

MBTA COMMUNITIES

ZONING FOR MULTIFAMILY HOUSING IN ARLINGTON



Community Visioning Kit for Multifamily Housing in Arlington

Welcome! Thank you for hosting a community conversation with your friends and neighbors! This kit includes the materials you need to run your meeting and provide feedback to the MBTA Communities Working Group. You do not need to be an expert on the MBTA Communities legislation to host a meeting! To request printed materials or help from a member of the MBTA Communities Working Group please contact Jennifer Joslyn-Siemiatkoski at JenniferJS@town.arlington.us.ma or 781-316-3229.

Materials for you to distribute before the meeting:

- Sample Invitation (please feel free to customize this)
- MBTA Communities Overview
- Draft MBTA Communities Concept (this map will change as the process continues!)
- Additional Materials about Size/Scale and Economic Vitality options

Materials you will need at the meeting:

- Sign in sheet
- A participant worksheet for each person
- Pens/pencils (also possibly a laptop or flipchart for taking notes)

Process Overview

These meetings are designed to encourage conversation. It should take between 1.5 and 2 hours from start to finish. If you have more than 15 people attending, you may wish to create smaller breakout groups. The agenda below is just a suggestion and you should feel free to conduct the meeting in whatever way is most appropriate for your group.

Suggested Agenda

10-15 mins: Introductions and meeting overview and purpose (ask people to sign in)

10-15 mins: What is the MBTA Communities Act?

60 mins: Discussion of Map and Worksheet

10 mins: Wrap-up. See if there are any issues or concerns that remain

Ask people to fill out the code box with host initials and month and day of the event (e.g. if Marisa Lau hosted on June 20th then write ML0620 on all sheets.)

Final Steps

- Collect and sort meeting materials
- Write up a short summary of meeting notes. Were there ideas that achieved consensus? What topics were still under discussion? Any outstanding questions?
- Return meeting materials by either:
 - In-person: Department of Planning and Community Development at Town Hall
 - Scan and Email to: JenniferJS@town.arlington.ma.us

Information for Meeting Host
MBTA COMMUNITIES

Sample Invitation

Please feel free to customize this invitation to your own style and voice.

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]

The MBTA Communities Act (sometimes also called Section 3A) is a new state law that requires the 175 Massachusetts communities served by the MBTA to create a district where multifamily housing (3 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 MBTA Communities Working Group is inviting community members to share ideas and opinions as they work on the development of this district. The Working Group expects that Town Meeting will vote on Arlington's MBTA Communities plan at a Special Town Meeting in the fall. The best plan for Arlington will be based on the perspectives and insights of community members.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Provide an introduction to the MBTA Communities Law and how it applies to Arlington;
- Understand community members' visions for multifamily housing in town;
- 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.

SHEET B

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 multi-family housing (any residential property containing three or more housing units) is permitted as of right (without a special permit). Under the guidelines released by the Department of Housing and Community Development, Arlington is considered an “adjacent” community which gives us a great deal of flexibility in designing and locating our new zoning.



Why did Gov. Baker create this requirement?

The law was created because the greater Boston region, for some time now, has been going through 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 enough 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.¹

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 together.

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

MBTA COMMUNITIES “Meeting in a Box”

What is Arlington required to do?

In August of 2022 the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) issued guidelines to communities on achieving compliance with the MBTA Communities law. Based on DHCD guidance, Arlington is considered an “adjacent” community, and so must create a zoning district of at least 32 acres where at least 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. Arlington is able to locate the district or districts anywhere within the town.

What is the Town’s approach?

Several of our Town plans have recommendations that are consistent with Section 3A:

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

Compliance ensures Arlington’s eligibility for millions of dollars in infrastructure funding from the State’s MassWorks program. We also would participate in the state’s fossil fuel ban pilot program—related to a Home Rule Petition approved by 92% of Town Meeting Members. These are 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.² Furthermore, both the Select Board and the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) have indicated that the Town should work to achieve compliance with the law.

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 are being crafted through community outreach—the community has had and will have many opportunities to inform the vision and substance of the amendments. The amendments will be brought to the ARB, 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 Jennifer Joslyn-Siemiatkoski:

email: JenniferJS@town.arlington.ma.us
phone: 781-316-3229

² 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 C: Participant Visioning Worksheet

CODE:

The first two questions below are ones that the Working Group has been considering, and we’d like your feedback as we refine next steps. You may wish to refer to the additional information on sheet D. The third question invites you to share any other thoughts, ideas, or locations with the Working Group.

Question 1: Size and Scale

What size / scale buildings are right for Arlington? Where should we allow for these differently sized buildings? You may wish to refer to the additional information on sheet D.

Question 2: Relationship to Commercial

How should our MBTA Communities Districts relate to our commercial and industrial districts? You may wish to refer to the additional information on sheet D.

Question 3: What additional information would you like the Working Group to have?

Please share any other thoughts, ideas, or locations that could help the MBTA Communities Working Group as we continue to refine a proposal for Arlington.

SHEET D

WHAT SIZE / SCALE OF BUILDINGS?

Per the MBTA Communities law, Arlington must 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.

What size / scale buildings are right for us? And where should we allow for these different sized buildings?

Some information to consider:

- Arlington's inclusionary zoning (IZ) takes effect in developments of six units (at 15% or more. Developers are required to include one affordable unit (affordable meaning at 60% AMI or less) per six units. Larger buildings produce more affordable housing. (Note, so far, we've seen IZ affordable units in larger buildings of twelve or more units.)
- The Specialized Stretch Energy Code passed at this April's Town Meeting applies to multi-family buildings > 12,000 square feet, requiring higher energy efficiency and other sustainability practices of these larger, multi-family buildings compared to smaller buildings. (Note, assuming 1,000-1,500 square feet / dwelling, this aspect of the Specialized Code would likely impact developments of eight to twelve units.)
- Buildings four-stories or higher will require an elevator, which may increase accessibility for aging residents.

Other things to consider:

- While the legislation allows us to zone for three-family homes, our consultant Utile's advice is that developments of that size will not be cost-effective, given the cost of land in Arlington and the stringent building code requirements for multi-family buildings.
- We don't have to have all the districts be zoned for the same size buildings; one size doesn't have to fit all. So, as you look at the map, consider what size buildings you think would be appropriate in each district.

SHEET E

HOW SHOULD MBTA COMMUNITIES ZONING RELATE TO OUR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS?

Changing our zoning to comply with the MBTA Communities law has the potential to result in additional housing in Arlington. More housing means more new residents to patronize local stores and restaurants, to join Arlington’s workforce, and even to start new businesses.

Arlington has existing Commercial and Industrial districts. These generally follow the Mass Ave and Broadway corridors and, on average, have larger parcels than the residential neighborhoods.

How should MBTA Communities zoning relate to our Commercial and Industrial districts? Some information to consider:

- The results from the initial MBTA Communities survey indicated significant support for locating multi-family housing within walking distance of commercial areas. This would allow people to patronize local businesses without necessarily needing to drive to every destination.
- Allowing development of multi-family housing in certain parcels currently zoned Commercial or Industrial could allow for larger multi-family developments close to services, amenities, and transit. What are your thoughts about this? Are there specific areas / locations where this might be desirable?
- If we want to avoid housing development in Commercial and Industrial districts, multi-family housing could be located on side streets. Consider opportunities for multi-family housing of various sizes and heights on side streets in the neighborhoods abutting the Mass Ave and Broadway corridors. What are your thoughts about this? Are there specific locations where this type of development would be desirable / feasible? Do you have recommendations about the size and scale of such multi-family housing?
- It is possible to incentivize development that has commercial usage on the ground floor and residential usage on the floors above. An example incentive would be to allow a height bonus allowing a developer to build one or two additional stories. Are there specific areas on the map where this strategy of mixed-use development would be desirable?

MBTA COMMUNITIES

ZONING FOR MULTIFAMILY HOUSING IN ARLINGTON

DRAFT MAP

June 22, 2023

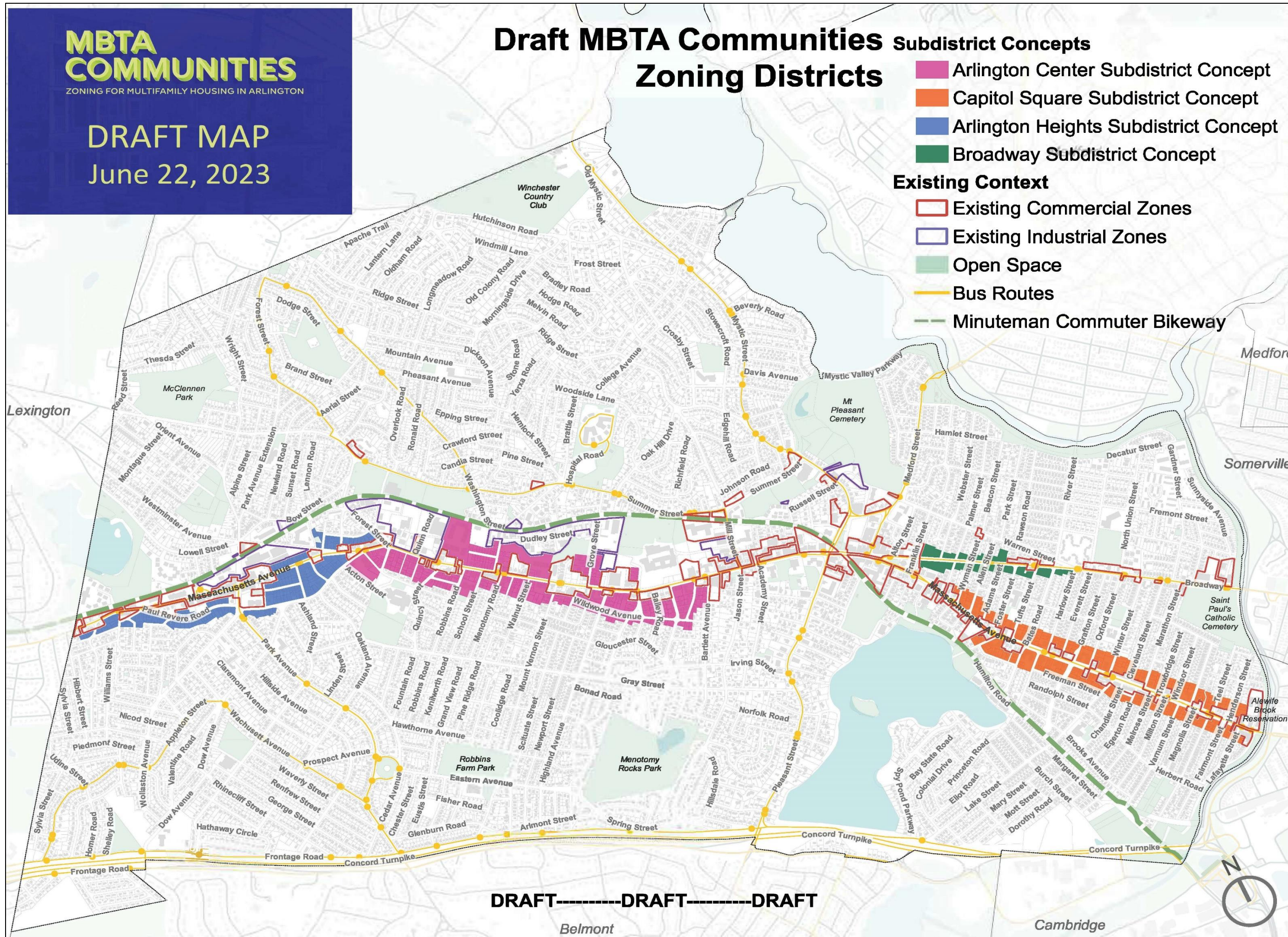
Draft MBTA Communities Zoning Districts

Subdistrict Concepts

- Arlington Center Subdistrict Concept
- Capitol Square Subdistrict Concept
- Arlington Heights Subdistrict Concept
- Broadway Subdistrict Concept

Existing Context

- Existing Commercial Zones
- Existing Industrial Zones
- Open Space
- Bus Routes
- Minuteman Commuter Bikeway



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Belmont

Cambridge