

MBTA Communities Working Group

May 4, 2023

Meeting Summary

Attending: Mette Aamodt, Rebecca Gruber, Sanjay Newton, Stephen Revilak

Staff: Kelly Lynema, Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

MBTA Communities Engagement Plan and Outreach Tasks

The working group's May 16th meeting will be in person, with the goal of workshopping the materials from Utile. These materials will be presented to the public on June 8th, where our goal will be to present a first draft of the multi-family districts, and set the stage for the next iteration in the process. The ARB will have the opportunity to review Utile's drafts during their May 22nd meeting.

Between now and the end of summer, raising awareness will be a critical outreach task.

Another goal is to get visioning kits into the hands of people who need them. Ms. Marzilli asks everyone to look at the outreach spreadsheet, identify a few groups, and try to hold visioning sessions with them. Raising awareness is an important part of this effort.

Our message will evolve as we work through iterations and invite people into the process of building and revising. Working group members doing outreach should try to address questions and concerns that come up in different communities and understand the motivations behind them. The visioning kits have instructions on how to return materials to the planning department. The visioning kits will be living documents that evolve with the process.

Mr. Newton offers to make an announcement at town meeting, to describe the community engagement process.

Utile will present draft district maps to the working group on May 16th, and we'll hold a larger public forum on June 8th. Our group will do the presentations that night, but Utile will be present to answer technical questions (e.g., concerning compliance). The format for June 8th will be planned in our upcoming meetings. It may be held in person, but we'll want to create options for asynchronous participation. After June 8th, we plan to have a second survey, and continue promoting meeting in a box materials. We anticipate having a second iteration of the map in late June.

Cambridge has a community budgeting process, and there's a discussion about whether our group could do something like that. The idea is to listen to people's priorities and get them to understand what the choices are. For example, a number of survey respondents felt that affordable housing was important; that entails allowing six-plexes (or larger multi-family buildings) by right. People who are new to these issues will need to understand the complexities inherent in these decisions.

Visioning Kits (aka meeting in a box)

The kits include information on how to return materials to DPCD.

The kits are designed to be evolving documents – as we advance through the planning phases, the kits can / will change to reflect updated information. Working Group members were asked to review the kits and provide any feedback. Kelly will add a version number to the footer of the kits so that responses can be tracked according to when the kits were updated.

Ms. Marzilli encouraged Working Group members to do warm handoffs with the kits – directly invite someone to schedule and run a meeting, check in periodically to offer assistance and answer questions, and encourage participants to return the kits once completed.

Preparing and presenting the draft plan

Staff have given Utile the results from the survey so that they can use the data to develop a draft plan. On May 16, the Working Group will meet to review a rough draft of the concept to be presented to the community. The ARB will review this at their May 22 meeting.

On June 8, the Town will host an in-person public meeting to present the draft. Working Group members deliberated on how to conduct a companion remote or “on your own” virtual meeting.

- A survey will be released contemporaneously with the meeting to invite input on the draft.
- A second meeting in a box kit can be prepared to encourage small-group discussion on the draft.

Regarding the draft plan, the Working Group discussed preparing scenarios or alternatives around that plan so that participants can understand the impact of making decisions. For example, if the community wants to see affordable housing units created as part of the zoning, they will need to allow six units by right. Working Group members will provide a list of such alternatives to staff in advance of the May 16 meeting.

Draft Iteration (through late June)

Following the June 8 meeting, a second survey will be available along with additional small group opportunities for providing feedback on the draft. The draft will be revised and brought back to the community at the end of June.

Outreach Tasks

Ms. Marzilli discussed additional outreach and engagement tasks that Working Group members can complete:

- Working with Libby Lazar, Homelessness Prevention Coordinator, to interview community members and create housing stories. The GBIO organizer in Lexington said they had done this in Lexington to show how creating missing middle housing benefits the community.
- Dinner with the Planners – invite folks to get around a table and discuss over a meal.

- Working with Cecily Miller from ACAC about Art Advocacy.
- Working with Rachel Oliveri to engage high school students.
- The Chamber of Commerce has offered to provide comment on the proposal and write a letter of support.
- Working with HCA's Americorps staff to reach out to tenants.

Survey Results

Mr. Revilak provided an overview of the survey results. Overall, there were quite a few things ranked important, especially if you looked at important and secondary. Sustainability was at the top of the list, and housing near transit was close to that. Despite this, once the questions became more specific to location, respondents showed less support. For example, consensus divided when asked about locating the district on corridors, near business districts, or along business districts. Top priorities were as follows:

- Sustainable principles
- Affordability
- Public transportation
- Commercial vitality – speaks to Chamber of Commerce's concerns about not losing commercial space in the B districts.
- Shared community spaces

Overall, this shows the need for a more nuanced proposal around the commercial districts.

Staff will be working with Utile to understand how the survey results informed draft plan, so that Working Group members can share this back with the community on June 8. Overall, the group was heartened to see that the community's values were aligned with the purpose and requirements of the MBTA Communities law.

The Working Group discussed the open-ended comments. Steve invited any Working Group members with spare time to help him code responses. His goal is to be able to add up the tags with positive (+) and negative (-) comments to capture overall sentiment in each direction.

Next Steps

Working group members should try to formulate discussion questions for June 8th. Please send these to Ms. Ricker, Ms. Lynema, and Ms. Marzilli.

Ms. Marzilli informs the group that HCA just hired a new resource coordinator. Ms. Marzilli will work with them to collect housing stories from HCA tenants. Staff have also spoken with Cecily Miller (Commission of Arts and Culture), and Rachel Olney (High School). The Chamber of Commerce is interested in the multi-family zoning, although they have concerns about the possibility of losing commercial space.