. **Enter this code into the appropriate boxes on all the materials that you will need to return to the Town.**

FIRST THREE SPACES: Your initials

NEXT FOUR SPACES: Month and day of your event (e.g., "0324" for March 24th)

The code box is always located at the top of the page and it looks like this:

**Code:**

## **Write up a summary of the meeting notes**

The summary can be bullet points listing the main ideas participants. If possible, try to group the ideas by type or theme. Provide highlights of the meeting.

## **Return the meeting materials within seven (7) days.**

Please mail, scan and e-mail, or hand deliver all participant and group response materials to:

Claire Ricker, Director

Arlington Department of Planning and Community Development

730 Mass. Ave, Town Hall Annex

Arlington MA 02476

**THANK YOU!**

# Sample Invitation

Use this template as a guide for your meeting invitations. You can include this language in an email, send invitations in the mail or use it as a guide to invite people over the phone.

## You're Invited!

**What:** MBTA Communities: Multifamily Housing in Arlington Visioning Session

**Where:** [your info here]

**When:** [your info here]

**RSVP by:** [your info here]

**RSVP to:** [your info here]

MBTA Communities, or Section 3A of MGL Ch 40A, is a new state law that requires the 175 Massachusetts communities served by the MBTA to create a district where multifamily housing of three or more units is allowed by right, meaning without a special permit. **The attached MBTA Communities / Section 3A overview provides additional information about the law and what it means for Arlington.**

The Department of Planning and Community Development and the MBTA Communities Working Group have invited us to host a meeting using their **Multifamily Housing Visioning Kit** so they can hear from us as they work on the development of this district.

This meeting is designed to help the Town understand community priorities and visions for the best locations for multifamily housing. In the long run, when Arlington and the other MBTA communities create these districts, we will be working to combat the housing crisis and offering more diverse types of housing within our community – housing that suits the needs of those seeking starter rental and ownership homes to those looking to downsize within the community.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Explain the MBTA Communities Law and how it applies to Arlington;
- Understand community members' visions for multifamily housing in town;
- Identify opportunities to balance multiple needs in Arlington: housing, economic development, access to community resources, etc.; and
- To include as many voices as possible in the MBTA Communities planning process.

We look forward to hearing from you! For more information about the process, please visit [tinyurl.com/MBTACommunitiesArlington](http://tinyurl.com/MBTACommunitiesArlington) .



# MBTA Communities

## Participant Meeting Agenda & Information

### Part One: Welcome and Introductions

#### 1. Who's in the room?

#### 2. Meeting overview and purpose

- To invite questions about the requirements of Section 3A, what Arlington needs to do to comply, and how this aligns with other plans.
- To understand community members' visions for multifamily housing in Arlington.
- To identify opportunities to balance multiple needs in Arlington: housing, economic development, access to community resources, etc.
- To include as many voices as possible in the MBTA Communities planning process.

#### 3. What is MBTA Communities?

Your host shared an overview of MBTA Communities requirements before the meeting. Do you have any questions about the law and what it means for Arlington?

An FAQ is also available on the MBTA Communities page of the Town's website ([tinyurl.com/MBTACommunitiesArlington](https://tinyurl.com/MBTACommunitiesArlington)). If you don't see your question answered there, let us know by emailing it to Teresa Marzilli, Community Outreach and Engagement Coordinator at [tmarzilli@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:tmarzilli@town.arlington.ma.us).

### Part Two: Discussion Questions

#### 4. How input from this meeting will be used

#### 5. Questions and discussion

### Part Three: Wrap Up

#### Group Discussion Guidelines

To have a productive conversation where everyone feels welcome to participate, please use these guidelines.

- Everyone should have an equal opportunity to talk and be heard.
- Keep the conversation on topic.
- Listen to others and avoid criticizing.
- Respect limited time and keep your answers to the point.
- Be honest and try to understand other viewpoints.
- It's ok to disagree.
- Try not to interrupt the facilitator or other group members.
- Cell phones on silent, please.

SHEET C

## MBTA Communities / Section 3A



In 2021, Governor Baker signed the multifamily zoning requirement for the 175 communities served by the MBTA into law. This new law requires that an MBTA community shall have at least one zoning district of reasonable size in which multifamily housing is permitted as of right and meets other criteria set forth in the statute:

- Minimum gross density of 15 units per acre
- Located not more than 0.5 miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station, if applicable
- No age restrictions and suitable for families with children

### Why did Gov. Baker create this requirement?

The law was created because the greater Boston region, for some time now, has been experiencing a housing crisis. The State's [Future of Work](#) study estimated a shortage of up to 200,000 housing units. Municipalities play a key role through zoning and permitting in determining whether or not housing is built. To solve the housing crisis, the law requires communities to amend their zoning and permitting to encourage greater housing production. Additionally, the state notes that:

- Before COVID19, Massachusetts faced a core challenge in creating adequate housing to support young families, workers, and an aging population. The pandemic has further highlighted these needs.
- Massachusetts has among the highest, and fastest growing, home prices and rents of any state in the nation.
- Rising costs have dramatically increased financial pressures on low- and middle-income families, forcing them to sacrifice other priorities to pay housing costs. High housing costs are a primary driver of homelessness.
- The lack of housing production is an impediment to community development.
- These high costs are a disadvantage as we compete economically against peer states. The risk of future job growth moving outside Massachusetts is rising due to the high costs of living.<sup>1</sup>

Every community in Massachusetts is responsible for addressing this problem. The law ensures that we, along with 174 other communities, are working to address it simultaneously.

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<sup>1</sup> MBTA Communities Summary Deck: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/mbta-communities-summary-deck-feb-2022/download>



## MBTA COMMUNITIES “VISIONING KIT” WORKSHEETS

### **What is Arlington required to do?**

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) issued guidelines on how communities can achieve compliance with the MBTA Communities law in August of 2022. Based on DHCD guidance, Arlington is considered an “adjacent” community, and must therefore create a zoning district of at least 32 acres where 10% of Arlington’s current housing stock, or 2,046 units, could be built by right in three-family or larger homes. The guidelines are based on *capacity*, not housing to be created *in addition to* what currently exists – the capacity of 2,046 units is measured as if there was nothing currently on the land within the zoning district. Because there are fewer than 50 developable acres within a half mile radius of Alewife Station, Arlington is able to locate the district or districts anywhere within the town.

### **What is the Town’s approach?**

MBTA Communities, or Section 3A, is consistent with a number of Town plans:

- Arlington Master Plan
- Fair Housing Action Plan
- Housing Production Plan
- Connect Arlington: The Sustainable Transportation Plan
- Net Zero Action Plan

Additionally, if the Town does not comply, we lose our eligibility for millions of dollars infrastructure funding from the State’s MassWorks program. We also would not be able to participate in the state’s fossil fuel ban pilot program—related to a Home Rule Petition approved by 92% of Town Meeting Members which would take significant steps toward achieving the Town’s net zero energy goals. It is anticipated that the state will tie compliance to MBTA communities with other funding sources and opportunities in the future, and the Attorney General has issued an advisory concerning enforcement of the law on March 15; “opting out” is not an option.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, both the Select Board and the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) have indicated that the Town should work to achieve compliance with the law.

As a result, the MBTA Communities Working Group is working in earnest to create a zoning amendment that will both meet compliance requirements *and* have the ability to result in actual production of multifamily housing over time. The amendments will be crafted through community outreach—the community will have several opportunities to inform the vision and substance of the amendments—and brought to the ARB in September, and with the ARB’s approval, to Town Meeting in October. If approved, the amendments will be submitted to the state for review and incorporated into the Zoning Bylaw.

For more information about this process, contact Claire Ricker, Director of Planning and Community Development, [cricker@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:cricker@town.arlington.ma.us).

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<sup>2</sup> Andrea Joy Campbell, Massachusetts Attorney General; Advisory Concerning Enforcement of the MBTA Communities Zoning Act: [arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/64380/638144981082117352](https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/64380/638144981082117352)

**SHEET D: Participant Visioning Worksheet**

**Question 1: Opportunities for Consensus** (answer this BEFORE the discussion)

What would help bring Arlington residents together to create a district where multifamily housing is allowed by right? What are the challenges? What do you think most people could agree on?

**Question 2: Goals for New Housing**

Let's discuss the goals we each might have regarding creating new housing in Arlington. How important are each of the following to you? Rank 1-5, with 1 as the most important.

	Importance				
	Most				Least
Encourage multifamily housing on commercial corridors.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing in the neighborhoods next to commercial corridors.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing in all neighborhoods in town.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing near public transit stops.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing near the bike path.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing near Route 2.	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid locating multifamily housing near flood-prone areas.	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid locating multifamily housing in the core of our three business districts unless it includes ground floor commercial space.	1	2	3	4	5
Other (elaborate below)	1	2	3	4	5

## MBTA COMMUNITIES "VISIONING KIT" WORKSHEETS

### **Question 3: Bonuses for Providing Community "Goods"**

Many communities provide bonuses like additional height/stories or parking reductions for new development that includes features desired by the community, such as additional affordable housing, shared community spaces, and ground floor commercial space. If the town were to include bonuses in MBTA Communities zoning, what features should be incentivized? Rank 1-5, with 1 as the most important.

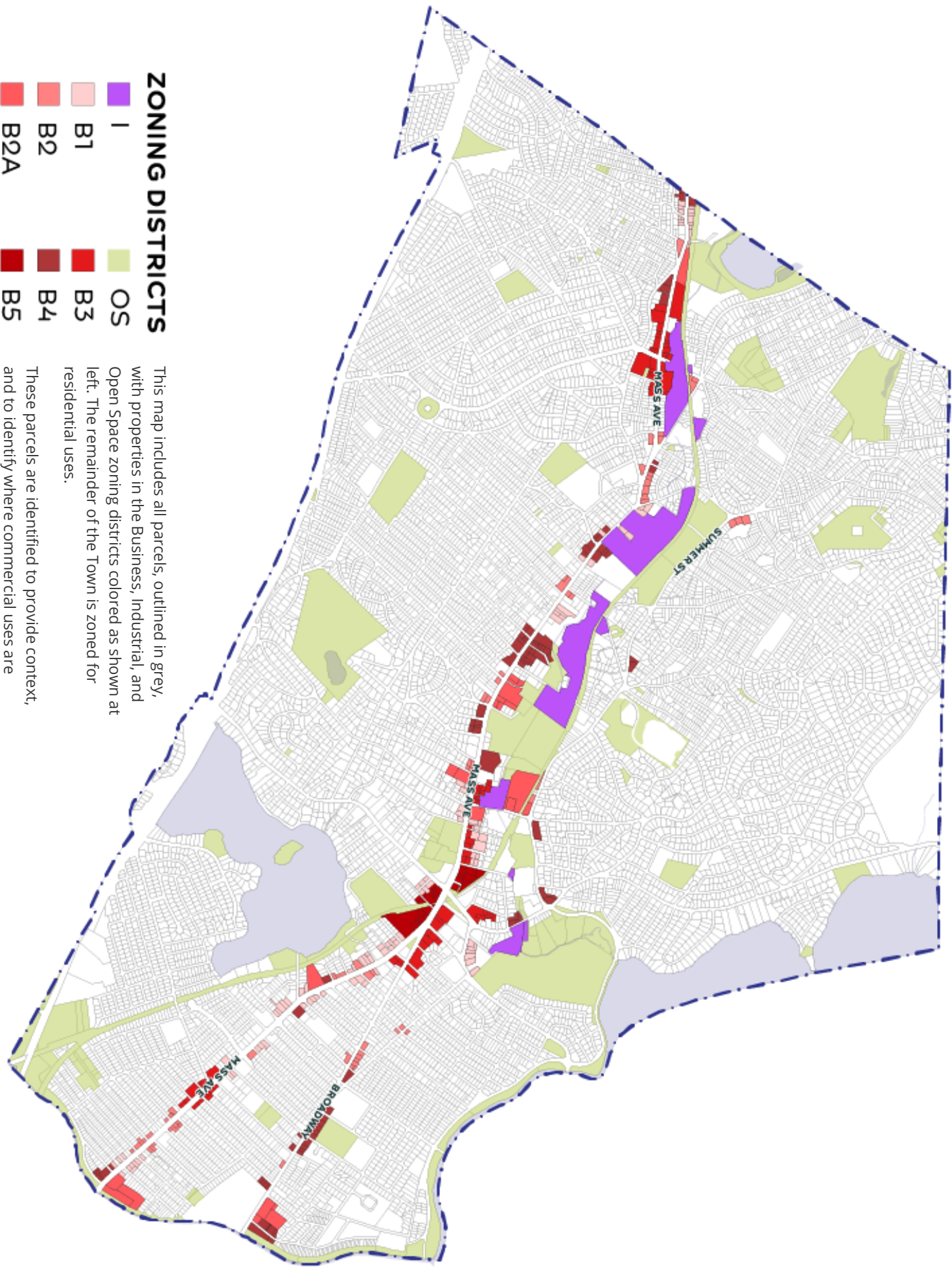
	Importance				
	Most				Least
Encourage multifamily housing that includes mixed use (e.g., first floor commercial or other business).	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage multifamily housing that has more affordable units than 15% (the proportion required in Arlington's inclusionary zoning bylaw).	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage sustainable building practices beyond those already required.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage new shared community spaces, such as small parks and plazas.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage additional greenery, such as street trees, roof gardens, and other landscaped open space.	1	2	3	4	5
Other (elaborate below)	1	2	3	4	5

### **Question 4: Let's Get Specific.**

What types of housing would you like to see more of in Arlington (e.g., three and four family buildings, larger apartment buildings, etc.)? Where should allow and/or encourage more housing to be located? Answer in writing or by marking up the map on the next page (whatever you're most comfortable with).

### **Question 5: Opportunities for Consensus, Revisited**

What are the top opportunities for consensus about the MBTA Communities district(s)? Any other thoughts? (to be answered as a group)



**ZONING DISTRICTS**

- I
- B1
- B2
- B2A
- OS
- B3
- B4
- B5

This map includes all parcels, outlined in grey, with properties in the Business, Industrial, and Open Space zoning districts colored as shown at left. The remainder of the Town is zoned for residential uses.

These parcels are identified to provide context, and to identify where commercial uses are allowed. The Town is not interested in converting any Open Space properties to housing.