

# **MBTA Communities Working Group**

## **June 20, 2023**

### **Meeting Summary**

**Attending:** Mette Aamodt, Vince Baudoin, Rebecca Gruber, Kin Lau, Sanjay Newton, Steve Revilak, Laura Wiener.

**Staff:** Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

## **Committee Discussion: Review and Thoughts from June 8 Forum**

Mr. Newton felt the June 8th forum was well-attended. Ms. Ricker says there were over 130 participants. Mr. Newton would like to go around the table and hear impressions from other working group members.

Mr. Lau spent the evening walking around and observing. He visited five tables and got the sense that people were very enthusiastic. Everyone seemed to be speaking up and giving input, and people were excited about moving on to the next steps.

Mr. Revilak's table supported allowing six or more units by right, in order to create some affordable housing. There was less support for allowing 12,000 square foot apartments (8-12 units) that would trigger passive house requirements in the enhanced stretch code. Mr. Revilak believes the reservations were due to a perception of increased cost. Finally, the table almost came to consensus around the idea that there shouldn't be anywhere in Arlington that's considered "sacred", and off-limits to multi-family housing.

Ms. Wiener's table was less interested in answering questions from the handout, and more interested in talking about the map. Several people at her table expressed an interest in preserving commercial zones.

Ms. Marzilli's table had a lot of questions about affordability, and who the housing would be for. There were also questions about how these multi-family zones would interact with 40B. Finally, several people asked "what about Broadway?".

Several people at Mr. Baudoin's table were puzzled by the omission of Broadway, and there were mixed opinions about allowing multi-family housing in the B districts. He felt there was support for allowing 2-3 family dwellings over a larger area.

One person at Ms. Ricker's table claimed that the maps didn't meet the requirements of the statute; they believed that the entire district needed to be within one-half mile of the Alewife T station. She thinks additional public education may be needed in this area. There were concerns about parking, and Route 2 also came up in the conversation. The discussions were mostly about including more areas in the district.

Conversations at Ms. Gruber's table followed the same theme. People were fascinated by the map. There were conversations about scale, where people felt that larger buildings were okay along Mass Ave, but should taper off further away from the street. One person proposed allowing nothing larger than three-

family homes, under the premise that nothing would be built. The rest of the table was not okay with that proposal, and the majority believed we should support more housing.

Ms. Aamodt spoke to (ARB members) Rachel Zsembery and Eugene Benson during the evening. She'd like to bring the ARB into the conversation right away, and have them be more involved.

One person at Mr. Newton's table changed their mind during the course of the evening. They started with the position that the district should be as geographically small as possible, but came around to the idea of having a larger district with variations in scale. He heard a wide variety of ideas and comments, and got the sense that people feel we're generally on the right track. He also heard a desire for future flexibility, meaning that the district boundaries could change over time.

Mr. Revilak mentions a map that a resident emailed to the Planning Department. It proposed a "small" Section 3A district that was over four-hundred acres, and a large district that was over nine hundred. He thinks that's another data point in support of having larger districts.

Mr. Newton read the comments from the forum, which suggested having multi-family districts around Broadway, Summer Street, Park Ave, Pleasant Street, and Route 2.

Someone at Ms. Wiener's table asked about affordability. That person was under the impression that we're limited to 10% affordable at 80% AMI. Ms. Ricker says we can use our existing inclusionary zoning (15% of units affordable at 60% AMI), if we can demonstrate those requirements are economically feasible. Mr. Lau thinks 15% is feasible.

Ms. Ricker asks to review Mr. Lau's conversation with the school Superintendent. She remembers the Superintendent saying that a larger district would be easier for the schools to accommodate. Mr. Lau says that's correct. A larger and more geographically dispersed district gives the schools more flexibility to move elementary school buffer zones around.

There's general agreement on this point: a geographically dispersed multi-family district will be easier for the schools to handle, and a concentrated district would be challenging. To that end, the group prefers spreading the district out, so it's not concentrated around a small number of elementary schools.

## **Next Steps**

There's discussion about the scope of Utile's future work. These include further revisions to the map; scale diagrams of six-, twelve-, and twenty-four-unit apartments; a study of configurations that would be suitable for common lot sizes in Arlington; and finally the actual text of the zoning changes.

Ms. Ricker says the Select Board hasn't chosen a date for the fall town meeting, but October 16th and October 23rd are likely candidates. Mr. Newton says he and Ms. Wiener worked on a timeline. He thinks we need to have something ready for the ARB by August 28th, and we'll need to iterate with Utile on the map and zoning regulations. He'd also like to have some drawings and 3D renderings. He thinks it would be good to have an alignment meeting with the ARB. Mr. Baudoin thinks we should have several meetings with the ARB.

Mr. Newton says we'll probably need another public meeting in late July. He suggests forming a subcommittee to work directly with Utile, in order to move the process along more quickly. The subcommittee will consist of Mr. Lau, Ms. Wiener, Mr. Baudoin, Ms. Aamodt, and Ms. Ricker.

Ms. Gruber thinks the map seems very specific, and that makes it difficult to understand the more thematic view. Mr. Newton thinks we're at a point where we need that level of specificity.

Ms. Ricker says she heard positive feedback about commercial, transit, and having more housing in more neighborhoods. She notes the districts can be amended and move around over time.

There's discussion about how to translate the feedback we heard on June 8th to changes in the map, and where to enlarge the districts.

Ms. Aamodt has heard a desire to protect our business and industrial districts, but she doesn't think these districts need to remain the same as they are today. She did an analysis of the B1 districts (which was provided to working group members as a memo). B1 is called the "neighborhood business district", and the name suggests something that should be located off the main corridors. The district definition says it should be characterized by a low-level of activity; Ms. Aamodt feels that's an inefficient use of land, and inconsistent with the town's planning goals for Mass Ave. She proposes to allow B1 uses along larger streets in the R1 and R2 districts, and thinks Section 3A zoning would be a better use of these corridor-facing parcels.

Mr. Lau and Mr. Revilak like Ms. Aamodt's proposal. Mr. Revilak points out that there are only two commercial uses allowed by-right in the B1 district: funeral homes, and radio or television studios, without broadcast facilities. He says there are large portions of Arlington that are just residential subdivision after residential subdivision; these areas aren't very walkable, because there's nothing in them to walk to. He likes the idea of allowing small-scale business in the R districts as a way to add amenities and (ideally) to improve the walkability aspect.

Ms. Wiener thinks this is a good way to expand the area where these kinds of small businesses are allowed. She asks about making the Section 3A changes as an overlay district vs. changes to the base zoning. She asks what the base zoning in B1 would become. Ms. Ricker says she was thinking of an overlay district. Mr. Revilak suggests leaving the B1 base-zoning as-is, allowing these commercial uses in R1 and R2 as Ms. Aamodt suggested, and including the B1 parcels in the multi-family overlay.

The conversation moves to future meeting dates.

Mr. Newton says he'd like to move our meetings to the APD community room, which is equipped to hold hybrid meetings. A number of working group members have summer vacation plans, and he suggests hybrid meetings to allow them to attend remotely.

Ms. Aamodt suggests setting up a Facebook page for the working group and using that to disseminate information. It could also be a place for public discussions. Ms. Marzilli would like to discuss this with Joan Roman, the town's information officer. Ms. Gruber is aware of several town groups that have Facebook pages. She says these are used to disseminate information rather than for hosting discussions. Ms. Marzilli would like to discuss this idea with the outreach subcommittee.

The group makes a list of materials they'd like to get from Utile. These include:

- Massing diagrams of different multi-family configurations, such as six units, and 20-25 units.
- Modeling of what different heights and setbacks would look like.
- Cross-section models of Mass Ave. These would involve plugging Utile's massing diagrams into our Sketch-up model of Mass Ave.
- Having two tiers of dimensional regulations: more intensive buildings directly on the corridors, and smaller ones away from the corridors.

Mr. Revilak suggests following Lexington's model for dimensional regulations. Their Section 3A overlay has limitations on height, setbacks, and parking minimums, and he feels that is a good set of regulations. Mr. Revilak believes that Arlington's zoning is overly prescriptive and includes things like minimum lot size, frontage, lot coverage, FAR, two kinds of open space, parking, and lot area per dwelling unit. There's a lot of interaction between between these, and he'd prefer a small set of dimensional regulations that don't interact with each other. He'd also like to avoid the use of formulaic setbacks, like  $(H + L)/6$ .

## **Review of meeting summaries**

The working group approves meeting summaries from the May 23rd, May 30th, and June 6th meetings.

## **Review of March/April survey report**

The group discusses the survey report. Ms. Gruber suggests a few final edits and Mr. Revilak proposes a new title.

Mr. Revilak will accept all of the edits, clean up the formatting, combine the narrative and appendices, and send a final copy to Mr. Newton and staff for posting.

## **Adjournment**

Wynelle Evans (guest) asks how we'll verify that the district presented to town meeting complies with state requirements. Ms. Ricker explains that Utile has warranted that what they give us will be compliant.

Meeting adjourned.

## **Materials Reviewed**

- June 8th version of the Draft district Map
- *BI Districts*, memorandum by Mette Aamodt.