

MBTA Communities Working Group

June 27, 2023

Meeting Summary

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

Staff: Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

Guests: Beth Locke, Executive Director of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The working group approved minutes from their Feb 28, March 28, May 4, May 16, and June 20th, 2023 meetings.

Debrief Joint Working Group/Redevelopment Board Meeting

Mr. Newton thought last night's meeting with the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) was productive, but would like to hear opinions from other working group members.

Mr. Baudoin felt it's good to have the ARB involved, since they review projects. He thinks the ARB wants something they can feel comfortable proceeding with. Mr. Baudoin says he heard ideas of having different scales on and off Mass Ave, and (ARB member) Mr. Benson's suggestion of allowing multi-family and mixed-use in some of the residential sections of Mass Ave.

Ms. Gruber suggests scheduling time to walk down sections of Mass Ave and discuss where the different approaches might work.

Mr. Revilak had some specific takeaways. He felt like the ARB's chair was interested in creating opportunities for parcel aggregation, which is something our current zoning map was intended to discourage. For example, small R districts that are sandwiched between B districts should probably be left out of the multi-family zone, so it's possible to combine the pieces and make a bigger B district. There are also a number of B districts that are very shallow, which makes those properties hard to redevelop. Mr. Revilak suggests leaving out areas behind shallow B districts, so that it's possible to aggregate them with parcels to the rear and have something at least 100' deep (100' generally being the standard lot depth in Arlington).

Ms. Aamodt thought the meeting was not productive. She wanted to have more of a discussion, rather than getting opinions from (ARB members) Mr. Benson and Ms. Zsembery. She thinks the two groups

should have been meeting together all along, and sees disagreement around the general direction. While (ARB chair) Ms. Zsembery said the B1 proposal wouldn't work, Ms. Aamodt was surprised to see Mr. Benson's support. She wanted to brainstorm more and isn't sure how to take the ARB's feedback. She feels it's contrary to some of the things the working group has discussed.

Ms. Ricker notes that the MBTA Communities working group was formed by the ARB, for the purpose of bringing community members into the conversation. There's discussion about who will file the warrant article for the Special Town Meeting, and that will be the ARB. As with any zoning article, the ARB will hold hearings and provide Town Meeting with a recommended action.

Review of Maps and Other Planning Products

We're joined tonight by Beth Locke, who's the Executive Director of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Baudoin acknowledges that Arlington's business districts are limited. The process we're going through is about creating the opportunity for more multi-family housing, but we've been having conversations about the relationship between housing and business. He explains that we're not planning to touch the existing business or industrial districts at all, but we are open to the idea of having mixed use in areas along Mass Ave that are currently zoned residential.

Ms. Ricker displays the new draft iteration of the map. Utile added a new multi-family district along Broadway, which is shown in green. The map is based on an assumption of four stories, 10' side setbacks, 20' rear setbacks, and 0' front setbacks. The capacity would be 3,158 dwellings if housing density were limited to 30 dwellings/acre, and 7879 units without a per-acre cap. Ms. Ricker says the heights can be varied, but a lot will depend on individual parcel sizes.

Ms. Aamodt thinks we need to make a decision about density. She wonders if we should exclude parcels that are zoned for three or more units in order to avoid inadvertent down-zoning. Much of the multi-family district is currently zoned for two or more family homes, and we're not unlocking a lot of potential by placing the district in areas that are currently near 15 dwellings/acre. She's concerned about the possibility of overburdening elementary schools, by placing too much of the district in a single area.

Mr. Newton would like to know the number of existing units in the proposed district, to understand the difference between existing conditions and capacity.

Ms. Ricker proposes looking at the different areas and seeing what makes sense. For example, there are a number of garden apartments along Mass Ave, and other housing types that could be replicated.

Mr. Revilak thinks the map should omit parcels that are under consideration for the Arlington Heights Business District. As we adjust the multi-family map, we'll need to make decisions about whether to remove parcels, or whether to shift the districts back.

Mr. Baudoin points out that the Arlington Heights Business District map includes several multi-family buildings, like the stretch of triple-deckers on Mass Ave. He asks if those would become non-conforming uses. Ms. Gruber suggests having those remain residential parcels, but giving height bonuses for mixed use. Mr. Baudoin is concerned about having dead zones on Mass Ave. Ms. Aamodt suggests leaving room for the Arlington Heights Business District proposal to go forward, and using Capitol Square as an example of what different approach could look like. Ms. Ricker thinks that Paul Revere Road might be a better place for the multi-family district in the heights, in order to avoid overlapping with the Arlington Heights Business District. Mr. Lau thinks it's important to have the ability to combine parcels in the future.

Ms. Marzilli asks about areas that are already zoned for multi-family housing. Ms. Aamodt thinks this all needs to be reviewed. She's disappointed that more of Broadway hasn't been included. There's discussion about apartments, the 20,000 square foot minimum lot size that Arlington's current zoning requires, and how many of them are non-conforming and couldn't be built today. The group agrees that the Section 3A districts should leave room for future commercial growth around the existing business districts, but there are areas directly on Mass Ave and Broadway that are suitable for inclusion in the multi-family district.

Mr. Revilak suggests removing the portion of the East Arlington district that's east of Henderson and Fairmont Streets. These blocks are near the Alewife Brook and Mr. Revilak is concerned about the future risk of flooding.

There's discussion about Arlington Center. Ms. Aamodt favors including parts of the center in the multi-family district, while Mr. Baudoin isn't so sure. Ms. Ricker thinks the fact that the center has been left out implies that the area should be treated differently, perhaps with its own master planning effort. Mr. Newton notes that we don't need to submit everything that's rezoned to the state as part of our certification of compliance. Mr. Revilak agrees. He thinks that Lexington was particularly strategic about doing this.

Mr. Lau would like to see us take advantage of our 3D model of Mass Ave, as visuals will be an important tool for showing town meeting what future changes might look like.

Mr. Baudoin asks about the possibility of giving a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce, and Ms. Locke would be amenable to that. Ms. Locke asks whether the board is trying to meet the requirements of the law or go beyond them. She doesn't understand why the town would do more than the minimum required. Mr. Newton says the working group is inclined to do more than the minimum, and he thinks there's public support for that. Discussion on this topic continues, where it's noted that the multi-family districts can evolve over time. In the future, we might add areas in, or take areas out.

Ms. Locke acknowledges that a lot of people have said they support commercial vitality, but she questions whether they understand what it takes to really help businesses. She'd like to see future survey questions that get into some of those details. Ms. Aamodt asks if Arlington has the capacity to support more businesses. Ms. Locke has received calls from several commercial realtors who are

looking for space, preferably restaurant spaces with second-generation kitchens. There are businesses that want to come to Arlington, but they end up going elsewhere because there aren't suitable spaces here. Ms. Ricker has heard the complaint that some of Arlington's commercial spaces are poor quality. The big question is how to turn them around.

Ms. Aamodt thinks there's an argument for clustering commercial uses in certain areas. Mass Ave is 3.5 miles long, and there are about 20 New York City blocks in a mile. She believes Arlington lacks the capacity to support that much commercial, and thinks we need to be more realistic about how much we can support.

The group discusses the next set of map changes to request from Utile. These include:

- Having two different height limits, with higher buildings along Mass Ave, and lower shorter buildings behind it. We'll start by assuming a maximum of six stories on Mass Ave, and four stories behind. These provide differentiation in scale, and are taller than Arlington's typical three-story homes.
- Leaving the district footprint as-is, with the exception of (a) removing parcels that overlap with the Arlington Heights Business District, and (b) are east of Henderson and Fairmont streets.
- Asking Utile to calculate the number of dwellings currently in the district, so we can understand the delta between district capacity and what's there now.
- Including parcel lines within the multi-family district, rather than shading over the entire area.
- Avoiding existing R2 districts that are already built out and focusing on R1 instead. Ms. Aamodt noted that Bates Road is zoned R1, and could be used to bridge the areas along Mass Ave and Broadway. Likewise, there are a number of R1 areas around the Thompson school that could be suitable for inclusion in the multi-family district.

Outreach

Ms. Marzilli summarizes some of the engagement opportunities we have lined up. These include:

- The Housing Corporation of Arlington
- Arlington EATS
- The Arlington Reservoir Concert Series
- The front table at the Robbins Library
- Holding office hours in the library
- Having a booth at the Farmer's Market

Ms. Marzilli suggests going back and checking in with some of our key stakeholders. We'll also need things like flyers, a QR code survey, ways to collect feedback as we refine the map, yard signs, and postcards. We can partner with Joan Roman to create a Facebook page, but it will have to follow the

town's social media policy. In other words, the Facebook page would be a place to disseminate information, but not for back and forth discussions.

Ms. Gruber is working on a one-page flyer. She thinks the same kinds of display materials could be used for both the library and farmers' market. We just need to sit down and work them out.

Mr. Newton is working on an update to the meeting in a box. He notes that we won't have another meeting for two weeks, and he'd like to release the materials before then. Mr. Revilak motions that the outreach team be authorized to produce new meeting-in-a-box materials, which can be posted to the town website when the outreach team thinks they're ready. The motion is unanimously adopted, which means the materials should be available by the end of the week.

Mr. Revilak hopes the survey report can be posted to the town website soon. He thinks we've gotten a lot of useful feedback, and he'd like to keep public comment in the center of the conversation. Ms. Ricker agrees that the report should be posted. Her department is currently short-staffed, and that's been the main barrier to getting things posted on the town website. Ms. Ricker's office has gotten a large number of public records requests for working group materials. These include the different versions of the draft map, and the sign-in sheets from June 8th.

Mr. Lau would like to see the group have a discussion about resident-submitted maps. These take a lot of work to do, and he thinks that residents who've submitted them deserve to have their work discussed.

There's discussion about sending postcards to abutters, and a decision that we should wait until the map is in a more refined state.

Next Steps

The next working group meeting will be held on July 11th, in the APD community room. It will be a hybrid meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Materials Reviewed

- Draft map from Utile, including a Broadway district (shaded green), with accompanying capacity calculations.
- "Existing Residential Units Per Parcel (2022)" map, provided by Vince Baudoin
- Pencil sketch of Arlington Center concept, provided by Ms. Aamodt.