

MBTA Communities Working Group

March 28, 2023

Meeting Summary

Attending: Mette Aamodt, Vince Baudoin, Rebecca Gruber, Shaina Korman-Houston, Kin Lau, Sanjay Newton, Stephen Revilak, Ramie Schneider, Laura Wiener

Staff: Kelly Lynema, Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

March 9th Community Visioning Session Debrief

Overall, the first public forum went well. One of our outreach goals was to have conversations around the topic of multi-family zoning, and to give people the opportunity to be heard.

The group discusses options for taking the results of a broad survey, and using them to formulate a more detailed proposal. Many of the questions involved maps, and we'll be able to do a map-based presentation of the survey results. There are also free-form textual answers, and those will require additional analysis.

There's a question about whether the MBTA district should be form-based, and whether Arlington would be better served by a form-based zoning code. A number of the survey responses expressed concerns about building shape and size. There haven't been discussions within the planning department about moving to a form-based code, but other communities are adopting them. Arlington's zoning bylaw is heavily use-based, and it would be challenging to adapt to a form-based framework. However, we could frame the multi-family district in terms of dimensional regulations, and be less prescriptive about the number of dwellings allowed. In the long run, form-based may be the way to go, and it may be possible to define the multi-family district in a way that lends itself to the eventual transition to a form-based code.

There was discussion about whether Utile is looking at our Housing Production Plan, or considering a 40R district. The Housing Production Plan focuses more on district regulations, and doesn't have a lot of site-specific redevelopment recommendations. The multi-family districts could be done via 40R.

There's discussion about whether there's town-owned land that could be used. The answer is generally no. The town doesn't own many parcels, and the ones it does own tend to be small, open space, or have existing municipal uses.

We've had approximately 550 survey responses so far.

Ms. Lynema provided a brief overview of outreach and engagement tools that are available for Working Group members as they reach out to the community, including:

- Facilitator guide from the 3/9 meeting
- Slides for overview presentation
- Visual tools for polling questions
- Meeting in a Box Kits
- Survey

Stakeholder analysis with Community Engagement Coordinator

Teresa Marzilli leads this part of the meeting. We do a number of group exercises to identify groups we'd like to engage during outreach.

Ms. Marzilli introduced herself and her role with the town as Engagement Coordinator, and led the group through a stakeholder analysis. The working group discussed who is interested enough to be motivated to participate and how to get people motivated to engage.

The group also discussed the need to connect the dots between multifamily housing and the ability of the town to participate in the fossil fuel ban pilot program, and fine-tuning the messaging about how setting the table to allow for missing middle housing benefits lower income households, even though the initiative is not about affordable housing.

As part of this discussion, Ms. Marzilli asked Working Group members to describe why they are interested in MBTA Communities. Responses included:

- The law ties together conversations about housing, sustainability, connections to transportation, and support for local businesses.
- A desire to make local rules less complicated and eliminate barriers to the kind of growth we really want.
- Providing “starter homes” through condos to allow adult children to move back to the area, and create spaces for people to downsize within the community.
- Creating a welcoming and inclusive community.
- Increasing housing choice by allowing and encouraging a range of housing types.
- Reducing the need for people to move further out into the suburbs and rely on unsustainable commuting patterns in order to live in the region.
- Housing is the key way that Americans build wealth and support themselves and their families long term – by creating additional types of housing, we unlock that potential wealth creation for those who cannot afford or chose not to live in a single-family home.
- With an Affordable Housing Overlay, unlock the potential for the creation of affordable housing.
- Allowing people to age in community in intergenerational housing.

Next Steps

Mr. Baudoin drafted a vision statement. Please read this document and provide feedback where appropriate.

Ms. Lynema has started developing a list of frequently asked questions. Please review this document, and provide feedback to Ms. Lynema.

Working group members are asked to review the draft visioning kits, and to provide feedback to Ms. Lynema.

Ms. Lynema will need assistance analyzing the survey data, coding textual responses, and so on. Several group members volunteer to help with this.