

# **MBTA Communities Working Group**

## **May 30, 2023 Minutes**

Attending: Vince Baudoin, Rebecca Gruber, Kin Lau, Sanjay Newton, Steve Revilak, Laura Wiener

Staff: Marissa Lau, Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

### **Review and Discussion of Preliminary Draft Maps**

Ms. Ricker informs the working group that she hasn't received Utile's map revisions yet, but expects to get them in the near future. She's asked Utile to model three-, six-, and twelve-family homes for massing and parcel size requirements.

Ms. Wiener asks about the possibility of including some parcels that are currently in B districts, specifically ones on the south side of Mass Ave in East Arlington, near Alewife Brook Parkway. She feels that Arlington has more retail spaces that it can fill, and we're simply fighting the market in trying to retain the current use of those properties.

Mr. Lau believes the RCN properties on either side of Mass Ave would be good candidates for re-zoning. He thinks a 24-unit apartment would work well, both in terms of economics and having an efficient footprint. He'd like to see Utile model parcel sizes needed for that configuration, along with what our existing 5000-6000 square foot lots could accommodate. Mr. Lau prefers mixed-income housing to housing that's all income-restricted, as the latter can have a stigma attached to it. Ms. Ricker agrees that 24-unit apartments are an economically good configuration.

Mr. Newton questions whether the survey preference for commercial vitality translates into "don't touch the existing business districts". Mr. Revilak points out that survey responses to the specific strategies that could increase commercial vitality – adding multi-family housing near commercial centers and encouraging mixed use, for example -- were less positive than the general question about commercial vitality. He sees support for the abstract goal, but less support for the specific steps that could get us there.

Mr. Lau believes the current commercial districts are hampered by old spaces, which are small, don't get sufficient foot traffic, and don't give businesses room to grow without relocating. He reminds the group that Section 3A's charter is about multi-family housing.

Mr. Baudoin agrees that the lack of foot traffic puts our businesses at a disadvantage. He'd prefer to see businesses allowed in more areas, and to see a mix of older and newer spaces.

The group discusses some of the challenges to building apartment buildings in Arlington, like the 20,000 square foot minimum lot size requirement. Of the districts where apartment buildings are allowed, only the B districts can meet the minimum parcel size.

## Preparation for June 8th Forum

Ms. Gruber drafted an email message, inviting town meeting members to the June 8th forum; she'd like to see it distributed to the town meeting member announcement list. Mr. Newton will look into this.

Ms. Marzilli would like the community to understand the next steps in the process, as June will be a fairly intensive month for engagement.

The group discusses the location of the June 8th forum. It will be held at the community center.

The group discusses the agenda for June 8th, which will consist of opening presentations, table exercises, and report outs. Ms. Ricker informs the group that most members of the Planning Department will be able to attend the event, and can serve as note takers. Ms. Marzilli suggests establishing norms for the table discussions.

There's a discussion about whether to give all tables a map of the entire town, or to have different neighborhood maps at different tables. In the latter scenario, there'd be tables and maps for East Arlington, Arlington Center, and Arlington Heights.

The group discusses questions to ask during the forum, with the goal of highlighting some of the choices we'll have to consider during the next iteration. The list of possible questions included

- what size buildings to allow by right
- whether to include a few specific parcels that are currently zoned business or industrial
- whether to incentivize mixed use in areas where it's not currently allowed (this would effectively expand the business districts)
- whether it's possible to leverage future development for infrastructure improvements
- whether to allow buildings that are tall enough to require an elevator
- whether to allow buildings that are large enough to trigger the enhanced stretch code's passive house standards for multi-family housing.
- whether to allow buildings with enough units to trigger inclusionary zoning requirements

Mr. Baudoin suggests using visuals to frame some of the questions. For example, we could provide pictures of buildings, and ask table groups to place them on a map.

Mr. Revilak finished assembling the data appendices for the survey report. He'll collaborate with Ms. Lau on writing a narrative; Mr. Newton offers to be an additional reviewer.

## Next Steps

Ms. Lau, Mr. Newton, and Mr. Revilak will work on the survey report.

Ms. Gruber and Mr. Newton will work on questions about sustainability.

Mr. Baudoin, Ms. Gruber, and Ms. Wiener will work on questions involving retail and commercial.

## **Documents Reviewed**

Draft district maps from Utile, labeled "V1" and "V2"